



Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Between Discriminatory Policies, Hate Speech and the “Death Boats”

The Root Causes of Irregular Migration in Lebanon



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About Cedar Centre for Legal Studies (CCLS)

CCLS is a human rights centre founded in Lebanon in 2013. The centre envisions a Lebanon where democracy, social justice, and legal rights are upheld for all citizens and residents. Its mission is to advance legal understanding and advocacy, making the rule of law a

lived reality. It has thematic units dedicated to human rights, social justice, and legal empowerment; mediation, arbitration, and alternative dispute resolution; and preventing and countering violent extremism and rehabilitation for victims of torture.

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List of Abbreviations

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
CCLS	Cedar Centre for Legal Studies
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
LF	Lebanese Forces members
FPM	Free Patriotic Movement
HDC	Higher Defence Council
IACL	Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon
WFP	World Food Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ACHR	Access Center for Human Rights

Executive Summary

Lebanon does not have a national refugee law and has not ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its annex, the 1967 Protocol. The government's failure to develop a coherent and realistic approach to asylum and migration has had a particularly destabilising effect. Bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of legal protection, coupled with xenophobic rhetoric, threaten to spark periodic violence and human rights violations, exacerbating the vulnerability of refugees in Lebanon.

Since the intensification of the economic and political crisis in Lebanon, along with the Syrian refugee crisis, the phenomenon of illegal escape on boats has worsened, and in 2020 a major tragedy took the lives of dozens after a boat sank near Tripoli. However, many families still find this dangerous experience a viable option to escape the misery and racism in Lebanon. In this escape mechanism by boat, entire families, parents and children, were affected.

Syrians fled to Lebanon following the Syrian war, seeking stability, safety, and a better life away from armed conflict and repression. However, the economic, political, and social crises in Lebanon since 2019 have led the Lebanese government to discriminate against all refugees in Lebanon, accusing them of being the cause of the country's deteriorating situation. As a consequence, the Lebanese labour market has become increasingly closed to Syrians, with the Lebanese government violating the law and practicing illegal policies against Syrians, fuelling racism and hate speech. Syrians were stigmatised with stereotypes and often linked to crimes. The hate speech towards the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is not recent; it started in 2016 with Gebran Bassil and takes many

forms. This hate speech toward Syrian refugees could also be seen in the action of some Lebanese municipalities that imposed curfews on Syrians.

More particularly, Syrian children in Lebanon face three challenges, namely the inability of a large proportion of them to receive an education as well as the fact that many of them are immersed in the labour market at an early age. Current data reveals that, as of September 2023, Lebanon hosts close to 470.000 registered school-aged Syrian refugee children and youth between 3–23 years old, based on UNHCR registration. The last and urgent challenge is the registration and civil documentation.

Each year, before the start of the school year, Syrian children are living a discriminatory restriction that will result in tens of thousands of Syrian refugee children being denied their right to education due to restrictions imposed by local authorities and politicians in Lebanon. On 8 July, Samir Geagea¹, head of the Lebanese Forces party, wrote on social media that the Ministry of Education should require all students to present identification papers to register in public and private schools for the 2024-2025 school year. He emphasised that foreign students, implicitly Syrians, should have valid residency permits to be able to enrol in schools. In July and August 2024, at least two Lebanese municipalities, Sin el-fil and al-Kaa, issued statements requiring Syrian children to have Lebanese residency in order to enrol in school. However, due to bureaucratic hurdles and strict criteria imposed on the renewal of Lebanese residency permits, only 20% (UNHCR, WFP,

¹ <https://x.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1810292188057620947>.

UNICEF, IACL, 2023) of Syrian refugees have valid residency status.

In the past two years, Lebanese decision-makers have multiplied propositions and strategies to administrate Syrians in Lebanon. The Council of Ministers issued decisions related to refugees from Syria under Decision No. 1, dated 11 September 2023.

Due to these crises and refugees, Lebanon has emerged as both a source country for irregular migration for its citizens, residents, and refugees, Lebanese and others, and as a major transit point for migrants and asylum seekers from Lebanon and Syria aiming for Europe. Lebanon's asylum and migration challenges have been exacerbated by authorities failing to develop a comprehensive strategy to manage the country. This has fuelled the migration economy between the opening of the migration market and the competition between smugglers, on the one hand, and the securitisation of migration by the EU on the other. Migrants and refugees find themselves caught in a complex web of challenges. Lebanon's transformation into a transit country for migrants to Europe stems from several important developments such as wars and economic collapse, inconsistent migration policies, widespread violence, and xenophobic attitudes. The growing number of migrants has created a migration ecosystem, with the north becoming its hub.

This study falls within the framework of a fragile environment. It aims to shed light on what Syrian refugees in Lebanon face at governmental and political levels and their exit from Lebanon by illegal migration. First, after presenting the Lebanese context, this report will attempt to describe the different legal and illegal discrimination patterns and violations among Syrians in Lebanon. Second, it will show how marginalisation, violation of laws, and discrimination policies directly lead to a dangerous "exit logic", namely illegal migration. The EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities were formulated in the context of the mass displacement of

Syrians after 2011. Migration is referred to as one of the "most pressing challenges" and the document emphasises the joint policy of both parties to urge the "safe return [of Syrians] to their country of origin", considering "the need to create conditions for the safe return of refugees from Syria and displaced Syrians [...] following all rules of international humanitarian law and taking into account the interests of the host countries" (Lebanese Republic, 2016, p. 4). The priorities also indicate "that supporting Syrian refugees cannot be done outside the framework of supporting the Lebanese national economy and investing in infrastructure and productive projects", thus establishing development aid as an essential modality (*ibid.*). As the European Commission's statement framing the prioritisation strategies makes it clear that, in return for aid, the Lebanese government must "make efforts in the field of socio-economic inclusion of Syrian refugees to improve their living conditions and legal residency strategies" (European Commission, 2016b, pp. 13–14).

The nature of the political relationship in the field of migration shifted with the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011 and the increase in illegal migration to Europe via sea and land routes that peaked in 2015. This shift was catalysed by the inability to manage migration flows from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This has led the EU to engage in "informal, local and pragmatic decisions" rather than "formal and legally binding cooperation", a path chosen due to the resistance of MENA countries and to ensure continued cooperation between the EU and its southern neighbours (Seeberg and Zardo, 2020, p. 2).

Finally, this study will show that achieving some concrete steps to help improve the social conditions of Syrians requires a commitment from everyone, such as international community, non-governmental organisations, and the Lebanese government. The report concludes with recommendations to combat the

abuse of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the growth of hate speech on the one hand, and, on the other, the possibility of effectively reducing illegal migration through protection measures and a renewed Euro-Lebanese strategy focused on circular migration, investments, and creative cooperation.

This is an action-research report based on quantitative and qualitative methodology that uses the tools of desk

reviews of scientific and grey literature, including government documents as well as government and non-governmental reports. Fieldwork, case selection, and an analysis of the effects of the migration policy were based on CCLS's legal and advocacy intervention in this field by monitoring violations and illegal boats, providing legal assistance to migrants.

Introduction

In the autumn of 2019, Lebanon entered the worst economic crisis that has threatened its stability since the 1975–1990 civil war. Poverty has become the fate of Lebanese social groups and other nationalities living in Lebanon who rely on their hard currency savings.

Since October 2019, the Lebanese pound has lost a large percentage of its value, and today it has fallen on the black market to around 90.000 Lebanese pounds, instead of the official rate of 1.500 Lebanese pounds per dollar.

Since the intensification of the economic and political crisis in Lebanon, along with the Syrian refugee crisis, the phenomenon of irregular escape on boats has worsened, and in 2020 a major tragedy took the lives of dozens after a boat sank near Tripoli. However, dozens of families still find this dangerous experience a viable option to escape the misery and racism in Lebanon.

In this escape mechanism by boat, entire families, parents and children, were affected. Syrian children in Lebanon suffer from three challenges, namely the inability of a large proportion of them to receive an education as well as the fact that many of them are immersed in the labour market at an early age. Current data reveals that Lebanon hosts close to 470.000 registered school-aged Syrian refugee children and youth between 3–23 years old, based on UNHCR registration as of September 2023. The last and urgent challenge is the registration and civil documentation. The VASyR data indicates a positive, upward trend in Syrian children being registered at the Foreigners' Registry from 21% in 2018 to 31% in 2021 and 41% in 2023. However, despite the upward trend, 59% of all Syrian children are not registered at the level of the Foreigners' Registry, which would guarantee them

access to nationality. 96% of all respondents mentioned that the doctor/midwife issued the child a birth notification. As much as 85% issued the births of their children at the Mukhtar and 56% at the Nofous level. Only 0.5% mentioned they have no registration at all for the child. The main reasons for the lack of registration shared by those respondents, indicating the lack of issuance of a birth certificate for their child, are the associated costs for certificates, which were reported by 42.5% and the lack of awareness of the procedures by 42.2%. The highest reporting of undocumented births is in Baalbek-El Hermel at 9%, which takes the lead from Akkar, which had the highest rate in 2022 at 4.7% and had a rate of 5.3% in 2023. The socioeconomic status of families plays a significant role in access to national birth registration systems. As such, the VASyR data of 2023 shows that those living in non-permanent shelters report children born in Lebanon having completed the birth registration process at about half the rate of those living in residential shelters (47.5% versus 24.5%)” (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, IACL, 2023, p.37).

This report focuses on Syrian refugees and provides an overview of the different types of discrimination and legal violations against Syrians in Lebanon. Next, it will show how marginalisation, law violations, and discrimination directly lead to some dangerous ‘exit logic’ through irregular migration. It then presents the migration dynamics and policies between the EU and Lebanon, providing an overview of key national and international migration policies in Lebanon. It identifies local migration governance structures within Lebanon. The report concludes with recommendations for the Lebanese government, the EU, and civil society to manage the refugee crisis and irregular migration to Europe and combat hate speech.

The report is based on desk reviews of scientific and grey literature, the latter of which includes government documents, government and non-governmental reports, white papers, working papers, and newspapers. It is also based on fieldwork, case selection, and analysing the impacts of migration policy.

The report addresses irregular migration, refoulement, and torture in general and focuses on CCLS's work in this area by monitoring cases of refoulement, torture, and irregular migration and providing legal assistance to migrants and victims. The method adopts a gender and

generational approach. However, these two elements, gender and age, i.e., women, adolescents, and minors, more specifically, have not always been easy to identify. Regarding the desk review, a few reports and studies consider these two dimensions. While CCLS interventions were not specifically aimed at women and minors, they were targeting the whole family. Even if those dimensions were taken into consideration, unfortunately, the access to the data of security institutions controlling the boat's flow is not considered all the time.

Section I

Lebanon Political Strategies and Syrian Refugees

The Lebanese job market is increasingly closed to Syrians. Numerous Lebanese people look at Syrian refugees with fear and suspicion - underlying racism. This discrimination and restrictions are fraught with danger; more precisely, it helps foster dynamics of irregular emigration to Europe, in most cases risking their lives. The first part of this report is divided into four main parts. The first part covers the influx of Syrian

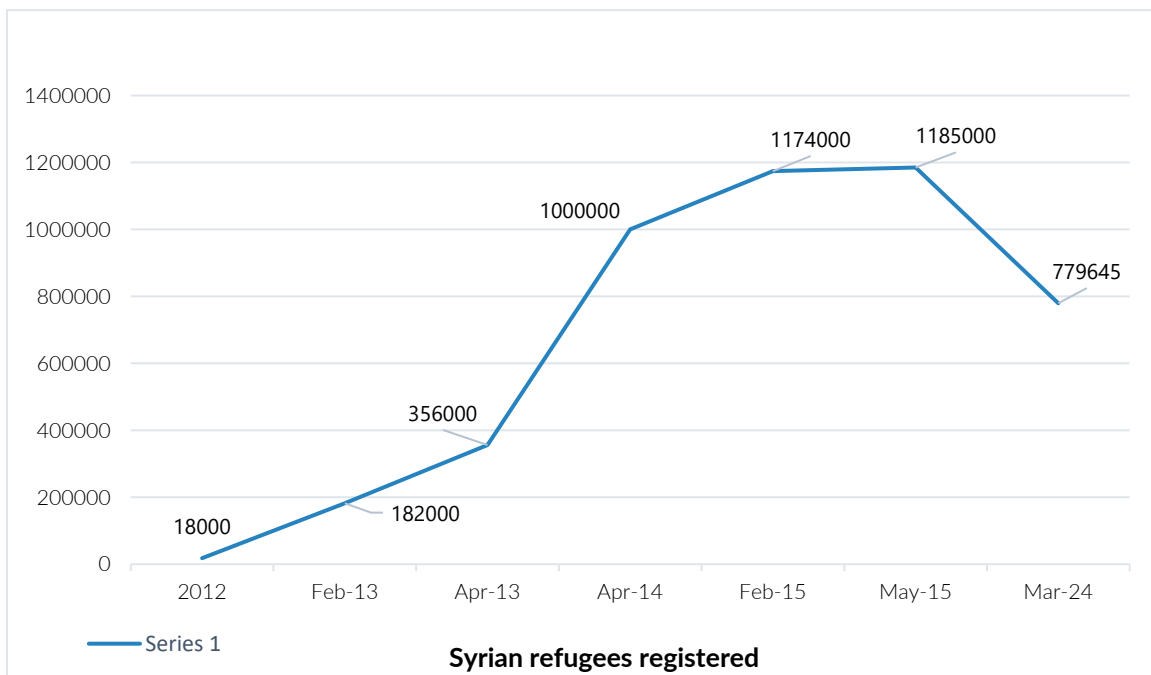
refugees to Lebanon and the xenophobic rhetoric against them, while the second part analyses the Lebanese political strategies to administrate Syrians. The third part entails details about the "refoulement", the torture, and the enforced disappearance exercised by the Lebanese power irregularly to subjugate them. At the end, the fourth part stresses the CCLS interventions for legal defense.



1 The Influx of Syrian Refugees and the Impact in Lebanon

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there were 18.000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon in April 2012. In February 2013, there were 182.000, in April 2013, 356.000, and in

April 2014, 1 million. The peak was reached between February and May 2015 (between 1.174.000 and 1.185.000), after which it gradually dropped to 779.645 in March 2024.



In 2015, Lebanon stopped allowing the UNHCR to register Syrians. This does not mean that the influx of Syrians has declined; other registration channels and the financial requirements Syrians must meet to register are unaffordable for most of them. They must also resort to Lebanese sponsorship. Therefore, many of them are exposed to exploitation. In 2022, child marriages increased among displaced Syrian girls. A total of 22% of girls and young women aged 15–19 was married as compared to 20% in 2021 (GoL & UN,

2023). While child marriage is primarily affecting Syrian girls, boys are more exposed to child labour. Only 4% of all Syrian children aged 5–17 was engaged in child labour, with boys (7%) more than girls (2%).

As much as 72% of adolescent girls and boys of displaced Syrians and 94% of caregivers reported feeling stressed out. Girls (62%) were more likely to report symptoms of stress and anxiety compared to boys (45%) (GoL & UN, 2023, p. 80).

In Lebanon, almost one in five households (18%) were female-headed households (FHH) in 2022 (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, IACL, 2022).

Moreover, with a majority of Sunni Syrians representing more than 20% of the Lebanese population, their presence is considered a threat to the sectarian stability of the country, which arouses the hostility of the Maronite parties. As the number of Syrian refugees continued to rise, the Lebanese Forces, Phalanges, and the Free Patriotic Movement feared that the country's sectarian political system could be undermined.

Historically, strained relations between Lebanon and Syria have not helped, and the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon has deepened negative perceptions of these

refugees, ranging from accusations of stealing jobs from the Lebanese to rape and murder.

In addition to this refugee crisis, there was an economic crisis. The World Bank (2013, 2019, 2020) estimates that the Syrian crisis cost Lebanon \$2,6 billion in lost economic activity for nearly 200,000 Lebanese in 2013. Inflation and the devaluation of the Lebanese currency have a significant impact on the prices of provisions, fuels, electricity, and medicines, which are consequently experiencing shortages. Since October 2019, the cost of food has increased by more than 400%, which recorded worrying levels of food insecurity according to UNHCR. Consequently, scenes of violence against the Syrian refugees, xenophobic rhetoric, and hate speech took place.

Xenophobic Rhetoric and Hate Speech Against Syrians

The hate speech towards the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is not recent; it started in 2016 with Gebran Bassil and takes many forms. It occurs in the public sphere, on posters and banners referring to the Lebanese civil war and displaying Bashir Gemayel's famous speeches against the Syrian presence in Lebanon at that time of the civil war. However, it is addressed to all Syrians who have taken refuge in Lebanon today. For example, in 2018, in Sasin Square, some of these banners spoke against the Syrian presence in Lebanon: "The Syrians are trying to divide Lebanon, but the day came when their country was divided" or "a day will come when the Syrians will be told to take their belongings and everything they have stolen and leave".

This hate speech toward Syrian refugees could also be seen in the action of some Lebanese municipalities that

imposed curfews on Syrians in 2018² or in press articles against the Syrians, accusing them of accentuating air pollution in Lebanon (in the daily al-Nahar) and of bringing forms of inflammation-causing cancer (on MTV channel which is close to the LF, Lebanese Forces members), etc. These calls for the return of the Syrians, proclaimed by political leaders, Maronites, in particular, range from racist and populist claims, to winning the votes of Christians in elections, and sometimes degenerate into episodes of violence. For instance, when the Syrian presidential elections took place in 2021, many Syrian refugees crossing Maronite neighbourhoods were attacked because they were raising portraits of Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian flag, which was seen by the attackers as a profound offense. This was because of the Maronite humiliation and martyrs killed under the Syrian rule of Lebanon. Many Lebanese newspapers stated that the attackers

²In response, campaigns were organized in support of the Syrian presence in Lebanon. For example, in 2016, a demonstration was organized against these curfews that some municipalities imposed on Syrian refugees.

were Lebanese Forces members (LF). The LF did not confirm this, however, but they justified their actions by saying that they were defending their neighbourhoods and could not allow the Syrian flag or the portrait of the Syrian President to be raised there. For their part, when asked to comment on these events, Free Patriotic Movement members gave varying degrees of understanding regarding the behaviour of the attackers. Moreover, by playing on the chord of sectarianism to mobilise Maronites, the political parties avoid participating in violent extremism manifestations. However, when such events occur, they give them justification as well as a political cover. Such actions have reactions like, for instance, the counter-demonstration of the Syrian National Party in the following days.

However, according to a study released by Stanford's Immigration Policy Lab, only a few refugees want to return to Syria because they fear for their lives (Alrababa'h et al., 2020). However, the xenophobic rhetoric regarding the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has primarily an electoral objective. The Phalanges and the LF were to expel the Syrian refugees from Lebanon without delay. The official position of the Free Patriotic Movement FPM was to wait until conditions were suitable for their return. Since the FPM became the first Christian party in Lebanon and its founder acceded to the office of President of the Republic, it adopted a strategy of rapprochement with Syria and began to adopt the same rhetoric as the other right-wing Maronite parties. The FPM, which has a new leader since 2016, Gebran Bassil, Aoun's son-in-law, participates in the polarisation of the Christian electoral base. When Bassil succeeded President Aoun as the head of the FPM, he started adopting xenophobic and racist narratives for electoral ends towards the Syrian refugees.

In January 2019, Bassil tweeted (X former Twitter) saying that the presence of Syrians in Lebanon is

exhausting for the Lebanese economy. A month later he accused the Syrian refugees of threatening the very existence of Lebanon and that, should they stay, it would increase the danger of terrorism in Europe. On May 5, 2019, another tweet in this series of striking tweets said that more than 600 Syrian children were born in al-Bora Hospital compared to only 30 Lebanese births. In a tweet dated May 8, 2019, he said that Lebanon, "land of prophets and saints, cannot be the land of refugees, the displaced and the corrupt". He kept claiming the return of Syrian refugees to their country and accused them of being responsible for the Lebanese crisis. In 2019, when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs, he claimed the priority of employment for the Lebanese over other nationalities. FPM members seized this opportunity and protested in front of Syrian-owned stores, singing the Lebanese anthem and demanding priority of employment for the Lebanese. These claims did not stop at the level of party members; it also reached the media. At the start of the school year in September 2019, OTV broadcast a cartoon in one of its programs, showing Lebanese schoolchildren unable to enter their schools due to the saturation of Lebanese schools because of the presence of refugees and foreign children. The viewers were asked: "Have you ever seen a Lebanese more generous than that?" The channel later apologised for broadcasting this cartoon and removed it from its website (al-Endari, 2019).

The populist strategy of Bassil was clear for his political counterparts who belong to the Muslim communities but also for his direct Maronite adversary, the LF, who accuse him of adopting their rhetoric to win their electorate. This populist rhetoric reminds us of the rhetoric of the Maronite militias during the civil war, known for their hostility towards Muslims, Palestinians, and Syrians at the time. In the political and media spheres, Gebran Bassil has become a subject of mockery for his counterparts who believe that he uses

this rhetoric to succeed his father-in-law as the head of state.

By embracing the discourse on Christian rights, the FPM is following the same path as the Christian opposition parties. This means that calls for a share of political power come from a community that feels betrayed or threatened with losing its "political advantages" against Lebanese Muslims, against Palestinian or, more recently, Syrian refugees, and against most Muslims who would contest the Christian "advantage", upset the demographic balance, and thus upend the political system in Lebanon. By adopting such a strategy, the FPM, like the other parties, makes sectarianism the canal of access to citizenship in Lebanon, and confuses in its discourse Christian and Lebanese interests.

Since April 2024, when hate sentiment flared up following the murder of Pascal Sleiman, a member of Lebanese Forces, the Lebanese government has instructed municipalities to tighten control over the Syrian population in their neighbourhoods. In mid-April, caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati announced that "most Syrians" in Lebanon would be deported as soon as the international community recognised safe zones in Syria (l'Orient Today, 2024). Issam Sharaf al-Din, Lebanon's minister of displaced people, called for opening maritime borders to allow Syrian refugees to leave Lebanon by sea and to pressure displaced Syrians to return to their country, a stance echoed by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (Hilaneh, 2024).

On 2 May 2023, the Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Judge Bassam Mawlawi, sent a circular to governors, mayors, municipalities, and mukhtars in villages and cities where Syrian refugees were present, to launch a national survey campaign to count and register them. Under the pretext of "the current circumstances that Lebanon is going through" and "concern for the supreme national interest", the letter called on those concerned to register all refugees

residing within the scope of each town and give them certificates to that effect. It also requested that no transaction or statement should be entered and that no property should be rented to any Syrian refugee before confirming that they are registered with the municipality and have legal residency in Lebanon. This was done in addition to conducting a field survey of all institutions and professionals run by Syrian refugees, verifying that they hold legal licenses. However, the ministry's decision did not provide any guidelines or guarantees to ensure that local authorities would refrain from engaging in discriminatory practices or implementing measures that could lead to human rights violations, such as further displacement and eviction of Syrian refugees. Based on the guidance of this book, several municipalities have issued decisions restricting the movement of Syrian refugees within their jurisdiction, preventing them from leading normal lives, and engaging in all kinds of practices that effectively limit Syrian refugees' enjoyment of their right to housing, freedom of movement, and the right to be employed.

In May 2024, MP Gebran Bassil, head of the Free Patriotic Movement, responded to the European move to grant a donation to Lebanon by stressing the following: 'rejecting the EU's policy of keeping Syrian refugees in Lebanon and emphasising that Lebanon is not for sale or rent', identifying the main Lebanese problem as 'officials' obedience to foreign policies even at the expense of the national interest', and announcing, 'a series of Free Patriotic Movement actions at the parliamentary and popular levels to confront the displacement dilemma'. In a statement on social media, Bassil pointed out, "By what right does it demand this, which is a Lebanese sovereign decision, and by what authority does it impose on Lebanon what it does not accept on EU countries, as the immigration ceiling does not exceed 30 thousand for all of Europe, while Lebanon has 2 million refugees?" He also asked:

“Does the European Parliament dare to speak with Turkey in the same tone?”.

Bassil believes that “blackmailing Lebanon to stop aid and funding for the displacement crisis is unacceptable” and “what they gain is beautiful”, as Lebanon’s contribution by losing 50 billion dollars is four times more than all the contributions of the donor countries, which amounted to 12 billion dollars, hoping that European countries will make such a decision. By doing so, it will either contribute to the return of the displaced to their countries or heading to Europe or that “they will not ask us to be coast guards” to prevent migrant boats heading towards Europe. “If European countries are interested in the return of refugees, let them finance their return or take them to Europe,” he added. Bassil stressed that **Lebanon is liable** due to the inaction of officials, and that immediate diplomatic measures are required from the Foreign Ministry against UNHCR and EU officials. This should be done in addition to a response from the parliament with a clear and binding decision for the government to start organising a dignified and safe return, which should be paralleled with a popular movement that is not hostile but pressures the government to support the return of refugees.

Before the start of the new school year, Syrian children are living a discriminatory restriction that will result in tens of thousands of Syrian refugee children being denied their right to education due to restrictions imposed by local authorities and politicians in Lebanon. On 8 July, Samir Geagea³, head of the Lebanese Forces party, wrote on social media that the Ministry of Education should require all students to present identification papers to register in public and private schools for the 2024-2025 school year. He emphasised that foreign students, implicitly Syrians, should have valid residency permits to enrol in schools.

In July and August, at least two Lebanese municipalities (Public Works Studio, 2024c), Sin el-fil and al-Kaa, issued statements requiring Syrian children to have Lebanese residency in order to enrol in school. However, due to bureaucratic hurdles (Wood, Nasser, 2024) and strict criteria imposed on the renewal of Lebanese residency permits, only 20% (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, IACL, 2023) of Syrian refugees have valid residency status.

However, on 11 September 2024, the Council of Ministers approved allowing Syrian students to register in vocational institutes and schools without having a legal residency card from the competent official authorities, especially the General Directorate of General Security (Elhajj, 2024).

It is not yet known whether it will apply to students in public schools and high schools. Vocational education has long been accepting Syrian students without presenting their residency card, until the head of the directorate’s monitoring and examinations department, Joseph Younis, prevented students this year from obtaining the technical baccalaureate certificate before obtaining residency. He did, however, allow them to take the official exams. Subsequently, Director General of Vocational and Technical Education, Hanadi Berri, issued her first circular No. 24/2024 on 9 September, just two days before the Council of Ministers’ decision, asking directors of public and private technical institutes to require students to obtain a valid residence permit from the General Directorate of Lebanese General Security for non-Lebanese students, under penalty of taking administrative and disciplinary measures against the violating institutes.

In addition to the narratives and rhetoric, on a political level, Lebanese strategies have changed over the years to find a way to administer Syria in a common political vision, which is not gained all the time.

³<https://x.com/DrSamirGeagea/status/1810292188057620947>.

2 Lebanese Political Strategies to Administrate Syrians

In the past two years, Lebanese decision-makers have multiplied propositions and strategies to administrate Syrians in Lebanon. The Council of Ministers issued decisions related to refugees from Syria under Decision No. 1, dated 11 September 2023. Under the title “The issue of Syrian displacement, especially the irregular infiltration of displaced persons”, the cabinet assigned security and military agencies and eight ministries (Interior and Municipalities, Labour, Industry, Economy and Trade, Justice, Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Social Affairs, and Information) several tasks in this regard. They were also tasked with submitting periodic reports on the implementation thereof for periodic evaluation by the Council of Ministers. The cabinet discussed these decisions through a periodic report⁴.

In November 2023, Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati revealed that the idea of deporting Syrian refugees in Lebanon who violated the law will be raised in coordination with the Syrian government. Violators will be deported to camps that will be set up inside the Syrian border. Mikati added that this idea will be in coordination with the United Nations, the international community, and the Syrian government. The intimidation strategy will take different forms.

On 23 May 2024, MP Melhem Riachi, member of the Strong Republic Bloc, submitted a proposal for an accelerated law that “prohibits owners of rented apartments and rooms from renting to any citizen who resides in Lebanon without identification documents or who entered Lebanon illegally, under specific penalties and fines” (Public Works Studio a, 2024). This

prohibition applies to all types of real estate, whether it is a building or agricultural land. Owners who violate the provisions of this law shall be punished with a one-month imprisonment and a fine of 200 million Lebanese pounds. For a second offense, the penalty will be doubled. According to the law, the lessor must apply these provisions and all other decrees, decisions, and circulars issued by the competent ministries. To fulfil his responsibility, he must, within one month from the date of publication of this law, inform the municipality if his leased property is inhabited by a tenant who entered Lebanon illegally, in a petition exempt from any fee, to enable the municipality to take appropriate measures against said tenant.

Although the proposal does not explicitly identify Syrian refugees as the target, its timing and rationale suggest that it is part of an ongoing campaign of incitement against Syrian refugees. The rationale focused on Syrians residing in Lebanon, whether as refugees, workers, or displaced persons. The urgency of the law, which imposes exceptional criminal penalties on landlords, was justified by the extreme necessity to mitigate the damage, aggravation, proliferation, and limitlessness of illegal residency.

The official reasons for this proposal include that, according to the agreement concluded in 2003 between the Lebanese state and the UNHCR, Lebanon is a country of transit and not a country of asylum, and that the vast majority of foreigners, especially Syrians residing in Lebanon, are illegal residents. They do not have any residency permits issued following the

⁴https://legal-agenda.com/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=post

relevant laws, and should therefore be subject to the law of exit from Lebanon as is the case in every country in the world. This is because any foreign citizen who has no residency or entry visa is deported to his country under the law issued in 1962 that provides for the refoulement of those without a residency permit.

The General Rent Law and related laws, which outline the fundamentals of leasing and mandate that landlords do not arrange a lease if the tenant does not fulfil the legal prerequisites—foreign residents specifically needing to obtain residency and be present lawfully in Lebanese territory—are also mentioned in the reasons. The rationale also indicated that the circulars recently issued by the Minister of Interior, the Governor of Beirut, the General Directorate of General Security, and several municipalities, which emphasise that no lease should be organised for Syrian residents who do not have legal residency in Lebanon, have often remained unimplemented due to a large number of landlords not adhering to them.

The legislator's belief that the discriminatory circulars issued by the Minister of Interior, the General Directorate of General Security, and several local authorities are inadequate in terms of restricting Syrians and are not fully enforced is evident from the reasons for this proposal and the fact that it is an accelerated bis proposal. On the one hand, these circulars have led to widespread evictions and mass. On the other, these circulars have led to mass evacuations in some parts of Lebanon and have contributed significantly to creating an atmosphere of intimidation.

MP Ghassan Hasbani announced a new initiative titled 'Every Citizen is a Sentinel' in mid-March 2024. The initiative, which includes a series of measures available through an app called 'Tabligh', can be used by any citizen to report legal violations, especially those committed by 'illegal groups' in Ashrafieh and surrounding areas. The user takes a picture with his mobile phone, selects the type of violation from a

specific list, and sends the report to a dedicated centre, which in turn refers it to the competent authorities to take legal action. This is done on the basis that the application represents thousands of eyes of surveillance using technology.

In early March 2024, the General Directorate of General Security proposed a road map for the return of Syrian refugees (GS, 2024). The roadmap consists of four axes. The first axis: border management and combating smuggling. The second axis: controlling the status of Syrians in Lebanon. The third axis: combating the phenomenon of the parallel economy, suppressing violations, and closing illegal shops and commercial establishments. The fourth axis: opening channels of communication with all parties concerned with the Syrian displacement.

The vision is to develop a unified national strategy to control and address all the repercussions of the Syrian displacement in Lebanon, leading to a voluntary, safe, and dignified return to their country or resettlement in a third country. Its mission is to conduct a comprehensive survey of all Syrians in Lebanon to secure data based on the state's right to know all those in it. This allows the state to classify Syrians residing on Lebanese territory into categories in preparation for establishing regulatory bases to control and legalise each of them within the category to which they belong while working to issue the necessary decrees and decisions through the competent authorities when the need arises. The aim is to revive the voluntary return programme and launch convoys as soon as the conditions are appropriate, in collaboration between General Security and UNHCR, as was previously done. In addition to Lebanese domestic laws and regulations, signed agreements and memorandums of understanding will be implemented to utilise the data on displaced persons obtained by the General Directorate of General Security from UNHCR, which allows dealing with this group following international

conventions and the governing domestic laws. Monitoring the activities of associations and non-governmental organisations through applying the Associations Law and limiting these activities to temporary relief work rather than sustainable ones. The relevant ministries will implement the laws by conducting a crackdown on illegal commercial establishments run by Syrians. The status of Syrians in Lebanon will be determined according to legal status, such as those legally residing in Lebanon and per Lebanese laws and regulations, whether before or after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis; IDPs registered with UNHCR between 2011 and 2015 who benefit from international protection until their voluntary repatriation or resettlement to a third country.

Those registered with UNHCR as of 2015 benefit from relief assistance and Lebanese laws apply to them, especially since the Lebanese government officially requested UNHCR to stop registering Syrian refugees at the beginning of 2015 following Resolution No. 38 of October 2014 (Exhibit 2), provided that exceptional humanitarian cases, if any, will be considered.

- Syrians who entered the country illegally after 24/04/2019. This category is subject to the decision of the Supreme Defence Council; they will be deported to their country after informing the UNHCR.
- Syrians who entered the country legally and violated the residency and work regulations, and those who reside in Lebanon without obtaining a residency or work permit according to the laws.
- Syrian detainees, who constitute 38% of the total prison population, whose legal status will change after their judicial files are resolved.

Syrians convicted by criminal judgments issued by the Lebanese judiciary for heinous crimes will lose their

displacement status and legal measures will be taken against them, up to and including refoulement, within a mechanism approved in this regard.

In March 2024, the Lebanese Minister of Displaced Persons, Issam Sharafeddine, was assigned to manage the return file in response to popular, parliamentary, and governmental pressure.

The Minister of Displacement categorised Syrian refugees into three categories: workers, artisans, and business owners, provided they have legal residency and work permits, and 'do not exceed 400.000 Syrians', he said. He added that the ministry plans to repatriate 15.000 Syrians every month, as it has been approved by the Syrian side and the Lebanese government. 'And we are waiting for the political decision to implement it', he said, adding, 'We also have a paper of understanding to start dismantling the camps.'

As for political and opposition refugees, according to the minister, they have three solutions:

- Benefit from the Syrian presidential amnesty.
- Migrate to a third country in coordination with UNHCR to resettle them there, which is what the majority of Syrians want.
- Move to the opposition area in northeastern Syria.

The minister adds that America and Europe follow double standards with Lebanon, as they vote for Syrians to remain in Lebanon as if they were its guardians, 'fearing boat migration to Europe, which has about 400 million people and cannot support two million Syrian refugees from very small Lebanon'.

3 The Bio-Power and Law Violations Against Syrians

Amid a wave of xenophobic policies and retaliatory violence, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture, and refoulement by the Lebanese army and the General Security Directorate, due to governmental and political decisions and pressures. These actions come in violation of various international legal texts including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT).

This part discusses the policies and practices to pressure Syrian refugees to return to their homeland, increasing their legal insecurity in Lebanon. After the first campaign of xenophobic rhetoric in 2019, and the second one in 2023–2024, analysed above, there was an escalation in arbitrary security campaigns and raids on Syrian refugees' residences in multiple Lebanese regions, since April 2023. This campaign led to the arbitrary arrest and forced refoulement of many refugees. At least 808 refugees have been arbitrarily detained by the Lebanese authorities (including 17 who hold legal residency permits, 13 women, 25 minors, and two people of the LGBTQ+ community). At least 336 detained refugees have been forcibly deported

(including 12 refugees holding legal residency permits, 13 women, 22 minors, and 2 people of the LGBTQ+ community) (ACHR, 2023).

A security campaign has been unrelenting against Syrian refugees since the spring of 2024. It was accompanied by the government, ministries, parliament, local authorities (municipalities or governors), security forces, Lebanese civilians, decision-makers, discriminatory laws, and incitement statements. In addition, media campaigns focused on the negative impact of Syrian refugees on Lebanon and blamed them for the economic collapse and the crises affecting the electricity sector, housing, water, waste, etc. The number of complaints has risen significantly since February 2023, with 145 complaints, although the average number of complaints does not usually exceed 30. In March 2024, the number of complaints dropped to 101, although it was still significantly higher than in December 2022 (15 complaints) and January 2023 (16 complaints), when the rate of reports was similar to the monthly rate in previous reports. At other times, the number of reports increased significantly, reaching 227 in April and 143 in August 2023.

Deportation, Torture, and Enforced Disappearance

In 2024, there was an increase in calls to the Cedar Centre Hotline from Syrian refugees in Lebanon threatened with refoulement as a direct result of recent circulars issued by local authorities, or fearing that they would be harmed if extradited to Syria, Cedar Centre

submitted urgent complaints to the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SRT)⁵. Considering that Lebanon has been a party to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading

⁵<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-torture>

Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) and its optional protocol (OPCAT)⁶ since 2000. Article 3.1. of the Convention states:

“No State Party shall expel, return (“refouler”), or extradite a person to another state where there are substantial grounds for believing that he or she would be in danger of being subjected to torture.”

Meanwhile, some EU member states, such as Cyprus and Denmark, are pressing the EU to consider recognising certain parts of Syria as safe zones. However, human rights organisations such as Amnesty International allege that such a move would breach the non-refoulement principle under international law, which prohibits returning refugees to countries where they could face torture or persecution.

Deportations escalated significantly in 2023. Marred by abusive and discriminatory treatment, including arbitrary detentions and torture, refoulements have targeted not only Syrians who arrived in Lebanon after April 2019 but also those who arrived earlier and were registered with UNHCR.

In 2023, Lebanon intensified raids aimed at returning Syrian refugees to their country, regardless of their legal status. The Lebanese army deported or pushed back at least 13.700 Syrians, a significant increase from 1.500 in 2022, according to data provided to Foreign Policy. According to the same sources, Lebanese General Security - the agency in charge of foreigners' affairs and border security, deported at least 301 Syrians, and the Lebanese army deported or pushed back at least 1.000 from northern Lebanon into Syria between January and April 2024.

Refoulement also impacted Syrian prisoners in Lebanon. In Lebanon's Roumieh Prison, Syrians opposed to the Assad regime expressed their willingness to commit mass suicide in protest against decisions to deport them to Syria individually.

The latest suicide attempt took place on 2 March 2024 in Roumieh prison, east of Beirut, to protest the handover of a Syrian prisoner to the Assad regime. More than 10 prisoners reached a balcony in the prison yard where 4 of them hung themselves. Other prisoners reached them in time and took 3 of them to the hospital, indicating that more than 200 Syrian opponents are ready to commit suicide rather than being returned to Bashar al-Assad's prisons.

Fears of deporting Syrian prisoners arrested on charges of terrorism and membership in armed groups increased when Lebanese Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, asked the minister of Justice at a ministerial meeting on 26 April 2023 to 'investigate the possibility of immediately handing over detainees and convicts to the Syrian state'. Most of Roumieh's Syrian prisoners are defectors from the regime's army.

Among the legal irregularities is that the Lebanese General Security no longer informs the prisoner of the date of the refoulement in advance, as well as the obstacles to obtaining a lawyer. It often takes 45 days to obtain a legal violation of the new amendments issued in 2020 of Article 47 of the Code of Criminal Law⁷, which requires the General Security to have a lawyer present.

⁶<https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/catcidtp/catcidtp.html>

⁷https://ccls-lebanon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Art-47-Criminal-Procedure-Law_2020_AR.pdf.

The Extradition of Al-Eter Case

The Lebanese General Security decided to deport Syrian refugee Yassin Mohammad al-Eter (31 years old) to Syria when he was released after serving a 10-year prison sentence (of which he served 7 years) for 'belonging to an armed gang and a terrorist organisation'. The Military Court of Cassation issued its verdict against al-Eter in June 2022 and decided in December 2023 to release him on bail of 300 million Lebanese pounds and ban him from travelling, following his legal status in Syria.

Mohammad al-Eter, a Syrian dissident, participated in opposition activities in the Syrian revolution. He comes from an opposition family from the city of al-Qusair, Homs governorate, and is wanted by the Syrian regime, while his father Mohammad al-Eter is still forcibly disappeared and detained by the regime. This decision also prevents General Security from deporting him from Lebanon as part of the recent wave of arbitrary

refoulements, based on the anti-torture law and the court judgment issued against him.

In January 2024, however, General Security decided to deport him, despite the judgment, and CCLS followed up on the case after being notified through the hotline. Mohamad Sablounh, Al-Eter's lawyer, was surprised that, despite the release decision, he was still illegally detained by General Security. He submitted a letter to the Public Prosecutor to emphasise the risk of extradition to the Syrian regime for fear of enforced disappearance, torture, and murder, along with the travel ban decision and informed the UNHCR of the situation. When General Security attempted to deport him based on the decision of the Acting Director General of General Security, his extradition was reversed, and the decision was initially suspended pending a final decision by the Public Prosecutor at Court of Cassation.

The Enforced Disappearance of Al-Zohouri Case

Mr. Abedullah al-Zohouri is a Syrian, born in 1983 in Al-Qusayr, Homs Governorate. He served as a captain in the Syrian Army and, in 2012, he defected from the Syrian regime amidst the ongoing conflict. In 2023, seeking safety, he fled Syria with his family and entered Lebanon, where they took refuge in a camp in Aarsal, located in the northeast of Beirut, Baalbek-Hermel Governorate. On 27 May 2024, Mr. al-Zohouri is arrested by members of the Ablah branch of Lebanese Army Intelligence. On 11 June 2024 at 1:30 p.m., he is reportedly handed over to Syrian Military Security Branch 291. On 13 June 2024, CCLS, on behalf of Mr. Al Zohouri's family, submits a complaint of enforced disappearance to the Public Prosecutor of the Cassation Court. On June 22, CCLS submits the case to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary

Disappearances and on 8 July, Mr. al-Zohouri's family learns informally that he is being detained at the Palestine Branch in Syria.

The legal framework surrounding this case involves several key pieces of legislation and international conventions:

Lebanese Criminal Procedure Law: particularly the recent amendment to Article 47, which grants detainees the right to have legal representation during initial interrogations by security agencies.

Enforced Disappearance Law in Lebanon (2018): law no. 105 specifically addresses the crime of enforced disappearance, aiming to prevent such occurrences and provide recourse for victims and their families.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): Lebanon has ratified the ICCPR in 1972. Several articles are relevant to this case:

Article 9: Protects the right to liberty and security of person, stipulating that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention.

Article 7: Prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 10: Mandates that all persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

The handling of Mr. al-Zohouri's case by the Lebanese authorities involved several legal violations. First, the denial of Legal Representation where Mr. al-Zohouri was not allowed to meet or contact his family or have a lawyer present during his initial interrogation. If that had happened, it would have been a violation of the amended Article 47 of the Lebanese Criminal Procedure Law. Second, unlawful refoulement: Mr. al-Zohouri was handed over to Syrian authorities without

being presented to the director of General Security or the Public Prosecutor of the Cassation Court, bypassing established legal procedures. Third, Enforced Disappearance: the failure to disclose Mr. al-Zohouri's whereabouts and the lack of due process constitutes an enforced disappearance, a grave violation of human rights under international law. Fourth, the Breach of Enforced Disappearance Law (2018): this case violates Article 37 of the Enforced Disappearance Law in Lebanon, which explicitly prohibits the act of enforced disappearance and mandates the state to protect individuals from such practices.

Concerning the violation of ICCPR are 9, 7 and 10. Mr. al-Zohouri's arbitrary arrest and detention without due process contravene his right to liberty and security. The secretive nature of his detention and the potential for mistreatment raise concerns about the prohibition of torture and inhuman treatment. The lack of transparency and humane treatment in his detention is a direct violation of the requirement to treat all detainees with respect for their inherent dignity.

The Case of The Disappearance of Ms. A.

Ms A. is a Syrian woman born in 2002 in Homs, Syria. She resided in Azaz, an area under opposition control in northwest Syria. On 29 April 2024, she entered Lebanon illegally to travel to Beirut and eventually to another country. Her journey was abruptly interrupted when she was arrested and then detained by Lebanese Security forces. On 30 April 2024, the driver informed her family that she was arrested at a checkpoint in Chtoura, Beqaa. While the others were released, Ms. A. remained detained due to an identity card she had with her issued by the Azaz City Council. On 2 May 2024, CCLS submitted an urgent appeal to the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances and raised the case with the UNHCR office in Beirut. Only 13 days later, on 15 May, CCLS was informally informed that Ms. A. was

handed over to Syrian authorities shortly after her arrest. In early July, her family learned informally that she was detained in Saidnaya prison in Syria, but this information is not confirmed. On 29 July, CCLS raised her case again with the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances to address her arrest and then disappearance with the Syrian authorities.

The handling of Ms. A.'s case by the Lebanese and Syrian authorities involved several legal violations. First, the denial of Legal Representation: Ms. A. was not allowed to meet or contact her family or have a lawyer present during her initial interrogation, if it had happened. This violated the amended Article 47 of the Lebanese Criminal Procedure Law. Second, unlawful

refoulement; Ms. A. was handed over to Syrian authorities without being presented to the director of the Lebanese General Security Service or the Public Prosecutor of Cassation Court, bypassing established legal procedures. Third, Enforced Disappearance: failure to disclose Ms. A.'s whereabouts and the lack of due process constitutes an enforced disappearance, a grave violation of human rights under international law. Four, a breach of the Lebanese Enforced Disappearance Law⁸. This case violates Article 37 of the Enforced Disappearance Law in Lebanon, which explicitly prohibits the act of enforced disappearance and mandates the state to protect individuals from such practices.

This case violates Articles 7 and 10 of the ICCPR. The secretive nature of her detention and the potential for mistreatment raise concerns about the prohibition of torture and inhuman treatment. The lack of transparency and humane treatment in her detention is a direct violation of the requirement to treat all detainees with respect for their inherent dignity. Lebanon ratified the ICCPR in 1972 and in 2000, it ratified the Convention against Torture, and Syria ratified the ICCPR in 1976. The Convention against Torture was ratified by Syria in 2004.

The Role of The Lebanese Army in Syrian Refugees' Refoulement

The Lebanese army said it was implementing the decision of the Supreme Defence Council to deport Syrians who entered Lebanon illegally after April 2019. In all documented cases of refoulement, the Lebanese army did not allow deportees to object to their refoulement.

Indeed, the HDC is a body that advises the government on national security and defence matters. An HDC decision in 2019 the Lebanese army gave power to the Lebanese army to repatriate any Syrians who entered Lebanon illegally after 24 April 2019.

The Lebanese army is returning many refugees directly to Syrian authorities without forwarding them to the public prosecutor of Lebanon's Cassation Court – a process that violates Lebanese law.

Final decisions about refoulement officially lie with the director of Lebanese General Security and the public prosecutor. When a Syrian is arrested in Lebanon

without legal residency, or if they entered the country after 24 April 2019, they are taken to General Security. If they are not registered with UNHCR or don't have legal residency in Lebanon, they are returned to Syria. If they are registered with UNHCR, a representative visits them in prison to ask if they want to voluntarily return to Syria or stay in Lebanon.

Between April and May 2023 Lebanon deported thousands of Syrians, including unaccompanied children, without respecting legal procedures. The refoulement generally targeted Syrians without legal status, and amounted to 1.800, according to humanitarian sources. On 9 and 10 January 2024, 24 Syrians were arrested at the Al-Madfoun checkpoint. They were handed over to the regime. A total of 22 of them returned to Lebanon after paying hundreds of dollars to smugglers, and two of them forcibly disappeared and were defectors from Assad's army. Cedar Centre submitted a letter to

⁸<http://77.42.251.205/Law.aspx?lawid=278973>.

Ghassan Oweidat, the public prosecutor, but he did not do anything. Then the Cedar team learned that one of them, Raafat Abdul Qader Faleh⁹, is detained in the Palestine Branch in Damascus.' Meanwhile, the refoulement of Syrian researcher, Juma Mohammed Lahib¹⁰, is making headlines on social media after the Lebanese General Security refused

Boarder Organised Crime

The Lebanese and Syrian states have established five regular crossings, including two crossings in the Bekaa: Masnaa or Jdeidet Yabous, as the Syrian term is called (from the central Bekaa to the capital, Damascus), and three crossings in northern Lebanon (Akkar, specifically). Damascus, Joussieh from al-Qaa (northern Bekaa) to the countryside of al-Qusayr and Homs, and three crossings in northern Lebanon (specifically Akkar): al-Arida (towards Tartus and Latakia), al-Daboussieh (towards Homs and the Syrian interior), and Qmar Bridge in al-Buqai'a in Wadi Khaled, also known as the Tal Kalakh crossing in Syria (towards Lake Qatina, Homs and the Syrian interior as well). In addition to these regular crossings, where General Security, customs, and gendarmerie stations are concentrated, former Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Abou Saab spoke about the deployment of 74 points of the Lebanese army and army intelligence along these borders. During a media interview in 2020, he estimated that the financial movement of smuggling on these borders amounts to \$2,5 billion annually.

In Lebanon, it is difficult to count the number of irregular crossings, although a previous report by the Lebanese government estimated it at 136 crossings on a 378-kilometre-long border separating the two countries. The border is vast and mostly unmonitored,

to renew his residency on 6 March and demanded that he travel to Syria within a month. Lahib's name was on the wanted lists of the Syrian Political Intelligence, especially since he was a former prisoner of conscience at the same branch and released on parole in 2011.

and any space on it could be a gateway to the other side. The Lebanese army has installed 40 observation towers equipped with day and night cameras.

Legal Agenda (Alwa, 2023) has documented eight serious crimes along the 378-kilometre-long border such as organ trafficking, prostitution, rape, kidnapping for ransom, drugs, weapons, people smuggling, and car theft documenting. The legal agenda gathered information from several sources, some of them security, as well as from smugglers and sometimes victims, and some of it was confirmed with direct observation. Each smuggler has a specialty in either human trafficking, organ traffickers, arms smuggling, drug smuggling, prostitution, and car theft.

First, concerning the organ trafficker, legal agenda (Alwa, 2023) explains how the removal of organs takes place in centres on the Syrian side of the border, where war-related insecurity is more prevalent than in Lebanon. Among these areas is a centre that was raided by the Syrian state earlier where they arrested a network of doctors involved in organ removal. Organ traffickers often kill their victims after removing all the organs. The organs are then transported in specialised bags to where the organ will be transplanted. Doctors who transplant organs in Lebanon do not know where the 'gifted' organ comes from or how it was obtained.

⁹<https://ccls-lebanon.org/disappearance-of-a-syrian-in-lebanon-sparks-concern/>.

¹⁰<https://ccls-lebanon.org/urgent-action-for-the-safety-of-jumaa-mohammad-laheeb/>.

This task is done through brokers who are contacted by the patient's family and obtain the desired organ in exchange for sums of money that reach \$33.000 for a testicle and \$30.000 for a kidney, for example. Other organs are transported out of Lebanon. The person transporting the bag of organs to Beirut airport receives \$15.000, and the person transporting it to the plane is paid \$10.000. There is no documented information on the gangs that receive these bags in the destination countries (Alwa, 2023).

Second, concerning human traffickers in sexual offenses exploit girls in several ways. For instance, traffickers feign the need to keep victims of sexual assault apart from men due to security concerns. In the Syrian border region, women are segregated from men and placed in separate houses under the guise of waiting for the 'opening of the road'. Once the chosen

women are placed in designated rooms, they are sexually assaulted.

Third, people kidnapped for ransom and robbery are subjected to violent torture to force their families to pay ransom. Some smugglers keep videos of kidnapped people hanging on the 'blanco', a torture machine in which a person is suspended by his feet or wrists while his body and head are left hanging upside down. The kidnapper and his men beat him, film everything and send the video to the family. The violence and torture escalate if the family delays or hesitates to pay the ransom. The pretext of a dangerous road or the need to wait for it to be secured is used to house the victims in individual houses where they are held until the ransom is paid. Witnesses report that negotiations sometimes fail and some of the kidnapped are killed as a result (Alwa, 2023).

4 CCLS Intervention in Legal Defence

From 15 November 2023 to 30 May 2024 CCLS handled 200 cases of individuals who were at risk of refoulement to Syria. Out of these, 126 cases were submitted to the U.N. (including to UNHCR and mechanisms such as the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Special Rapporteur on torture). A total of 33 individuals were freed, and 28 were deported to Syria. Ten of those deported were arrested in Syria. The unlawful refoulement also constitutes torture under Article 3 of the U.N. Convention Against Torture.

Within the framework of criminal procedure and Articles 47 and 48, Cedar Centre files a complaint when any Syrian refugee is arrested, taking the status of a personal prosecutor for the offence of deprivation of liberty, arbitrary arrest, and abuse of authority, because no person may be arrested for more than 48 hours, renewable once, with advice of the Appellate Public Prosecutor. This constitutes a deprivation of liberty, especially since the client is not detained in any other case. The Code of Criminal Procedure sets limits on arrests and the legal procedures that must be followed while carrying out this task.

Article 47 stipulates that forensic officers, as assistants to the Department of Public Prosecutions, shall undertake the tasks assigned to them by the Department of Public Prosecutions. This will include investigating unreported offences, gathering information on them, conducting inquiries aimed at uncovering the perpetrators and participants in their commission and gathering evidence against them, including seizing criminal materials, conducting physical examinations of crime scenes and scientific and technical studies of the traces and features left behind, hearing the statements of witnesses without swearing them in and hearing the statements of the complainants or suspects.

If they refuse or remain silent, it shall be noted in the report and they shall not be entitled to force them to speak or interrogate them under penalty of invalidating their statements.

They must inform the Public Prosecution of their actions and abide by its instructions. They are not entitled to search a house or a person without prior authorisation from the Public Prosecution. If they do get authorisation to search, they shall observe the procedures prescribed by law for the public prosecutor in the witnessed offence.

Any search conducted in violation of these rules shall be invalid, but the invalidation shall be limited to the search transaction and shall not extend to other procedures independent of it. They are prohibited from detaining the suspect in their glasses except by decision of the Public Prosecution and within a period not exceeding forty-eight hours. It may be extended for a similar period only upon the approval of the Public Prosecution.

The period of detention shall be counted as part of the period of arrest.

Once the suspect or complainant is detained for the necessities of the investigation, such person shall enjoy the following rights:

1. Contact a member of his family, his employer, a lawyer of his choice, or an acquaintance.
2. Meet a lawyer appointed by him with an authorisation to be recorded without the need for a duly organised agency.
3. Use a sworn interpreter if he does not know Arabic.
4. Submit a request directly, or through his agent or a member of his family, to the Public Prosecutor to be examined by a doctor. The Public Prosecutor shall appoint a doctor for him as soon as the request is submitted.

The doctor shall examine him without the presence of any of the judicial officers, and submit his report to the Public Prosecutor within a period not exceeding twenty-four hours.

The Public Prosecutor shall inform the summoner of a copy of this report as soon as he receives it, and the detainee or any of the aforementioned, if his detention is extended, may submit a request for another examination.

The judicial police shall, immediately upon his detention, inform the suspect of his rights as stated above and record this procedure in the report. Article 48 continues the following: If the judicial officer violates the procedures related to the detention of the defendant or suspect, he shall be liable to prosecution for the offence of deprivation of liberty stipulated and punished in Article 367 of the Penal Code, in addition to the disciplinary penalty, whether the offence is witnessed or not.

Cedar Centre has raised the cases of the disappeared in complaints submitted to the Working Group of UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances¹¹; since their disappearances violate articles 9 and 10 of the ICCPR Lebanon has been a party since 1972.

Locally, Cedar Centre on behalf of the victims and their families, was submitting complaints according to Article 37 of the Lebanese Enforced Disappearance Law (2018)¹², which explicitly prohibits the act of enforced disappearance and mandates the state to protect individuals from such practices.

CCLS organized legal proxies for refugees seeking assistance to prevent refoulement, as well as for relatives reporting disappearances or torture during arrests. CCLS conducted various visits to detention centers, submitted letters to the Public Prosecutor requesting suspension of refoulement for individuals at risk if deported, and filed cases with the UNHCR, while also applying pressure on General Security. If the initial refoulement decision was not suspended, a request was submitted to the Public Prosecutor of Cassation Court. In some cases, the requests to halt refoulement were accepted; in others, they were denied. There are no clear criteria for halting a refoulement decision, making it an arbitrary process. Even though the principle of non-refoulement should apply for security reasons, the decision-making remains arbitrary.

Out of the 95 cases monitored and followed by CCLS, 7 individuals are not detained but are being monitored due to a refoulement decision, while 88 individuals are detained, including 3 women. The forces responsible for these arrests are as follows: 12 by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), 3 by the Internal Security Forces (ISF), 1 by the State Security Forces, 1 by the municipal police, and 71 by General Security.

In 2023–2024, CCLS succeeded in overturning refoulement decisions in 38 cases. Unfortunately, 33 individuals were deported, 2 remain imprisoned, 1 case was transferred to Egypt due to the individual's visa status, avoiding refoulement to Syria. Among these, 3 cases involved torture, 8 cases are awaiting a final refoulement decision, and 5 individuals were forcibly disappeared after being deported to Syria.

11 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-disappearances>

12 <http://77.42.251.205/Law.aspx?lawid=278973>

Section II

Exit Logic: Irregular Migration

Lebanon does not have a national refugee law; its refugee policies are based on a 2003 memorandum of understanding (triggered by the invasion of Iraq) that grants refugees temporary asylum under the auspices of the UNHCR (Janmyr, 2017). Lebanon's partner states speak of its border control as a glowing success. In December 2022, eight months after the sinking of the vessel J-1580, the EU's Integrated Border Management program held a celebration (ICMPD, 2022) at the Mövenpick in Beirut to mark 10 years of cooperation on migration control. "The EU's border cooperation with Lebanon not only embodies our core values and security objective in supporting our host country, it also serves to make Lebanese feel safe and secure, knowing that we have a solid presence in this country and we care," said the Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation, Alessandra Viezzer (El-Murr, 2023 b).

This second part of the report tackles the logical exit by irregular migration for Syrians to flee the instability in their country and Lebanon discriminatory and xenophobic policies.

More precisely, this part will firstly discuss the emergence of a migration ecosystem in Lebanon. The second part will present the Lebanese and the international migration policy, specifically the relation with the UNHCR and the EU. The third part will briefly tackle the push factors; it will end with detailed data on

the boat and a quantitative analysis based on data collected by the CCLS. It tackles the monitored pushbacks and pullbacks cases, as well as human rights violations.

Between 2021 and 2022, the number of migrants fleeing Lebanon by sea almost tripled, from 1.570 to 4.629, according to data from UNHCR¹³.

Frontex defines five principles of migratory routes to cross EU external borders: the central Mediterranean, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Western African, the Western Balkan, the Eastern Borders, and the Western Mediterranean.

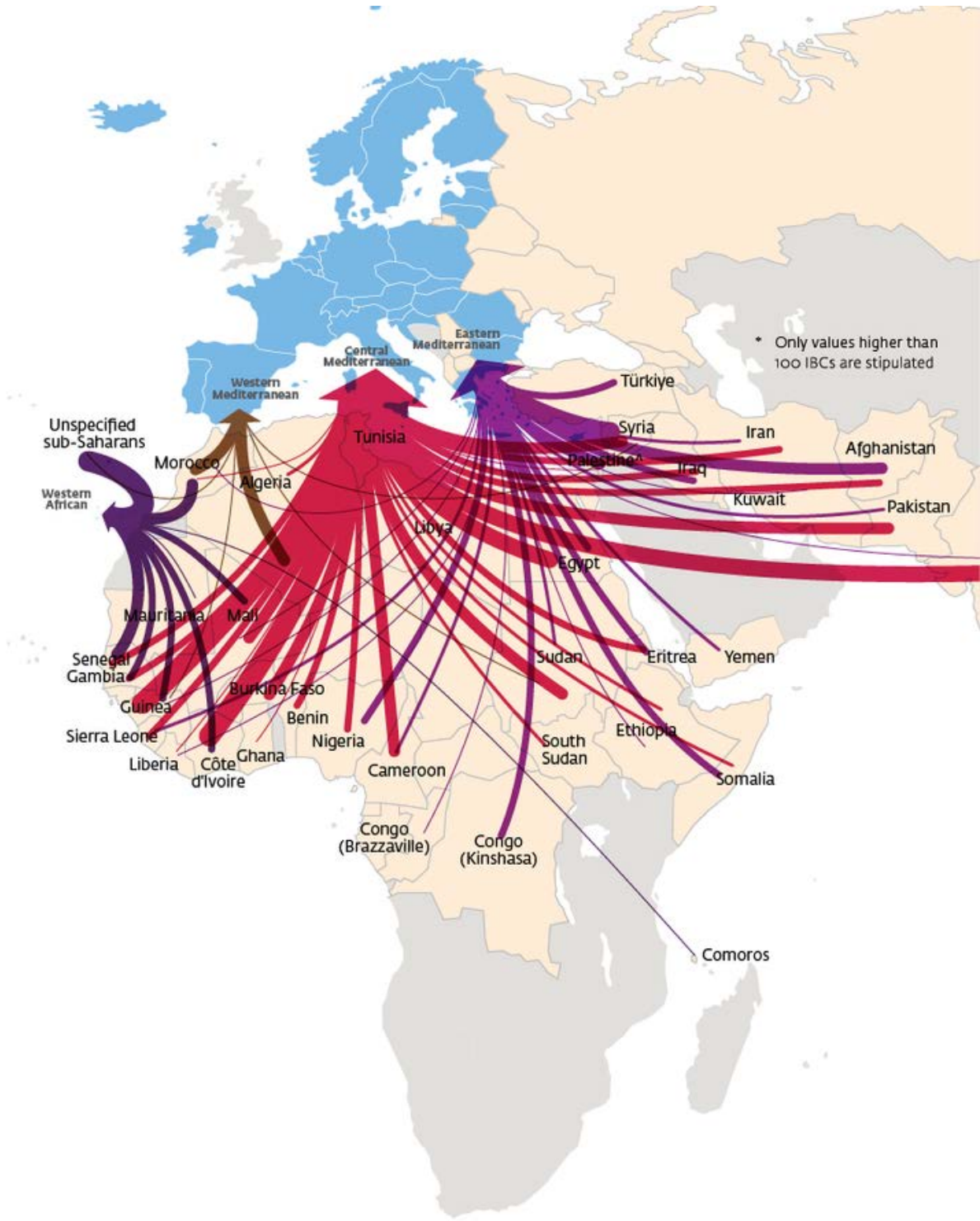
According to Frontex, "the Central Mediterranean, Western Balkan, and Eastern Mediterranean routes were the top three migratory routes on entry based on the volume of reported irregular border crossings, while Syrian, Afghan and Tunisian migrants were the most often reported nationalities".

The eastern Mediterranean migratory route encompasses movements towards Cyprus, the Greek sea borders, and the Greek and Bulgarian land borders with Turkey. Vessels arrive from Lebanon, Libya, and Syria.

The irregular border crossing at the EU increased from 22.793 in 2021, to 38.690 in 2022, to 60.073 in 2023.

¹³[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/dead-land-and-dead-sea-no-alternatives-syrian-refugees-lebanon_en#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20UNHCR%20registered%20an,in%202021%20\(1%2C570%20people\).](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/dead-land-and-dead-sea-no-alternatives-syrian-refugees-lebanon_en#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20UNHCR%20registered%20an,in%202021%20(1%2C570%20people).)

Source: Frontex



1 The Emergence of a Migration Ecosystem in Lebanon

Lebanon's status as a refugee host country and its multiple crises contextualise irregular migration. The economy of irregular migration has been thriving in Lebanon for decades. It is characterised by smuggling networks made up of people seeking to make a living in a country suffering from systemic economic and political crises. This migration economy has shown a great capacity to meet increasingly diverse demands and adapt to constraints caused by law enforcement.

It started with Palestinian refugees for many interconnected reasons, including discrimination against Palestinians, the empty lives of youth in the camps, unemployment, numerous issues in society and insecurity about their future, as well as the security situation. These reasons were all linked to the marginalisation of Palestinians and the denial of their civil rights. Palestinians do not only migrate for material and economic reasons, but also for safety or social reasons, or for a peaceful life. They migrate in search of stability. Migration has flourished with the Syrian crisis from 2011 to today. On 23 October 2015, the Lebanese army arrested a migrant smuggling network in the city of Sidon. This case is a prominent example of the matter, as this network consisting of five individuals sent a boat to Istanbul carrying migrants to Turkey. Among the passengers were one Lebanese individual, 14 Palestinians from Syria, and 21 Palestinians from different camps in Lebanon¹⁴.

The demand increased throughout 2019, and then it intensified in 2023. Years of high cost of basic foodstuffs impoverished them, and what was initially limited in scope, primarily involving locals during the summer season, quickly evolved into a thriving year-round business.

The dynamic expansion of the migration ecosystem also created opportunities for some actors within informal trade networks with Syria. Some individuals have seized the opportunity to engage in the transport of migrants from the Syrian border to northern Lebanon. These people also used the opportunity to transport migrants from their places of residence or concealment to departure points on the day of the crossing. This reflects their adaptation to the opportunities arising from irregular migration. By participating, transporters contribute to the development of the migration industry.

The increasing demand for irregular departures and significant financial risks have forced networks to organise themselves more systematically. Typically, a network consists of several individuals with distinct roles. The leader of the network plays a crucial but paradoxically relatively anonymous role. His primary responsibilities include scheduling departures, authorising transit, and ensuring the safety of the network's clients. To fulfil these tasks, the leader needs access to critical information regarding the movements of security forces on land and at sea. The role of the

¹⁴<https://civilsociety-centre.org/sir/army-lebanese-boat-smuggling-people-turkey-arrested-tyre>.

assistant network leader is to act as the main point of contact for all other network members and maintain direct contact with recruiters, transporters, smugglers, and hosts. Recruiters create connections to connect potential migrants with the organiser. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Signal, Messenger, and Telegram are widely used to establish contacts, disseminate information on prices and departure conditions, and liaise with border crossers. Transporters move migrants from the border to Lebanon or other cities and designated departure points on the coast.

As a transit country for migrants and a source of migration for Lebanese and foreigners on its territory,

Lebanon defines its contemporary relationship with Europe and the evolution of the 2016 Charter.

During that time, irregular migration trips by sea took a new turn as the organisers devised new ways to prepare and attract migrants. This was done through the reliance of some Lebanese on Syrian promoters to secure passengers for the trips from inside Syrian territory, as well as relying on promoters and facilitators from inside Palestinian camps to secure passengers of Palestinian nationality in Lebanon. Amounts ranging between 7 and 9 thousand US dollars were paid per passenger.

2 Lebanon and the International Migration Policy

International cooperation includes the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and 12 other UN agencies; the African-Arab Technical and Coordination Committee on Migration (est. 2013), as well as the UNHCR (see below) and the European Union (EU) (see

below). In the following section, the relationship between the UNHCR and the EU is analysed as directly involved in the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and the relation with Cyprus due to its proximity and the increased number of boats from Lebanon to this island.

2.1 UNHCR-Lebanon Policy Relations

Lebanon does not have a national refugee law and has not ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its annex, the 1967 Protocol. Lebanese refugee policies are based on a 2003 memorandum of understanding (triggered by the invasion of Iraq) that grants refugees temporary asylum under the auspices of the UNHCR (Janmyr, 2017). Asylum is therefore time-limited and must be followed by resettlement. However, due to other international legal obligations, Lebanon is required to protect refugees from refoulement, i.e., preventing refoulement. In 2011, when Syrian refugees began arriving in Lebanon, this MoU was not updated and the UNHCR was left to operate without a formal agreement with Lebanon. Political relations between the Lebanese government and UNHCR have undergone several crises due to the Syrian displacement. In 2011–2012, cooperation was hampered by the fact that the Lebanese Ministry took over the management of the response to the Syrian displacement. Asylum is therefore time-limited and should be followed by resettlement.

In parallel, interagency tensions within the UN and between the UN agencies and international NGOs, coloured coordination efforts (Mansour, 2017, pp. 10–13). The Lebanese government established a Crisis Cell in February 2014, headed by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Meanwhile, several ministries wrote the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2015–2016 (renewed every 12–18 months) in cooperation with around 100 other actors, including INGOs and UN Agencies. Ultimately, the UNHCR came to be seen as one of the leading bodies but was unable to take charge due to intersectional mandates. Successive LCRPs have been underfunded and perceived as wish lists rather than enforceable policies with little monitoring and

evaluation. In addition, the UNHCR remains caught between international refugee law and Lebanese policies on Syrian displacement (Janmyr, 2018).

In May 2024, UNHCR sent a letter to the Minister of Interior, Bassam Mawlawi, asking him to stop inhumane practices against Syrian refugees, objecting to the measures taken by the ministry to seize motorcycles driven by undocumented refugees. It also expressed its disapproval to the role played by municipalities in implementing the Ministry of Interior's decisions to verify the papers of residents living in homes within the scope of each municipality and to close shops illegally run by Syrian refugees.

Accordingly, some MPs moved to stop the UNHCR's practices, which have begun to exceed its role in funding the stay of Syrians in Lebanon. This move was accompanied by a threat to ask the Lebanese state to close the UNHCR offices in Beirut.

On 20 May 2024, a diplomatic crisis almost erupted between Lebanon and the UNHCR when the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdallah Bou Habib, summoned the UNHCR's official representative, Ivo Friesen, and demanded that he withdraw a letter sent by the UNHCR to Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi expressing concern over 'forced evictions of Syrians'. Bou Habib issued a statement calling on the UNHCR to respect communication with ministries and gave Friesen a one-month deadline to hand over an additional portion of the Syrian data it had previously delivered to the government, based on an agreement signed in August 2023. In turn, the UNHCR responded by withdrawing its politically objectionable letter, stressing its cooperation with the government.

2.2 EU-Lebanon Migration Policy Relations

Lebanon has bilateral migrant readmission agreements with Romania (2002), Bulgaria (2002), Cyprus (2003), and Switzerland (2006) (UN-Habitat, 2018, p. 15). In the Lebanese-EU Association Agreement of 2002, Article 68 commits to readmitting nationals irregularly present in each partner's territory. The possibility of coordination and the development of readmission agreements are specified in Article 69, "if deemed necessary".

In 1977, a Cooperation Agreement was signed between Lebanon and the European Community (European Commission, 2011). Lebanon and the EU have had a close political and economic relationship since the early 2000s, and the EU is currently Lebanon's largest trading partner with trade amounting to €7,7 billion in 2017 (Goulordava, 2019, p. 152). The current framework for policy relations on migration is implemented under the umbrella framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which was established in 2004. The ENP consists of multiple bilateral agreements between the EU and surrounding non-EU states. It is funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (European Community, 2006). The ENP governs the relations between the EU and 16 'neighbourhood' countries with the primary aim of "stabilisation" in the areas of politics, economy, and security (European Commission, 2006). Developments in the Middle East after the popular uprisings in 2011

instigated a reform of the ENP framework in 2011, and in 2015 the EU published a Joint Communication reviewing the ENP and proposing reforms. This led to the system of identifying joint 'priorities' in collaboration with partner countries (European Commission, 2015).

The ENP in Lebanon was negotiated in the form of the EU-Euro-Mediterranean Agreement and is the only legally binding document that governs migration between the EU and Lebanon. It was agreed in January 2002 and entered into force on April 6, 2006. The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the EU-Lebanon Action plans between 2006–2010 show that migration issues were not a policy priority (European Commission, 2011). The 2009 assessment of the ENI reported the beginning of infrastructural improvements at the Masnaa border post, seaports, and the airport, but highlights an overall "lack of an overarching Integrated Border Management strategy" as well as a lack of information sharing with the EU (European Commission, 2010, p. 11).

According to Tamirace Fakhoury (2020), the EU's logic of refugee management in Lebanon is characterised by three interrelated aspects, namely strengthening cooperation with the government; focusing on building resilience despite political elites' opposition to such an approach; and tactical disengagement with Lebanon's security practices towards refugees.

A New Lebanon-EU Agreement After Syrian Conflict

The EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities were formulated in the context of the mass displacement of Syrians after 2011. Migration is referred to as one of the "most pressing challenges" and the document emphasises the joint policy of both parties to urge the "safe return [of Syrians] to their country of origin", considering "the need to create conditions for the safe return of refugees from Syria and displaced Syrians [...] following all rules of international humanitarian law and

taking into account the interests of the host countries" (Lebanese Republic, 2016, p. 4). The priorities also indicate "that supporting Syrian refugees cannot be done outside the framework of supporting the Lebanese national economy and investing in infrastructure and productive projects", thus establishing development aid as an essential modality (ibid.). As the European Commission's statement framing the prioritisation strategies makes it clear, in

return for aid, the Lebanese government must “make efforts in the field of socio-economic inclusion of Syrian refugees to improve their living conditions and legal residency strategies” (European Commission, 2016b, pp. 13–14).

The nature of the political relationship in the field of migration shifted with the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011 and the increase in irregular migration to Europe via sea and land routes that peaked in 2015. This shift was catalysed by the inability to manage migration flows from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This has led the EU to engage in “informal, local and pragmatic decisions” rather than “formal and legally binding cooperation”, a path chosen due to the resistance of MENA countries and to ensure continued cooperation between the EU and its southern neighbours (Seeberg and Zardo, 2020, p. 2).

In this context, Lebanon as a transit country has been reframed as a bulwark against irregular migration to Europe, and the EU has become one of Lebanon’s main funders. Of the €24,9 billion mobilised by the EU to address Syrian displacement since 2011, €2,4 billion went to Lebanon (European Commission, 2020). The European Commission reported that this amount included €670,3 million in bilateral aid under the EU Syrian Displacement Initiative, €933 million in resilience aid through the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, and €666 million in humanitarian aid. Finally, €61 million was disbursed through two mechanisms: the instrument for Stabilisation and Peace and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (ibid.). An additional €402,3 million was granted to Lebanon with a focus on the following areas:

1. Economic growth and job creation;
2. Local governance and socio-economic development; and
3. Rule of law and enhanced security between 2014–2020 (European Commission, 2017).

In the 2007–2011 Action Plan, the Migration is related to Article 19, which provides for dialogue on migration, including asylum, mobility, irregular migration, return, and visas. There are several priorities under each section of the Action Plan, namely exchange of information and analysis of migration patterns, inclusion of Lebanon in existing EU cooperation structures on migration; dialogue on existing migration, integration and mobility policies, possible negotiation of a readmission agreement, cooperation on travel documents, improvement of short-term visas; inclusion of stateless persons and Palestinians concerning travel and asylum documents, strengthening inter-agency border management, including initiating cooperation between the Lebanese authorities and the European Community, and dialogue on the implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (European Community, 2006).

Migration in the Action Plan 2013–2015: the plan’s priorities included the protection of vulnerable populations such as the Palestinian (EU-Lebanon Partnership and Cooperation Action Plan 2013–2015, p. 2). Migration issues included defining the mandate of the EU-Lebanon Subcommittee on Social Issues and Migration. The subcommittee prioritises empowering municipalities and strengthening social protection but also cooperates on migration issues through dialogue and information exchange. Areas of cooperation in the subcommittee include migration management, prevention and control of irregular migration (including monitoring and return), readmission, travel documents and visas, and synergies on existing initiatives in the field of migration research (Section 3,2 in Annex II Other Objectives, Action Plan, 2013–2015).

In the 2016–2020 Action Plan, the EU and Lebanon agreed to deepen their partnership by agreeing on a set of priorities for this period, to support and strengthen Lebanon’s resilience and stability while seeking to address the impact of the protracted conflict in Syria. This agreement consisted of two parts: EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities and the Lebanon Compact.

EU Multi-year Indicative Programme – Lebanon 2021–2027: The New Mediterranean Agenda was launched in February 2021 and consists of communication and a working paper on the Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbourhood. “Migration and

Mobility” is the fourth pillar of the agenda and is funded through the retooled European Neighbourhood Initiative, known as the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), which promises €7 billion between 2021–2027. Although written into the 2030 Sustainable Development Programmes, including the European Green Deal and the Paris Agreement, the inclusion of migration policy in the new agenda is a continuation of previous policies and is formulated in line with the Migration and Asylum Pact that came into force in September 2020 (ANND, 2021).

The EU Compensates Lebanon to Mitigate the Migration Flow

Since the Association Agreement was first signed in 2002 and implemented in 2006, the issue of ‘migration’ policy has evolved into a pillar of EU-Lebanon diplomacy and cooperation. This is particularly evident in policy developments after 2012 when the EU sought to engage with Lebanon as a key partner in remote migration management.

This policy shift was accompanied by a massive influx of funds, as well as the creation of dedicated financial instruments under the EU’s Syria Trust Fund (Madad Fund). Another EU compensation promise to Lebanon started in the 2016 agreement. The Lebanon Compact emerged from the February 2016 London Conference on “Supporting Syria and the Region” as part of a broader framework of compacts. This agreement serves as a compensation vehicle for Lebanon to mitigate the migration flows. The section on mobility and migration highlighted the need to, firstly, negotiate a joint declaration to launch the Mobility Partnership, and, secondly, strengthen cooperation on migration through the Lebanon-EU Mobility Partnership, which sought to build capacity in the area of legal and irregular migration. Discussions on the Mobility Partnership began in 2015 but remained at technical level until 2018 (European Commission, 2018, p. 11).

The Lebanon Compact was not negotiated within existing ENP channels. It is priority-based and aims to operationalise the improvement of living conditions for Syrians including a comprehensive aid package (European Commission, 2016b). The compact leveraged multiple existing EU policy frameworks, including the EU Syria Trust Fund, through which it pledged €400 million to Lebanon in 2016–2017. The Lebanon Compact, and its lack of implementation, resulted from the framing of the compact through an EU narrative of the crisis in 2015 that failed to consider Lebanon’s internal political divide and predominantly framed the Syrian influx in terms of security and instability.

In 2021, the EU promised a four-year aid package to Lebanon worth €2,2 billion, in addition to Iraq, Jordan, and Syria (European Commission, 2021b, p. 17). The new Charter on Migration and Asylum aims to standardise asylum procedures across the EU and amend the 2016 Asylum Procedures Regulation by merging screening, asylum, and return policies into a single legislative package. However, the reform has been criticised for introducing pre-screening at the EU’s external borders allowing authorities to speed up asylum or return procedures at the port of

disembarkation (Guibert, Milova and Movileanu, 2021, pp. 1–2).

At the same time, the EU also renewed the EU Action Plan against the smuggling of migrants for 2021–2025, which will develop a tailor-made approach with partner countries in the South. As noted by two different NGO networks, this means that, despite the promise to address the root causes of migration, the new agenda continues to focus on “displacement, deterrence, containment and return” and aims to keep migrants away from European borders (Arab NGO Network for Development, 2021). Indeed, the resilience policies of the Lebanon Compact have been replaced by renewed calls for the return of refugees as the most durable solution. At the Brussels-hosted conference in May 2022, the EU reiterated calls for the return of Syrian refugees, while Lebanon formally declared to UNHCR that it could no longer be a host country for refugees (Fakhoury and Stel, 2022).

European efforts failed to stabilise and strengthen resilience. On the contrary, irregular migration increased in 2024, to such an extent that, on May 2, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen travelled to Beirut with Cypriot President, Nikos Christodoulides. They were there to strike a \$1.07 billion deal with Lebanon’s government to support the country’s “socio-economic stability” and curb the irregular migration of Syrian refugees to Cyprus.

Accordingly, on 15 May 2024, the President of Parliament, Nabih Berri, called for a parliamentary session dedicated to discussing the European donation and the Syrian displacement file (Lebanon debate, 2024) to discuss the European donation. The session resulted in a contextualization of the Syrian refugees’ files in Lebanon: “For more than 13 years, Lebanon has been suffering from Syrian displacement, with the number of those who entered the country exceeding two million refugees, constituting 44% of the population, without accurate and complete registration of them with the concerned official authorities. Their

movement could therefore not be controlled and regulated due to the lack of cooperation by the UNHCR, under various excuses in terms of handing over the lists in its possession about them, and with moral protection from some countries and bodies that encouraged their stay in Lebanon for either political objectives or because they are unwilling to accommodate a part of them.

“The Syrian displacement has affected Lebanon economically, financially, socially, securely, environmentally, and on the general stability in Lebanon with a growing sense of concern among all Lebanese about demographic and societal change. On the other hand, this most complex and dangerous issue is the most united one around which the Lebanese are united on a national basis, refusing to approach it with racist backgrounds or targets outside the legal frameworks.

“For many social, economic, and demographic considerations and because Lebanon is not a country of asylum, it is not prepared to be so constitutionally, legally and realistically, as confirmed by the memorandum of understanding signed between the Lebanese government, represented by the General Directorate of General Security, and the regional office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees dated 9 September 2003 and published in the Official Gazette No. 52 on 13 November 2003, which is still in force and regulates the relationship between the state and UNHCR, which confirms the return of displaced persons to their country of origin or their resettlement in a third country.”

Based on this introduction, the parliament’s oversight role and in compliance with the constitution, laws, and the agreement, and to repatriate irregular Syrian entrants and residents in Lebanon to their country within a maximum period of one year from now, the parliament recommends the following by unanimous consent of its members present:

1. Forming a ministerial committee headed by the Prime Minister including the ministers of Defence, Interior, Displaced Persons, Social Affairs, Army Command, General Security, Internal Security, and State Security to communicate and directly follow up with international and regional bodies, especially with the Syrian government, and set a detailed timetable for the return of displaced persons, except for special cases protected by Lebanese laws and determined by the committee.
2. Confirming Lebanon's commitment to the content of the agreement referred to in the introduction as a basis for treatment and obliging UNHCR through diplomatic means to apply its provisions in full, take the necessary measures for implementation, provide statistics and files on IDPs in its possession, and ask it to coordinate with its office in Syria to facilitate the process of returning them to their country.
3. A clear commitment to apply the laws in force that regulate the process of entry into, residence in, and exit from Lebanon, especially the law issued on 10/7/1962 and the relevant implementing decrees, especially Decree No. 10.188 dated 28/7/1962, the Lebanese Labour Law, tax laws, municipal fees, and others.
4. Taking the necessary legal measures to hand over prisoners from the displaced population to the Syrian authorities following the established laws and procedures.
5. Call on the international community and donor agencies to assist the government in allocating the necessary resources to the military and security agencies to control the land borders, coordinate with the Syrian side for assistance on the other side, and restrict entry and exit through legal crossings between the two countries.
6. Requesting all UN agencies, especially the UNHCR and international and European donors, to adopt incentives and financial and humanitarian assistance to encourage the return of displaced persons to their country through the Lebanese state and its institutions or with their consent, and not allowing this matter to be exploited to suggest approval of their stay in Lebanon, encouraging these parties to provide such services inside Syria.
7. Taking advantage of the resolutions issued by the United Nations, including its resolution on the early recovery plan issued in 2021, as it can be the entry point to accelerate the return to the Syrian interior through assistance to rehabilitate infrastructure without exposing donor countries to Caesar Act sanctions.
8. Conveying a clear message to countries and organisations working on the displacement issue that Lebanon can no longer afford to become an obstacle to the movement of displaced persons to other countries, and that it will not be its mission to protect the borders of these countries from the possibility of movement to them by those who wish or try to leave Lebanon by any means possible. The main responsibility is therefore to shift support towards promoting the movement of displaced persons and securing their stability in their country with the necessity of securing their life essentials.
9. The government commits to this recommendation and will submit a report to the parliament every three months on the stages of implementation of what it includes.

The report from the government to the parliament is an illegal recommendation and not an order. According to Allaham (2024), the parliament, as the legislative authority, has no right to make such 'recommendations', especially since it is a caretaker

government. This constitutes a violation of the principle of separation of powers since constitutionally binding the government can only be done through the law.

2.3 The Cypriot-Lebanese Relations

Since 2019, Lebanese authorities have deported returning Syrians who have left the country via an unofficial exit point, or who are pushed back by Cyprus. By returning Syrians to Lebanon with the knowledge that they would likely be deported to Syria, Cyprus has adopted a policy of “chain refoulement.”

In October 2020, Cyprus and Lebanon reaffirmed the agreement of 2003 on the readmission of illegally staying persons, ratified by Law No. 53. The first paragraph stipulates that each Contracting Party shall, at the request of the other Contracting Party and without any formalities, readmit any person who does not fulfil or no longer fulfils the conditions of entry or residence in force in the territory of the Contracting Party. In essence, the “Agreement on the Readmission of Persons Illegally Entering and/or Staying in the Territory of the Two Countries,” allows Cyprus to return any individuals coming from Lebanon, regardless of their nationalities.”

According to Eurostat (European Parliament, 2024), Cyprus recorded the highest rate of first-time asylum applicants (885 applicants per million people) in the EU during February 2023. The EU recorded 171 first-time applications per million people in that month. In February 2023, a total of 76.505 first-time asylum applications were recorded in the EU, a 41% increase compared to the same month of the previous year when 54.370 such applications were recorded. Cyprus has also called on the EU and the European border agency Frontex to help increase patrols along the bloc’s south-eastern maritime border to try and prevent migrants from arriving on the small island.

Overall, the number of migrants arriving in Cyprus is down, but the number of Syrian nationals arriving has once again increased (Wallis, 2024).

A surge in migrant boat arrivals of Syrians led the Cypriot government to temporarily suspend the processing of all asylum applications by Syrian nationals in mid-April. According to UNHCR data¹⁵, 3.521 Syrians arrived in Cyprus between January and July 2024, and the majority arrived between January and May (3.481). The overwhelming majority arrived in the country by sea from Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria, although a smaller portion crossed by land from the Turkish-controlled portion of Northern Cyprus.

The EU was hoping to strike a migrant deal with Lebanon along the same lines as its recent agreement with Egypt (Van Brunnersum, 2024).

After the arrival of two boats on 16 April 2024 (see below pushback), two port police boats have been sent from Cyprus (Prakas, 2024) to patrol off the coast of Lebanon for migrant boats. The two boats arriving a day later follow a week of consistent vessel arrivals. The news was confirmed by police spokesman Christos Andreou but he refrained from discussing more details about the mission.

Three boats returned to Lebanon, two of which arrived safely on the shore of the port. Passengers were arrested by the Lebanese army, some of whom were released. Those not registered with UNHCR in Lebanon were deported.

The Lebanon office of UNHCR said in a statement that it was aware of more than 220 people who had disembarked from the returned boats in northern

¹⁵Data UNHCR

Lebanon. Of those, 110 were refugees registered with UNHCR and all of them were released.

The UNHCR in Lebanon recorded a significant increase in cases of irregular migration by sea from the country's shores from January to 15 April 2024.

UNHCR spokesperson Dalal Harb explained that 52 sea voyages (actual or attempted) were recorded during this period, involving 2,636 passengers. The majority of them were Syrians.

According to Harb, these trips were distributed as follows: "Five trips in January carrying 278 passengers, 12 trips in February (606 passengers), 18 trips in March (1,016 passengers), 17 trips from the first of April until the 15th (736 passengers), while 3 sea movements involving 54 passengers were recorded in the same period in 2023."

According to UNHCR, the commission recorded '65 sea movements (actual or attempted) and 3,927 passengers in the same year. These cases were

distributed as follows: 29 boats were intercepted or failed to arrive, with 1,692 people on board, while 33 boats successfully reached their destination (31 boats to Cyprus, 1 boat to Italy, and 1 boat to Libya), with 2,126 passengers on board, and 3 boats with 109 passengers were deported to Lebanon'.

According to Harb, there has been an increase in maritime movements from Lebanon's shores compared to 2022, while the number of passengers decreased by 15,3% during the same period.

The presence of more than two million Syrians in Lebanon has caused a reaction within the country, resulting in them no longer accepting migrant returns (Shkurko, 2024). This reason and the increase in the influx of migrants via sea routes to Cyprus (InfoMigrants, 2024), pushed the head of Cypriot intelligence, Tassos Tsioni, accompanied by the national security adviser, to visit Lebanon and meet with officials to discuss the issue of maritime borders and irregular immigration¹⁶ on 17 January 2024.

¹⁶<https://alhasnews.com.jo/online/eye/690955.html?fbclid=IwAR17SOH3EXnG3rgYuPARwqF8EdSgz1SX1B9MTFAKLwrrpUD98DW4D76LeTYQ>

3 Push Factors to Escape Lebanon

Lebanon is in the second position in the IOM (2024) report of the top five remittance-receiving countries by share of GDP in 2022 with 36%, preceded by Tajikistan (51%), followed by Tonga (44%), Samoa (34%) and Kyrgyzstan (31%).

The Middle East remains a major origin of refugees and asylum seekers, while also featuring some of the largest internally displaced populations in the world.

Xenophobic attitudes, discriminatory policies, and hate speech of political actors and government have sparked a wave of racist violence against Syrian refugees. As the country's financial crisis worsened, they decided to scapegoat Syrian refugees, claiming that they are the cause of job losses for Lebanese, violence, crime, and unacceptable practices.

The latest study by the University of Saint-Joseph and the International Development Research Centre (USJ & IDRC, 2024) analyses the Lebanese phenomenon of irregular migration. Based on intensive fieldwork, the study summarises the push factors by thirteen factors:

1. The economic crisis and financial instability in Lebanon
2. The lack of social protection
3. The socio-political crisis and lack of security
4. The search for a better future: a loss of hope as an incentive
5. The increased vulnerability of Tripoli
6. The heightened vulnerability of displaced Syrians in Lebanon
7. The cumulative vulnerability of Palestinian refugees
8. The incentive and facilitating factors reinforce the motivation to leave
9. The barriers to legal migration
10. Lebanon's geographical location and shortcomings in maritime border control
11. Attractive factors in European countries
12. The organised and structured trafficking market
13. Stories of successful journeys and the guarantee provided by group travel.

4 EU Pushbacks and Pullbacks Strategies

The EU use pushback and pullback strategies to keep migrants reaching Europe. Pushback refers to the process of returning refugees or migrants across a border, usually immediately after they have crossed, and before they can exercise their legal right to seek asylum. According to the UNHCHR, pushbacks, which is a common practice in EU countries, is defined as “various measures taken by States which result in migrants, including asylum seekers, being summarily forced back to the country from where they attempted to cross or have crossed an international border without access to international protection or asylum procedures or denied of any individual assessment on their protection needs which may lead to a violation of the principle of non-refoulement” (Radjenovik, 2021, p. 2). In various judgments, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has condemned pushback practices as collective expulsions based on Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Nonetheless, according to the Annual Regional Overview IOM (2021), pushbacks are common practice in EU countries. While pullbacks are forcibly preventing people from leaving in the first place as “departure prevention”.

Pullbacks is the price that Lebanon must pay as departure state to outsourcing migration control (Frelick, Kysel, Podkul, 2016) for countries in the global north. Instead of carrying out pushbacks themselves, higher-income countries are now increasingly relying

on so-called mobility partnerships (Broczka, Paulhart, 2015, p. 1) with “third countries” referred to as “countries of transit or origin” for migrants. In these bilateral agreements, high-income countries give their lower-income partner states funding, training, and equipment for border control. Depending on the country, they might also dangle development assistance, trade agreements, or temporary labour migration (Republic of Lebanon, 2016). Countries that do not cooperate might be threatened with cuts to development aid. In exchange, departure states agree to prevent migrants from leaving in the first place. This “departure prevention” can often take the form of pullbacks: when a country forcibly prevents people – sometimes including its own citizens – from leaving.

The agreement between Lebanon and Cyprus is part of this larger trend. Within this partnership, Cyprus wants to donate ships and boats to Lebanon to carry out joint sea patrols against migration, paying the salaries of Lebanese soldiers for this purpose. According to the agreement, Lebanon would receive six used speedboats as well as two large and four medium-sized rigid-hull inflatable boats as a “donation” by the end of 2024 (Monroy, 2023).

Pullbacks can be just as deadly as pushbacks (Heller et al., 2017). The only difference is that migrants could be killed outside the reach of their own jurisdiction (Sea Watch, 2022).

Boat Data Analysis and CCLS Intervention

In this part, the study tries to cover CCLS interventions with victims of pushbacks and pullbacks trying to patrol Lebanon through human rights documentaries. A second category of irregular migrants appears in the aborted migration operation. It is a kind of prevention pullback and boats to collect migrants. The period covered is from April 2022 to June 2024. Cedar Centre addresses many problems related to irregular migration and the related issues in every step of the legal process of the arrest of a boat or migrants. When the concerned security forces receive information about the departure of an irregular boat, they immediately head to the place of departure and arrest all passengers on the boat.

These passengers are then taken to the respective investigation centers, where a report is opened with a specific number. The statements of all arrested passengers and smugglers are then recorded and their identification documents and all their mobile phones, passports, etc., are taken from them. The report and seized items are then referred to the competent public prosecution, which in turn refers to the papers sent to the investigating judge, who interrogates the arrested smugglers. After issuing his preliminary decision, he returns the papers to the public prosecution for legal action.

Usually, those suspected of human trafficking offences (usually the captain) are arrested. As for the passengers, the Lebanese are left behind and the Syrians are deported as the army hands them over to smugglers at the Lebanese Syrian border.

An example of this was when a boat sank in Salata, in the north of Lebanon on 30 December 2022. CCLS followed up with survivors who were rescued and subsequently interrogated. The CCLS liaised with police stations to ensure that the survivors were released.

Subsequently, a few people were arrested, including the alleged owner of the boat. Since his arrest on 19 January 2023, CCLS has been providing legal assistance to the alleged owner for his involvement in the shipwreck. According to the CCLS investigation, Mr Baroudi was not the real owner of the boat. He was tricked into registering the boat in his name and was therefore not the owner of the boat.

There were around 200 Syrians among the other survivors who were illegally deported back to Syria. They then managed to enter Lebanon illegally. When they were rescued and arrested, the Lebanese authorities confiscated their mobile phones and ID cards. At the end of March 2023, some of the Syrians asked CCLS's legal team to inquire about their ID documentation and mobile devices. Cedar Centre was able to identify where these documents and devices were officially kept, which was at the Public Prosecution in North Lebanon. CCLS intervened to return the items to the Syrian refugees.

Another example is the intervention of CCLS on behalf of four survivors who had several family members on board the April boat (see below). The lawyers filed a complaint against 13 members of the Lebanese Army Navy. The complainants accused the army of committing 'murder' under Articles 548 and 189 of the Lebanese Penal Code, as well as unintentional killing under Article 550 of the Penal Code. The same plaintiffs submitted a request to the Lebanese Minister of Justice to transfer the ongoing investigations from the Military Court to the Judicial Council. Currently, the Military Court's investigation into the sinking of the boat remains suspended due to the inability to recover the boat. A submarine was promised to be donated by Lebanese expatriates in Australia. A Pisces VI submarine arrived in Lebanon in August 2022 and departed on 28 August 2022. The submarine was able

to locate the wreckage at a depth of approximately 450 metres (approximately 1.470 feet). In addition, they found the remains of at least 10 victims. However, they were unable to recover their bodies.

Faced with this mystery, the Lebanese authorities should themselves have launched an investigation to find these 85 people. Due to their silence, Cedar Centre lodged a complaint of enforced disappearance on 2 January with the public prosecutor at the Court of Cassation, Ghassan Oueidate.

Cedar works with reliable security and intelligence sources to get information about the boats, including

several passengers, victims, survivors, disappeared, and arrested, including their nationality, gender, and age. This information is shown in each boat below when available, the majority of the time, and these details are not taken into consideration by the competent authorities. Next to the boat monitoring and collected information, the legal team intervened to protect the individuals. CCLS contacted the police station and reviewed their reports. Then attorneys followed the Public Prosecution of the accused and seizures by the judicial police officer in charge of investigating him, such as his identification papers, phone, or contraband, in the judicial police and the judicial detachment.

Pullback

The number of registered boats of pullback is five.

Boat 1: April Boat, 22 April 2022

On 23 April 2022, a boat that was heading outside the Lebanese territorial waters sank after it was trying to pass illegally. The boat was about three nautical miles off the coast of Tripoli. The number of passengers were 85 people of Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian nationalities, including 20 women, and 19 young people younger than 21. A total of 45 people survived, 33 were missing and only 7 bodies were recovered.

The April boat tragedy could be considered a pullback, if the Lebanese navy engaged in dangerous manoeuvres, i.e., destabilizing the migrant boat, or ramming into it, as survivors say.

On 24 April 2022 the Lebanese army officially announced¹⁷ that the total number of survivors was 45.

Seven bodies have been recovered while the rest remain missing.

Survivors later testified in the media about the cause of the sinking, saying that a cruiser from the Lebanese Navy attempted to stop the boat before it could reach international waters. Survivors have accused the Lebanese navy of deliberately ramming the vessel while trying to force it back to shore. The captain of the cruiser used a megaphone to order the boat to stop but was ignored. According to the testimonies, the cruiser first hit the front of the boat before hitting its side, which resulted in the immediate sinking of the vessel. Most passengers could not swim. According to survivors, the Lebanese navy did not immediately rescue the people in the water. It was reported in the media that they had to wait for 90 minutes (Associated

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/LebarmyOfficial/status/1518175389813719040>

Press, 2022) while the Commander of the Naval Forces in the Army, Colonel Haitham Dannawi, announced¹⁸ that the load of the boat did not allow them to move away from the shore, and they were not convinced of their members' call. The captain of the boat decided to carry out manoeuvres to escape from the watch in a way that led to his crash.

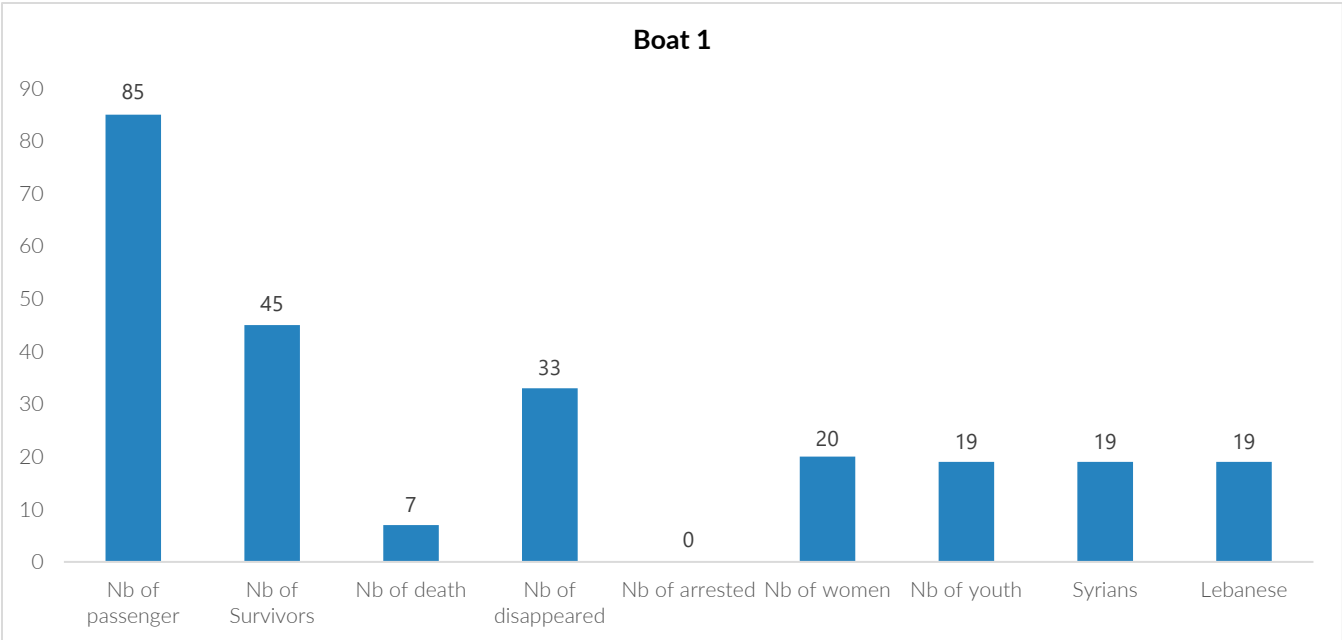
Lebanese officials have blamed reckless smugglers for deliberately overloading their boats and eschewing safety precautions. President Michel Aoun said the incident must be investigated due to these “conflicting accounts of events”.

After the investigation, high-ranking military officials, including army chief Joseph Aoun, navy commander Col. Haitham Danaoui, and the head of military intelligence, Brig. Gen. Tony Kahwaji, were summoned to present the findings of their preliminary investigation. The report has not been made public yet.

On 26 April 2022, the Lebanese army announced¹⁹ that the Lebanese Intelligence Directorate is continuing to investigate the boat sinking according to the request of the Military Public Prosecutor Fadi Akiki.

In August 2022, the “a Pisces VI submarine” arrived in Lebanon and left on August 28. The submarine was able to locate the wreck at a depth of approximately 450 metres (about 1.470 feet). In addition, they found the remains of at least 10 victims. They could not retrieve their bodies.

Australian AUS RELIEF Association received funding of over 250.000 Euros, which in the end was paid to “a Pisces VI submarine”. The submarine did not complete its mission, i.e., to recover the victims' bodies, nor take good quality photos of the shipwreck to find out if it had been struck, and to establish the details of the accident. The victims' families depended on the submarine to recover their relatives and loved ones from the water, particularly following the discovery of the boat and the dissemination of images showing the victims within. Suddenly, the submarine disappeared along with its crew, departing without accomplishing its designated responsibilities, failing to retrieve the boat to verify its sinking causes and eliminate any uncertainty, and failing to extract even a single victim under the guise that the corpses would dissolve and evaporate upon rising from the water.



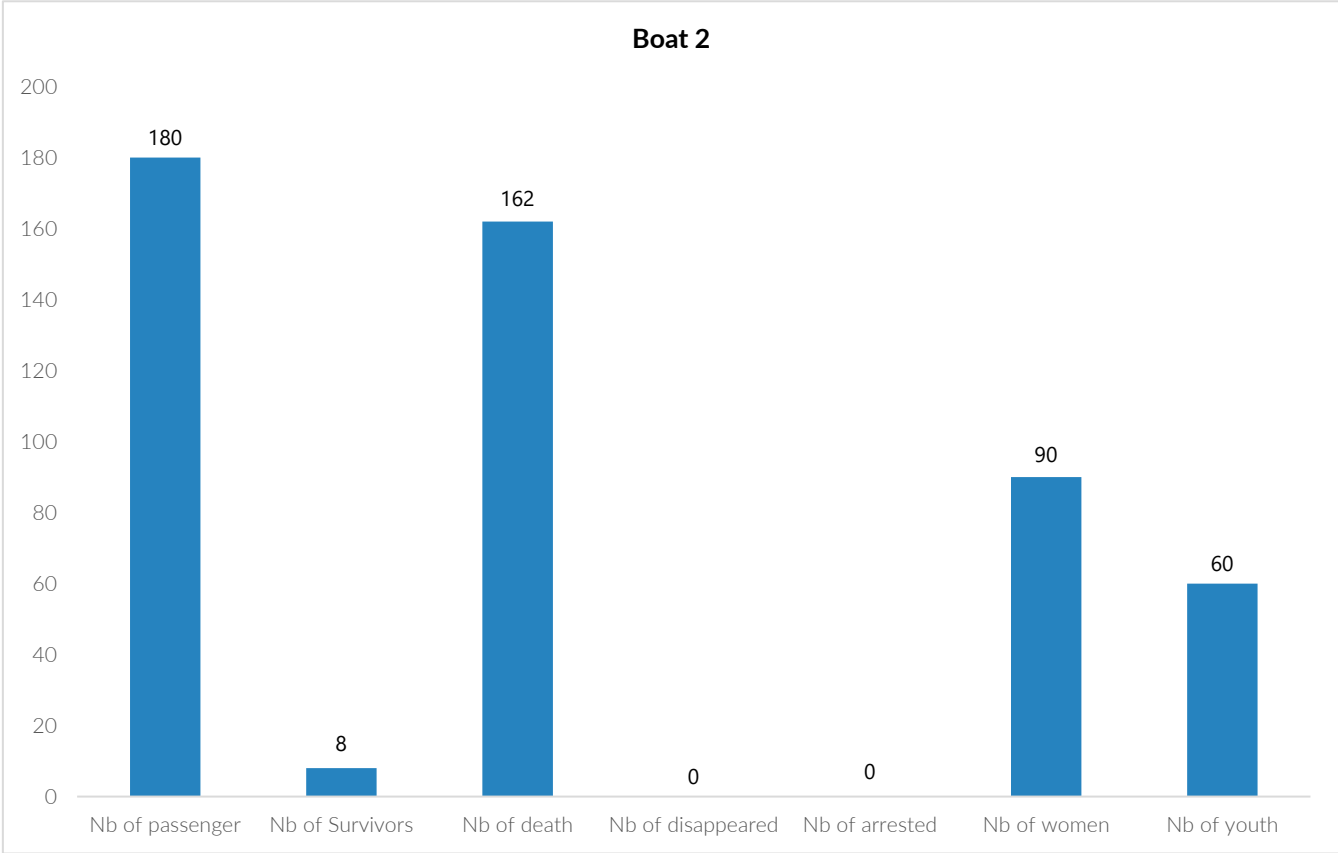
18 <https://twitter.com/LebarmyOfficial/status/1518174464197992448>

19 <https://twitter.com/LebarmyOfficial/status/1518970550122647552>

Boat 2: Tartus Boat, 21 September 2022

On 21 September 2022, a boat carrying around 150 people (Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian) sank near the island of Arwad, along the coast of Tartus in Syria. The boat was sailing towards Europe from northern Lebanon.

Search and rescue operations confirmed that at least 70 people were dead. 100 bodies were recovered with only 20 survivors. The rest are still missing. Initial reports indicate that 20 survivors managed to swim to shore and were hospitalised in the Syrian city of Tartus.



Fouad Hoblos, a Lebanese national, was one of the people on the boat. Hoblos managed to swim to shore and was rescued. The next day, his family visited him at al-Basel Hospital in Tartus, Syria. On 23 September, his wife went to the hospital to visit him again but was

informed that he had been transferred to the military hospital. Arriving there, she was not allowed to enter and the security officer told her that no one could see or contact him. He was finally released on 1 December 2022.

Boat 3: Libya Boat, 10 August 2023

The central Mediterranean Sea is the “most dangerous migration route in the world”, according to the IOM (McGowan, 2023). In 2023, migrants and refugees reported an estimated 212.100 attempts to cross the Central Mediterranean Sea from Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia to Europe. This was a 33% increase compared to known departures in 2022 (IOM, 2023). The northward movements were joined by migratory movements from the Eastern Mediterranean area.

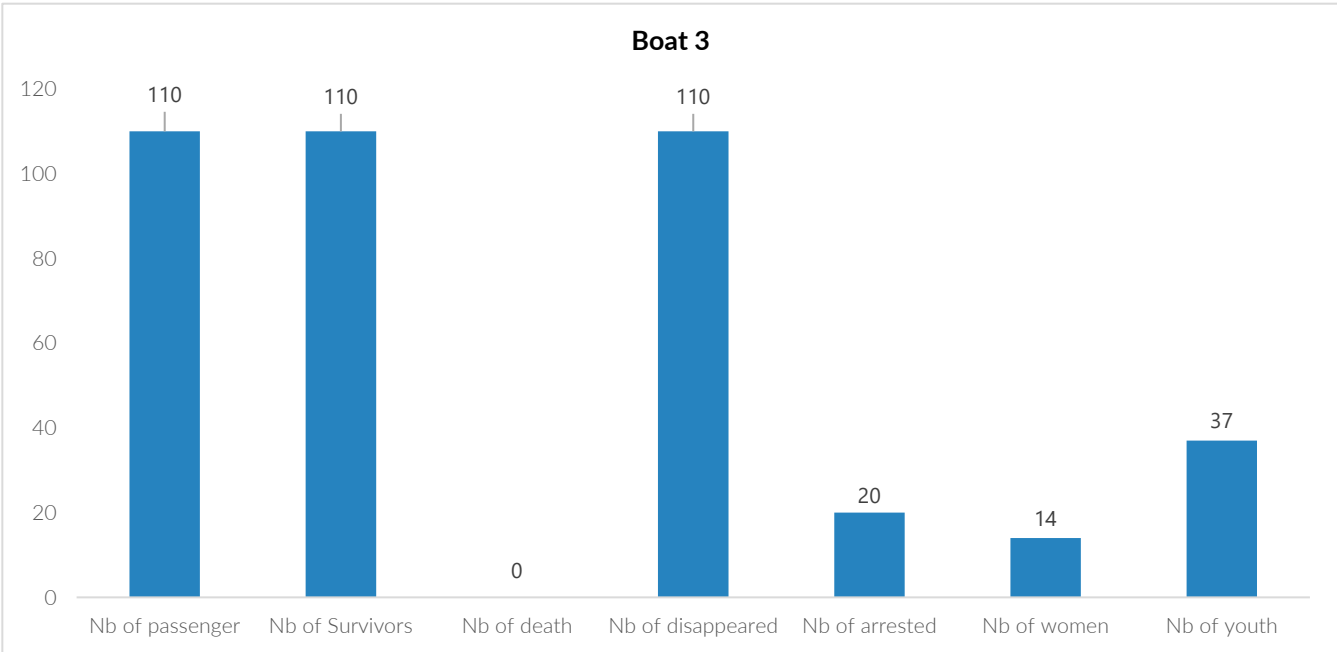
On 10 August 2023, two boats departed Lebanon’s northern shore in Akkar, attempting to cross the Mediterranean toward Italy. The Lebanese army thwarted one of the boats, while the other one managed to cross into regional waters. 134 migrants were on the first boat, including 130 Syrians and 4 Lebanese. The second boat carried 110 migrants, of which 37 were children, 14 women, and 59 men; and around 90% were Syrians.

Upon reaching Malta’s Search and Rescue (SAR) area, on 18 August at 3 p.m. Beirut time, the migrants

reported to an International NGO “Alarm Phone” that a ship displaying a Libyan flag was pursuing them. Armed individuals were firing at their vessel, resulting in one person being injured on board and failure in one of the boat’s engines.

Members of the Libyan armed group Tarek Bin Zeyad Brigade (TBZ) first took all 110 migrants into Misrata, a city in northwestern Libya, based on testimonies provided to CCLS by the detained family members.

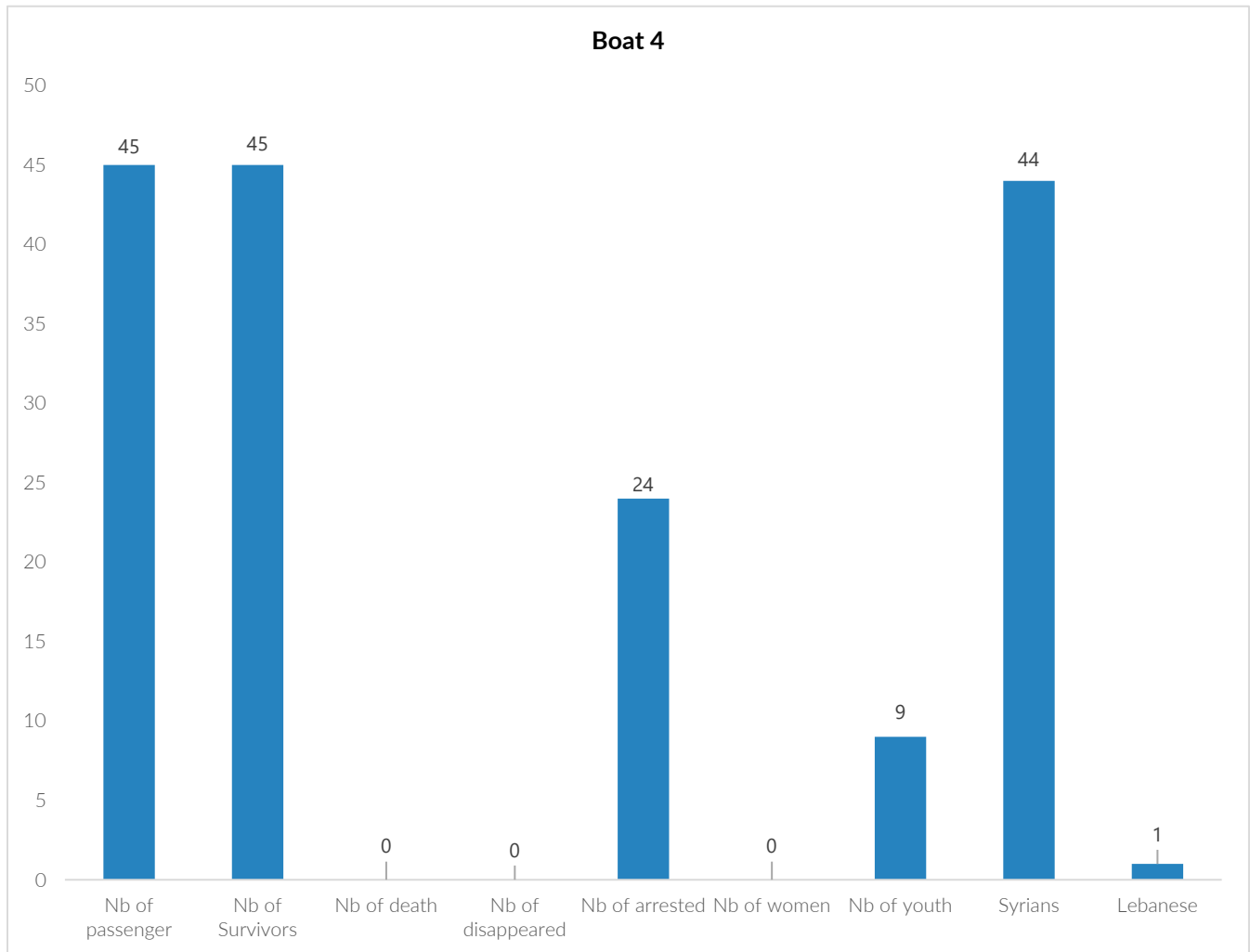
They were then transferred to a Benghazi detention centre, which is close to the port, where they remained detained in Benghazi in a detention centre called (Qanfouda). The official name is the Greater Benghazi Center. Among the 110 migrants, about 20 were detained till October, while others were liberated a few days later. On 29 August 2023, Cedar Centre for Legal Studies submitted the cases of seven Syrians who remained detained in Qanfouda to the UN Special Procedures.



Boat 4:10 November 2023

On 10 November 2023, a boat carrying illegal immigrants sank in Lebanese waters. An Army Navy patrol managed to thwart an irregular migration

operation and rescued 29 Syrian males who were on board and arrested 15 Syrians, including 9 minors and one Lebanese, all males, who were unable to board.



Boat 5: Selata Boat, 8 July 2023

The Lebanese army announced on 8 July 2023²⁰ that it had foiled an attempt to irregularly migrate north and arrested several people planning to smuggle others across the sea. The LAF reported: “A patrol from the

Intelligence Directorate arrested five Syrians in the town of Salata for preparing an irregular migration operation across the sea for many people.”

²⁰ <https://www.thisislebanon.com/lebanon/236906/>.

Aborted Migration

This kind of operation is done by the security services, the LAF, when they find out that a new boat is under preparation. During the studying period, CCLS has noticed 16 aborted operations: 12 in 2023 and 5 until June 2024; 17 in total.

8 July 2023

On 8 July 2023, the Lebanese security services aborted an irregular immigration operation heading towards Europe. The security services monitored about 400 persons, all Syrians except 3 Lebanese, who were in the process of preparing for their trip by sea. Some of them were arrested in Mhamara – Akkar, and others were arrested at the Deir Ammar checkpoint, while they were on their way to the dock in trucks and vans. They were arrested at two centres, one in Abdeh and the other in Minieh. After the follow-ups conducted by CCLS Centre, the reviewing of the report organised in Minieh and the judicial detachment, which included the reports of Minieh and Halba police station, and communicating with the security authorities in the intelligence services, it turned out that 184 people of Syrian nationality were arrested in Minieh. The rest were arrested in Halba. The security report also stated that about 143 mobile phones were seized. After interrogation, all of them were released at the end of the legal procedures, except for those involved in the immigration process, i.e., smugglers. The number of detainees totalled 5. The LAF launched a campaign of arrests in the Akkar in the town of Bebnin, targeting those involved in the preparation and execution of this operation. Three more irregular immigration trips were being planned, with the boats departing from the beaches of Chekka, as the beaches of Akkar, Minieh and Tripoli were monitored by the security services and their radars.

13 July 2023

On 13 July 2023, the security services in the Akkar-Abdeh region foiled an irregular migration attempt that was heading towards Cyprus, where several people were arrested near a mosque on the sea road in the Abdeh region. A person involved in the preparation of this operation was arrested. The number of Syrians arrested reached 25, all of whom were released, but their mobile phones and identification papers were seized.

16 July 2023

On 16 July 2023, an irregular migration operation was thwarted. The passengers came from Syria by land to travel abroad illegally and numbered 79 people, who were arrested while passing by five vans in al-Mahmara. Seven of the smugglers were arrested, while the Syrian passengers were released.

30 July 2023

On 30 July 2023 at around 1:30 a.m., the Lebanese Army Intelligence raided a house in the Bebnine area, broke its doors and damaged its furniture to arrest a group of people of Syrian nationality who were preparing to depart illegally, and while they were driving by van to a house in the Bebnine area, they were chased by the Army Intelligence.

Cedar Centre followed up on the matter. After their arrest, one of the passengers was taken to a government hospital for treatment and the rest were quickly returned to Syria. The centre also followed up with the Army Intelligence in the North to arrest a young man who had nothing to do with the boat. He was released at 4:00 a.m. on the same day.

12 August 2023

On 12 August 2023, an irregular immigration operation was thwarted by Lebanese Army Intelligence. Around 130 Syrians and 4 Lebanese nationals were arrested who were about to board five small boats to join a large boat located near the territorial waters. Their plan was to travel to Italy. The large boat that was waiting for them planned to escape to territorial waters with more than 400 people on board.²¹ When the owner of the boat realised that many passengers had been delayed for unknown reasons, it left with only 70 people on board. The detainees were handed over to the army and then to smugglers in the Wadi Khaled area. Some of them returned to Lebanese territory upon payment of USD 600 per person and the smugglers were arrested.

22 August 2023

On 22 August 2023, a boat with dozens of people on board set off from Tripoli, heading towards Italy. The boat arrived in Italy on 29 August 2023, and 60 people who were supposed to board this boat were arrested by the intelligence and information services.

17 September 2023

On 17 September 2023, after careful monitoring and surveillance, one of the division's patrols managed to spot W. A.A. (born in 1996, Lebanese) driving a Toyota pickup truck with a large number of Syrians on board²². General Directorate of Internal Security reported the following: as a part of the ISF's follow-up to curb irregular migration operations by sea, the Information Division received information about this operation to smuggle Syrian nationals to Europe from

the Arida beach. As a result of the Division's investigative follow-up, the information was confirmed, and its specialised units were able to identify the members of the smuggling network, including the person in charge of transporting the Syrian migrants to the beach. Orders were given to intensify surveillance operations to arrest him and thwart the smuggling operation. The driver was monitored until he reached the al-Abdeh area, where a tight ambush was carried out, resulting in the arrest of him and 42 Syrian nationals, including 6 children. A search of the pickup truck seized 83 life jackets, 13 mazut gallons of 20 litres, 200 small cans of foodstuffs, and 8 gallons of 20 litres water. At the same time, the boat intended for smuggling people was seized at Minieh beach. Under interrogation, the Syrians confessed that they were going to migrate to Europe via Cyprus in exchange for between USD 5.000 and USD 7.000 per person. The boat and the pickup were forensically seized, and then deposited with the competent authority. The Syrian individuals were handed over to the relevant regional unit to take legal action against them, following the judiciary's advice.

9 November 2023

On 9 November 2023, in Qubbat Shamra – Akkar district, a force from this detachment was able to arrest M.K. (born in 1998, Lebanese), M.A.A. (born in 1976, Lebanese) and A.K. (born in 2000, Lebanese) for the offense of smuggling people across the sea²³. This was the result of a follow-up, monitoring, and surveillance operation. The General Directorate of Internal Security Forces – Public Relations Division issued the following statement: "Within the framework of the daily follow-

21 <https://waradana.com/article/37873-->
22 <https://isf.gov.lb/ar/article/9116099>.

23 <https://aliwaa.com.lb/>

up carried out by the Internal Security Forces to combat migration operations by death boats from Lebanon to European countries, via the shores of North Lebanon, through unsafe boats, which led to the death of many irregular immigrants due to their boat sinking. The Halba Judicial Detachment in the Judicial Police Unit had information about the preparation of an operation to smuggle Syrians to Europe by sea. The ISF also arrested 15 people of Syrian nationality and seized four vehicles used in smuggling operations, in addition to a large quantity of weapons and ammunition. The investigation is ongoing under the supervision of the competent judiciary.

30 November 2023

A group of people, preparing to travel irregularly, were arrested. A total of 38 people, including 5 minors and 2 Lebanese women, were transferred to General Security and a report was organised for them separately for entering irregularly.

1 December 2023

A boat sank off the shores of Tripoli. The number of passengers was 110 of Syrian and Lebanese nationality and all of them were rescued. The Syrians were deported to Syria and the Lebanese were released.

26 December 2023

A boat sinks off Tripoli harbour with 54 Syrians on board.

11 January 2024

On 11 January 2024, four or six boats left and four were able to reach their destination. There is no exact information about them, but two boats were turned

back: one with 19 passengers and the other carrying 80 passengers, all of them of Syrian nationality. All contact with them was lost before they reached their destination.

21 January 2024

On 21 January 2024, two boats left Lebanon. The first one carrying 120 people (93 men, 10 women, and 17 children) was found by the Cyprus Coast Guard.

The second boat with 50 to 60 people was missing. The CCLS followed up on the missing boat with the concerned parties in Cyprus, Turkey, and Greece in an attempt to get any information about its whereabouts. The CCLS was able to obtain some of the names of those who were on board, and after continuous efforts, they were found in the Cypriot region of Lyanappa, where the passengers were rescued. However, 3 children were sick, and we were later informed of the death of one girl.

11 February 2024

On 11 February 2024, contact was lost with a sailing boat that started from off the coast of Batroun and was found off the Akkarian town of Sheikh Zeid. After follow-up, the boat was found empty, and 16 passengers managed to move and continue travelling by sea illegally. They crossed the territorial waters by another boat and headed to Cyprus. The Cyprus Coast Guard brought them to the Lebanese territorial waters and the Lebanese authorities refused to receive them because they were Syrian and did not sail from its shores. The passengers remained in the water for about 48 hours. After pressure from organisations, especially Alarm phone, the passengers were brought to Cyprus.

20 February 2024

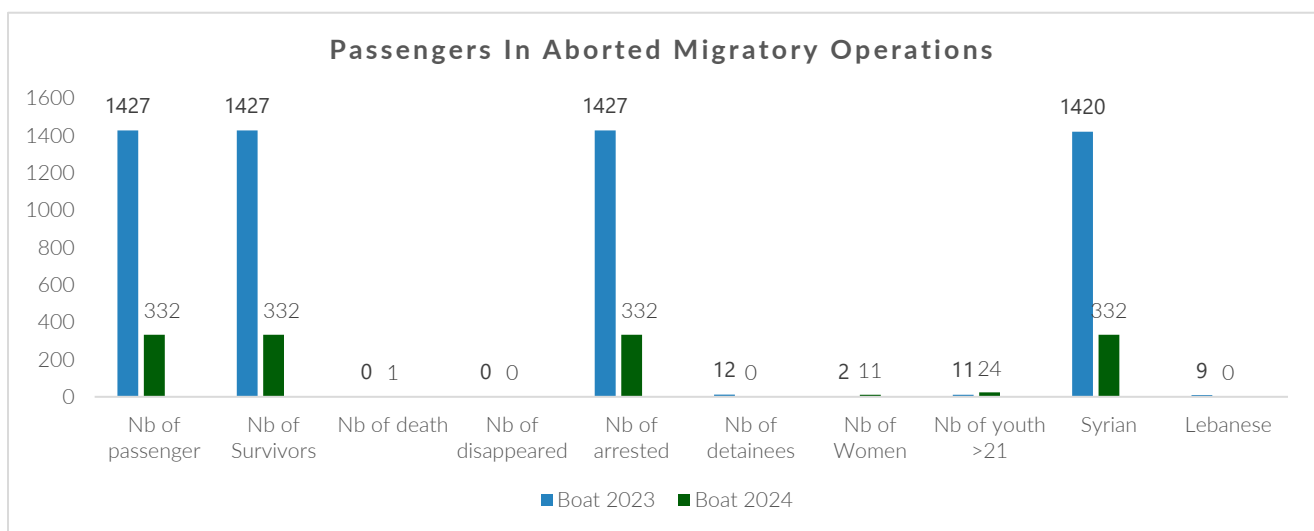
On this day, the Cyprus boat disappeared. CCLS contacted the Embassy of Cyprus to inquire about it, and was informed that they were not in either Greek Cyprus or Turkish Cyprus. The boat carried 33 passengers (including 4 children and a woman),

according to information received from the brother of one of the passengers. After follow-up with the concerned parties in Cyprus, they were found lost at sea and were rescued by Greek Cyprus in good health.

11 March 2024

According to information from the Army Command published on its social media account, 20 Syrians were

rescued from drowning while irregularly trying to smuggle them off Tripoli.



Pushback

Cyprus pushbacks boats with Syrian migrants looking for asylum back to Lebanon were unlawfully deported back to Syria if they were not officially registered with the UNHCR. Passengers pushed back from Cyprus were arbitrarily detained by Lebanese General Security,

where it is feared that they will be forced back to Syria. Two Syrian refugees who were pushed back to Lebanon²⁴ sued Cyprus in the European Court of Human Rights.

²⁴<https://www.newarab.com/analysis/two-syrian-refugees-fight-make-pushbacks-illegal-eu>.

Boat 1: 31 July 2023

On 31 July 2023, a boat departed from Syria and approximately 237 Syrians arrived in Beirut from Cyprus. The Cypriot authorities arrested them, brought them to Lebanon and handed them over to the Beirut port, after which they were handed over to General Security.

Boat 2: 25 September 2023

On 25 September 2023, two boats were rescued and pushed back to Lebanon. The first boat set off from Tartus, but broke down while sailing at about 25 nautical miles. Rescue teams in Cyprus were able to rescue about 95 people, all of whom were of Syrian nationality.

The second boat had set sail the night before from the Akkari Coast. It lost contact with them for a long time and had about 60 passengers on board. They were rescued by the Greek authorities.

Boat 3: 6 October 2023

On 6 October 2023, a boat sank off the shores of Tripoli, Lebanon. It was carrying about 125 Syrian nationals on board, and they were rescued by the Lebanese army and brought to the harbour.

Boat 4: 16 April 2024

On 16 April 2024, two Cypriot coast guard vessels and a navy ship intercepted five boats carrying around 500 migrants travelling from Lebanon to Cyprus. The boats were patrolling the maritime area to prevent the entry of irregular migrants following an agreement between

Nicosia and Beirut to help stem the flow of migrants into Lebanon.

The two Cypriot vessels, carrying 20 military personnel in one and 18 police officers in the other, as well as the five boats with the migrants, were stopped midway between Cyprus and Lebanon, about 50 nautical miles from Lebanon. Nicosia collaborated with Lebanese authorities to return the five boats to Lebanon but were fruitless. A message from the alarm phone: 'They have no food and water left. There is no fuel left and they cannot continue their journey.' These people were trapped in a cruel and dangerous game between Cyprus and Lebanon and remained at sea with no food or water and in urgent need of help²⁵. Later on, Cyprus sent two other boats with 12 police officers on board, carrying medicine, water, food, and blankets. Cedar Centre started following up on the situation of the arrested passengers to prevent them from being deported to Syria. Those who had a UNHCR asylum card stayed in the country and the rest were deported, but they returned to Lebanese territory.

Boat 5: 17 May 2024

A boat carrying 20 people of Syrian nationality travelled to Cyprus irregularly. The Cypriot authorities refused to receive them, and pushed them back to Lebanon, which in turn refused to allow them to enter Lebanese territory. The Lebanese army arrested them and immediately handed them over to the Syrian regime.

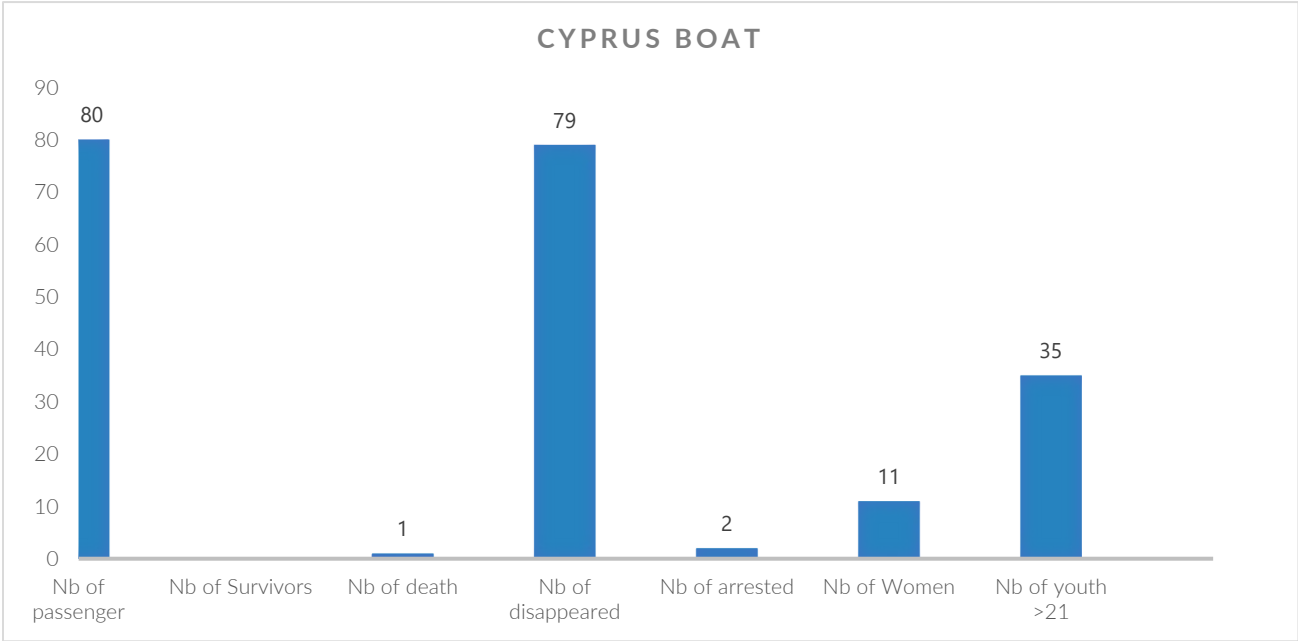
²⁵<https://cyprus-mail.com/2024/04/17/amnesty-alarmed-over-reports-police-threatening-migrants-with-guns/>

Missing Cypriot boat

A boat left Lebanon for Cyprus on 12 December 2023 has disappeared from the radar. CCLS intervened to trace them by mobilising its network. On board were 85 migrants, all Syrians except for 2 Lebanese, including 11 women, 69 men, and 35 minors.

At 12:55 a.m. on Tuesday 12 December 2023 Mazen, a 23-year-old Syrian from Soueida who had moved to Cyprus and was sleeping in his flat in Nicosia at the time, received a message from his uncle Wajid, saying that they had arrived at the coast of Tripoli-Lebanon and were about to board the boat who was preparing to join him from Lebanon. When Mazen woke up at 5 a.m., he immediately tried to contact Wajid. In vain.

Since then, his life has been a fruitless search for his uncle and the other passengers on the boat. A month after their disappearance, it was still unknown whether they were arrested on arrival or whether they perished in a shipwreck or met some other unfortunate fate. The alarm phone was the first to warn about the disappearance of these 85 migrants on 19 December. The family of the boat's captain, a Lebanese, claimed that he had told them he had arrived in Cyprus, before admitting that they had been found at Bassel hospital in Tartous. CCLS has managed to get the names of the 76 missing passengers and is in constant contact with their relatives. Since then, it has been caught up in a whirlwind of rumours that it is struggling to dismantle.



During that period, several bodies were found on various beaches, including Turkish Cyprus, Tartus, and Antalya, but only one body was identified as one of the passengers of the missing boat, while the remaining bodies were still unidentified, while their relatives in

Lebanon were avoiding DNA tests, as some Syrian families living in Lebanon fear forced refoulement to Syria if they were certain of the identities of the bodies belonging to their loved ones.

Boat overview by number

To summarise, the total number of persons involved in the irregular migration boats is 2353 divided as:

	Nb of people	Youth	Women	Men	Syrians	Lebanese
22 April 2022	85	19	20			
21 September 2022	150					
8 July 2023	584				581	3
13 July 2023	25				25	
16 July 2023	79					
10 August 2023	244	37	14	59	220	4
12 August 2023	600				596	4
22 August 2023	60					
17 September 2023	42	6			42	
10 November 2023	29	9		20	29	
30 November 2023	38	5	2			2
1 December 2023	110					
12 December 2023	80	35	11		78	2
26 December 2023	54				54	
11 January 2024	99				99	
21 January 2024	180	21	10	119	180	
20 February 2024	33	4	1			
11 March 2024	20			20		
22 September 2023	155					
31 July 2023	237				125	
6 October 2023	125					
16 April 2024	500					
17 May 2024	20				20	

Recommendations

A. To the Lebanese Authorities

1. **Respect the Principle of Non-Refoulement**

The Lebanese government must fully comply with its international obligation under the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to uphold the principle of non-refoulement, ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers are not forcibly returned to countries where they will face persecution, torture, or inhuman treatment.

2. **Conduct Independent Investigations into Allegations of Extradition**

Lebanese authorities should initiate independent, impartial, and thorough investigations into allegations of the forced return (extradition) of Syrian refugees, particularly following the sinking of the boat on 31 December 2022. This aligns with Lebanon's obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2165 (2014) to protect displaced persons and refugees.

3. **Ensure Equal Access to Education for All Children**

The Lebanese government must ensure that all children, regardless of their nationality or legal status, have the right to enrol in schools. This commitment is consistent with Lebanon's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

4. **Facilitate a Unified Political Vision on the Syrian Refugee Crisis**

The Lebanese government should promote discussions among political actors and key stakeholders to develop a unified and consistent national strategy to address the Syrian refugee situation, in line with Lebanon's obligations under UN Guiding Principles on Internal and External Displacement.

5. **Promote Good Governance for Syrians in Lebanon**

Lebanese authorities must work toward establishing governance strategies that ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of Syrians residing in Lebanon, as outlined by the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and UN Security Council Resolution 2165 (2014).

6. **Reform the MoU between the Lebanese Government and UNHCR**

A new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) should be established between the Lebanese government and UNHCR to address evolving challenges, provide protection, and manage refugee resettlement in accordance with international law.

B. To the International Community, UN Agencies and civil society organizations

1. Increase Safe and Legal Pathways for Migration

The international community, including UN agencies and relevant actors, must collaborate to expand safe and legal migration pathways to reduce the risks of irregular migration and protect vulnerable people on the move. This aligns with the principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN Guiding Principles on Internal and External Displacement.

2. Provide Rapid Resettlement Opportunities for Refugees

UN agencies, including UNHCR, must prioritize swift resettlement opportunities for vulnerable refugees, particularly survivors of human trafficking and victims of boats that sank. This is in line with the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

3. Ensure Medical and Psychological Support for Those Rescued

International organisations and UN agencies must ensure that those rescued from dangerous migration attempts receive immediate medical and psychological support. This falls under the humanitarian principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Guiding Principles on Internal and External Displacement.

4. Support Livelihoods and Improve Access to Services in At-Risk Communities

International actors should invest in programs that enhance access to essential services and support livelihoods in communities at risk of forced migration, as part of their commitment under the UN Guiding Principles on Internal and External Displacement.

5. Raise Awareness on the Dangers of Illegal Migration

International agencies and NGOs should launch awareness campaigns to educate citizens, residents, and refugees about the dangers of illegal migration journeys and the risks of human trafficking, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2165 (2014).

6. Create Safe and Legal Alternatives to Migration

International actors must prioritize the creation of safe, legal alternatives to dangerous migration routes, including facilitating regular migration pathways and humanitarian visas. This aligns with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees.

C. To Foreign Donors and International Educational Stakeholders

1. Ensure Access to Education for Syrian Refugee Children

Foreign donors who have contributed funds to Lebanon's educational sector should press the Lebanese government to allow access to educational institutions for all Syrian refugees. This supports the Convention on the Rights of the Child and reinforces Lebanon's commitment under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to provide education for all children.

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