

## **What practical recommendations would you propose in order to effectively address these ongoing challenges and protect migrants' human rights in origin, transit and host communities?**

### **Background**

Soutien Belge Overseas (SB Overseas) originated as a grassroots initiative among concerned citizens in Brussels, Belgium, who sought to address the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the Middle East. As these efforts gained momentum and impact, it became evident that while providing a secure environment for children was crucial in the short term, it wasn't enough to ensure a brighter future for a generation whose education had been disrupted by conflict. As a matter of fact, an entire generation of children risked being marginalized, lacking the skills and opportunities needed to take control of their lives. With this realization, SB Overseas established its inaugural school in Lebanon, a country hosting over 1.5 million Syrian refugees. Since then, our organization has expanded to operate three schools in Shatila, Aarsal, and Saida. Additionally, we have broadened our programs to offer vocational training for adults and empowerment courses aimed at addressing the alarming rise in child marriages as well as attaining community development. Our headquarters are based in Brussels, Belgium, where we oversee these initiatives alongside projects focused on integration and social inclusion, specifically targeting unaccompanied minors, isolated women, and mothers residing in asylum centers in Belgium.

### **Refugees experience in Lebanon**

In our Aarsal centre in Lebanon, we host an average monthly rate of 221 students with whom we carry out educational attainment and training as well as psychological support. Thanks to the work of our team on the ground and their direct contact with the beneficiaries of the projects, we were able to identify circumstantial and structural challenges that Syrian refugees in Lebanon have to face preventing them from enjoying full human rights.

As Lebanon has been without a functioning government for more than one year, the socio-economic situation has worsened after the Covid-19 crisis and the explosion at the port of Beyrouth in 2020. Even if in January 2024 the exchange rate of the Lebanese pound has stabilized at 89.000 Lebanese pounds for every US dollar after spikes in the inflation level, it is very difficult for both Lebanese people and Syrian refugees to live through winter as temperatures drop and unemployment and poverty spread. The impact of the economic crisis has also affected the healthcare system due to extremely high prices and a major shortage of medicines. Furthermore, the shortage of humanitarian aid provided by associations and the United Nations agency, resulting in the reduction of the percentage of families receiving food assistance and warmth, has led to a deteriorating situation and people's inability to secure their basic needs. Another source of uncertainty stems from the Israeli war rampage on Gaza that could easily escalate into a regional war dragging Lebanon and civilians into it.

Syrian refugees in Lebanon can access only three types of jobs (agricultural, construction and sanitation), which sensibly affects their possibility to start a career, work and provide for their families in the long-run. At the top of this structural impediment, there is the difficulty in getting the Lebanese residency for Syrians which increases in turn their chances of exploitation while restricting their access to most basic human rights. [Refugees = Partners](#) (R=P) has shown that only 20% of refugees have Lebanese residency with significant repercussions on their right to work (the

percentage of Syrians who obtained work permits is estimated at 0.5%), health care, education and other services, worsening their precariousness and living conditions. UN estimates show that 30% of the total number of Syrian children in Lebanon between 6-17 years have never attended school at all, since they can be registered at school and take exams only in pesos of an identification paper or legal residency. These obstacles in achieving the legal documentation highlight the strictness of the regulating legal framework in Lebanon that imposes restrictions on Syrian without taking into account the context they live in and the situation and needs of asylum seekers.

Other aspects of refugees' marginalisation include the fear of getting arrested by the Lebanese General Security, the difficulties in getting a house contract, acts of racism and extortion on the workplace. Humanitarians on the ground underline that Lebanese authorities can confiscate refugees' papers and consequently arrest them or impose fines when they go to renew their residency, thus pushing many refugees to stay in the shadow and refuse to denounce. Also getting the residency based on a house contract is extremely difficult for refugees because they can only rent registered houses, which are much more expensive and usually require six months or a year of deposit in advance. Sometimes even if you are able to rent a house, you can be eventually refused legal residency if municipality employees choose not to register a Syrian out of racism and discrimination ("we do not welcome Syrians in our area"). Last but not least, the work permit through a Lebanese sponsor puts refugees in conditions of being subjected to extortions and allows for further worsening of their situations. All these examples give the striking idea that even if a refugee is willing to obtain a legal residency meeting all the requirements, it does not mean that they will automatically achieve it.

### **Recommendations**

In today's global landscape, the plight of Syrian refugees remains a pressing humanitarian concern, particularly in countries like Lebanon, where the influx of displaced individuals has strained resources and infrastructure. To address these challenges and pave the way for sustainable solutions, concerted efforts are needed at both the European and UN levels.

- Advocate for the establishment of a robust **international monitoring mechanism**. This mechanism should closely oversee the conditions necessary for the safe, voluntary, dignified, and informed return of displaced Syrians to their homeland. Such monitoring is essential to ensure that the rights and well-being of refugees are protected throughout the repatriation process.
- Efforts should be made to increase the number of **resettlement places** available for Syrian refugees. By expanding resettlement opportunities, we can provide vulnerable individuals and families with a pathway to stability and security in countries willing to offer them refuge.
- It is imperative to provide additional support to initiatives like the **UN's Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (LHF)**. These funds play a crucial role in delivering essential aid and services to refugees and host communities, helping alleviate the strain on local resources.
- Allocating dedicated resources under budget lines such as **"building society"** and **peacebuilding** is also vital. These resources can be instrumental in supporting initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion, reconciliation, and sustainable development in Lebanon.
- It is essential to invest in the identification of innovative, digital methods that promote **downward accountability**. By empowering affected populations to voice their needs and

concerns, and actively involving them in high-level policy debates, we can ensure that humanitarian and development interventions are more responsive and effective.

- Clear monitoring and tracking mechanisms must be established to ensure the **transparent and accountable delivery of aid to Lebanon**. This will help prevent mismanagement and ensure that resources reach those who need them most.
- Explicitly requesting the **inclusion of a diverse set of local civil society organizations (CSOs) in UN-led Durable Solutions Working Groups** by leveraging the expertise and insights of local CSOs, so we can develop more contextually relevant and sustainable solutions for refugees and host communities.
- It is paramount to take proactive measures to **protect and promote an independent civic space for activists, human rights defenders, and local CSOs in Lebanon**. This includes providing both political and financial support to bolster their efforts in advocating for the rights and well-being of refugees and vulnerable populations.

In conclusion, by championing these initiatives and collaborating effectively at the international level, we can work towards sustainable solutions that uphold the dignity, rights, and security of Syrian refugees in origin, transit and host communities.