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9. Lebanese migration policy since 2011 and its role in the Syrian refugee movement

Kamel Doraï and Imad Amer

INTRODUCTION

Forced migration is not a new phenomenon in the Middle East but is a necessary factor in an analysis of the changes that have occurred in the socio-political context of the region. From population movements from the Caucasus and North African regions to the Levant since the beginning of the 20th century, and the large dispersion of Palestinian refugees following the creation of the State of Israel, to recent waves of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, migration plays an essential role in structuring the socio-economic, political and demographic landscape of the region. Thus, contemporary refugee movements can only be understood in connection with the dynamics of cross-border migration that have been formed over the years.

Middle Eastern migration has been radically transformed by the Syrian crisis of 2011. In the past, most Syrians who left their country of origin did so to find work, mainly by moving to Lebanon. However, following the crisis, Syrians have constituted one of the largest refugee populations since the Second World War. The principal consequence of this large influx of refugees has been the ending of the region's open-door policy, with neighbouring countries implementing restrictive migration policies. The mass arrival of forced migrants concentrated in certain areas (such as border cities and villages, and poor neighbourhoods in the main cities of the host countries) has had a significant local impact on host societies. This massive refugee movement follows others, such as the forced exile of Palestinians after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, that of the Lebanese following the outbreak of civil war in 1975 until the restoration of the government in 1990, and the fleeing of Iraqi refugees following the outbreak of war in the early 1980s (Chatty, 2010). Refugee movements are one of the major consequences of the political crises that have occurred in the Middle East in recent decades.

Despite not being a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention, Lebanon is host to one of the largest per capita refugee populations in the world. The region is also characterised by a long history of significant human migration resulting from regional economic disparities and transnational social ties. Today's forced migration movements appear to be linked to previous cross-border migration at a regional level. In the Middle East, where conflicts have generated large refugee groups, the existence of structured and ancient diasporas is a key element in understanding current refugee mobility. Based on research conducted in Lebanon in the framework of the Migration Governance and Asylum Crises (MAGYC) project which seeks to assess how the governance of migration has been influenced by recent refugee crises and how crises in general shape policy responses to migration, this chapter explores the impact that changes in Lebanon's migration policy have had on the migration process of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The conflict in Syria has resulted in one of the largest movements of refugees and internally displaced persons in recent history. Since 2011, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) more than 5 million Syrians have found refuge in countries bordering their country of departure. The scale of this exodus, and its long-term nature, has profoundly modified the regional and national balance and has led to a redefinition of the modes of governance of migration, of access to the labour market and of residence in Lebanon. Lebanon's migration policy has always been linked to the country's economic interests as well as to the special relationship that the state maintains with its Syrian neighbour. Since the end of the civil war, Lebanese migration policy has been shaped by the balance of power between the various political parties and their link with the Syrian authorities. External interventions, such as the role played by the UNHCR and the European Union, are also central to understanding the evolution of Lebanese asylum policy since 2011 (Fakhoury, 2020). In this chapter, after a reminder of the specific migratory relations that Lebanon maintains with Syria, we focus our analysis on the internal political dynamics that led to the implementation of a restrictive immigration policy. Following the 2015 refugee crisis, the European Union (EU) developed a new cooperation with Eastern Mediterranean states to turn the Syrian refugee crisis into a development opportunity. The EU signed two agreements (the Jordan and Lebanon compacts) in 2016. Both states became central actors, in cooperation with European states and international donors, in the implementation of containment policies based on tools to control Syrian refugees' mobility at both national and Euro-Mediterranean levels. The Lebanon compact is one step in the implementation of European Union migration policies, with other agreements such as that signed with Turkey post-2015.

MIGRATION POLICY OR ASYLUM POLICY?

Following multiple crises and wars, including the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and those of Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, which produced several million forced migrants, the countries of the Middle East now host the largest population of refugees in the world, as well as a large number of internally displaced persons. Given the fact that none of these Middle Eastern host countries, with the exception of Turkey, is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention – which defines the term ‘refugee’, outlines their rights as well as the legal obligations of States to offer them protection – migrants fall into a legal vagueness which has significant consequences on their movements and activities. The question of the migration policies of the host countries must therefore be analysed over time and placed in their regional and Euro-Mediterranean context.

The absence of specific refugee legislation in host countries in the region does not reflect an absence of migration policies implemented in response to the arrival and settlement of people fleeing conflicts; various measures to regulate entry and rights of residence have been adopted. The migration policies of states in the Middle East are often thought of as the product of constraints imposed by the European Union. Recent studies have highlighted the crucial role of EU policies in shaping national migrations and asylum in Middle Eastern countries (Bank and Fröhlich, 2021; Fakhoury, 2021; Seeberg, 2018). While this dimension is fundamental in understanding the ways in which migratory and refugee flows are managed, it is nevertheless necessary to analyse the internal political dynamics of each country, and in particular their responses to each of the successive crises. European Union policy tends to promote local integration of refugees in their host countries, whereas local state authorities promote temporary solutions to avoid refugees’ integration in the long term.

The non-resolution of the Palestinian question, which resulted in camps created in the early 1950s becoming a permanent fixture, strongly conditions the current treatment of new flows of refugees in the region. One result of this is that following the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003, the main host states in the region did not open refugee camps on their soil. While the establishment of camps permits the operational management of a humanitarian crisis and facilitates the control of the resulting refugee populations, their existence also poses various questions. By creating obstacles to mobility, camps can generate pockets of poverty that are partially disconnected from the socio-economic environment of the host country. In the long term, restricting the movement of refugees generates an increase in dependence on humanitarian aid organisations. It can also create a form of stigmatisation that leads to the segregation of refugee populations in their host society. As mentioned

above, the reluctance of the authorities of host states to open refugee camps is partly based on fear of repeating the long-term settlement of refugees on their soil as happened with Palestinian refugees. Conversely for Jordan, Syria and Lebanon (to varying degrees), the absence of camps combined with fairly unrestrictive forms of entry and stay following the Iraqi crises of 1990–1991, and then post-2003, have demonstrated increased refugee mobility and therefore greater possibilities for their re-emigration to third countries (Chatelard and Doraï, 2009).

As Lebanon, like the other Arab countries in the region, is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees, or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, with the exception of Palestinians who are recognised as refugees in the state where they have their permanent residence, the category of refugee does not exist as such (Zaiotti, 2006). While most states in the Middle East do not have a formal asylum system, there are asylum procedures developed by the UNHCR in place. As noted by Michael Kagan: ‘The systems that exist on the ground for refugees in the Middle East are essentially off the radar screen of conventional thinking in the field of international law because they rely on shifting responsibility from the state to the UN’ (Kagan, 2011: 9). Following the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq in 2003, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees found asylum in neighbouring countries, with a few thousand arriving in Lebanon. In response, the Lebanese authority wrote its first asylum policy in conjunction with the UNHCR. Given that it was not part of the 1951 Convention, the UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the government of Lebanon (Directorate of General Security) on 9 September 2003.¹ The memorandum of understanding stipulated that: ‘Lebanon does not consider itself to be a state of refuge’, and that the ‘only durable solution for refugees registered with UNHCR is their resettlement in a third country’. The MOU served to provide ‘temporary humanitarian solutions for people who are illegal residents in Lebanon and apply for refugee status at UNHCR’. This agreement between the UNHCR and the Directorate of General Security constituted the legal and operational infrastructure for the management in Lebanon of the later Syrian refugee crisis, and allowed the UNHCR to exercise a direct role with regard to displaced Syrians from 2011 up until 2014, when the Lebanese government implemented the UN refugee registration processes.

Pre-2011, a Migration Policy Rooted in Syrian–Lebanese Relations

The Lebanese authority’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis of 2011 is related to the lengthy history linking these countries. The Syrian occupation of Lebanon began in 1976 and ended in 2005, following the assassination of the former prime minister Rafiq Hariri (Meier, 2016). Since then, Lebanese

political factions have been divided on the nature of their relationship with the Syrian authorities. Several bilateral agreements have been signed that include regulations concerning access to residency and the labour market for Syrian migrants. The Taef Accord, signed in 1989, marked the cessation of armed conflict and cemented the role of the Syrian regime in Lebanon as a guardian authority, entrenching its absolute control on the inner workings of the Lebanese state institutions (Picard, 2016). On 22 May 1991, the governments of Lebanon and Syria signed the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Lebanese Republic,² establishing the Syrian Lebanese Higher Council³ to implement agreements reached. The signing of the treaty was accompanied by a series of other agreements between the states regarding security, military and defence arrangements. However strained the Syrian–Lebanese relationship has been over time, agreements based on the relatively free circulation of workers highlight the importance of the role played by Syrian labour forces in the post-war reconstruction of Lebanon (Chalcraft, 2008). Despite a lack of precise statistics, the magazine *Le Commerce du Levant* estimated that in 2003 there were a total of 400 000 Syrian workers in Lebanon in the construction and agricultural sectors. In 2005, before the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the Syrian military exit from Lebanon, Amnesty International estimated their total number to range between 400 000 and 600 000.⁴

In 2005, following the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, the March 14 bloc⁵ mobilised massive protests and demonstrations against the Syrian regime and the joint Lebanese–Syrian security apparatus. In parallel, the March 8 coalition mobilised support in favour of the regime, which in turn resulted in a vertical political division of Lebanon’s political scene. The demonstrations ended with the withdrawal of the Syrian regime from Lebanon on 26 April 2005. The military withdrawal was accompanied by a wave of revenge attacks perpetrated on Syrian workers and Syrian nationals by affiliates and supporters of political parties opposing the Syrian regime. The consequences of such events were felt on both sectarian and regional levels. The four pro-Syrian regime security officers were imprisoned in what, to a large extent, consisted of a process of dismantling the military regime.⁶ This major event ended the direct role of Syrian nationals in Lebanese political and social life, and began a new era marked by different dynamics between the Syrian and Lebanese people.

In June 2005, after the parliamentary elections, a new government led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora from the Future Movement was established. This government took the first step towards managing the presence of Syrian workers in Lebanon, establishing the Department of Syrian Workers’ Welfare within the Directorate for Employment in the Ministry of Labour.⁷ The role of the department included ‘reviewing and registration of application for work

permits for Syrians in accordance with the laws and effective rules and the specific accreted systems for the work of Syrians', in addition to 'the coordination with the joint work offices regarding the Syrian Lebanese borders and the exchange of information on all that pertains to the Syrian workers in Lebanon'. The department was established in parallel with the government of Syria's tightening of the conditions under which Syrian workers were allowed into Lebanon. For example, the government of Syria increased the border crossing fee from \$4 to \$18, and prohibited the transport of goods, food and cars with more than 20 litres of diesel from Syria. However, further steps in this direction were not taken by the governments of Syria and Lebanon because of the common interest both states have in the presence of the Syrian labour force in Lebanon. For instance, the movement of the Syrian labour force into Lebanon reduced the unemployment figures in Syria. This labour force also resulted in approximately \$1 billion being spent annually in Syria's consumer markets (Chalcraft, 2006). In Lebanon, farmers, industrialists, real estate brokers, as well as the owners of cafes and hotels, rely heavily on the relatively cheap Syrian labour force, especially considering that they can be dismissed at no cost, given that the Lebanese Labour Code does not grant foreign workers social security benefits.

Post-2011: From an Open-Door Policy to Restrictions

Concerning the Syrian refugee crisis, Lebanese migration policy is not an exception in the region. The policies of neighbouring states towards refugees from Syria have changed over time. Initially marked by the opening of their borders, these policies evolved towards an increasingly pronounced closure, with the introduction of visa requirements for Syrian nationals in all bordering countries. The year 2014 proved to be a turning point in Lebanon, with the suspension of the bilateral employment agreement governing the Syrian labour force that had been in place since 1994 (Longuenesse, 2015). At the same time, labour migration and refugee mobility intensified, with more than 300 000 refugees being registered by the UNHCR in 2014. While the conflict in Syria has resulted in the forced migration of several hundred thousand refugees, economic migration has not disappeared between the two countries. Most migrant workers stayed in Lebanon, some of whom could not return home and became *de facto* refugees and registered with UNHCR. The blurring of categories, and the coexistence within the same population of different legal statuses is one of the features marking migration in the region.

The open-door policy: 2011–2014

Conflict in Syria began in 2011, following massive peaceful demonstration against the regime which quickly escalated to widespread armed conflict

between Syrian government forces and armed opposition groups. The spread and intensification of the armed conflict and widespread violence led thousands of Syrians to flee to Lebanon. The government of Lebanon took no measures to respond to the influx of refugees to its territories until 2014, when political disagreement in Lebanon increased between those groups affiliated to the Assad regime and others opposing it. This political division has had a significant impact on the management of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. A considerable number of these refugees originated from opposition-controlled areas in Syria, resulting in concerns resurfacing about the potential alteration of a fragile demographic balance with political ramifications, and the return of historical divisions based on sects. In light of the lack of any legal solutions for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the Lebanese Security Forces took control of the situation and implemented a security-driven approach to deal with refugees. This resulted in the Lebanese Security Forces (LSF) and Lebanese Army Forces (LAF) detaining Syrians at checkpoints and conducting raids on their houses.⁸

As the conflict in Syria intensified, it spilled over into Lebanon. In response to the kidnapping of a Lebanese individual in Syria in 2012, a series of kidnappings of Syrians and other foreign nationals were carried out, hinting at a potential spillover of conflict and tension into Lebanon's internal political scene.⁹ The LSF also intervened in the deportation of Syrians back to Syria under the pretext of a judicial decision, while denying that there was any political basis for the deportations.¹⁰ The deportation of Syrian refugees by the LSF triggered a series of local and international condemnations. The European Union representative condemned the decision to deport the refugees at a press conference¹¹ held on 4 August 2012. Human Rights Watch and Ruwad Frontiers Association¹² also condemned the actions of the LSF. Human Rights Watch published an open letter stating the following:

I am sending you this message to inform you that we have received on the first of August a credible source report on LSF's deportation of four Syrian nationals forcibly back to Syria after they have expressed their concern of oppression in their country. Any forced return for individuals susceptible to oppression or any other form of mistreatment is a revocation of Lebanon's commitment against forced return as per the international law.¹³

Palestinian refugees from Syria, the first group experiencing restrictions in Lebanon

Although the current conflict has generated new refugees, it has also forced tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees already in Syria to seek asylum in a third country. Before becoming one of the countries producing the highest number of refugees, Syria was the primary host country for several hundred thousand Iraqi refugees fleeing the chaos and violence that followed the fall

of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, not to mention the presence on its soil of nearly 500 000 Palestinian refugees.¹⁴ The current conflict has had dramatic consequences for the Palestinian population in Syria. Before 2011, Palestinians enjoyed access to education and the labour market in Syria without experiencing significant discrimination (Shiblak, 1996); while the outbreak of the Syrian conflict returned Palestinians to being stateless. This can be viewed as replicating a scenario that occurred with Palestinians in Iraq during the aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 (Doraï and Al Husseinî, 2013). Due to their specific status, Palestinian refugees are not covered by the UNHCR mandate (Feldman, 2012). Even if some of them are in receipt of assistance from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Lebanon, they lack legal protection, transforming them de facto into illegal migrants subject to potential deportation to Syria. Palestinian refugees tend to be transformed into asylum seekers by conflicts, and as they are stateless, they cannot even seek the protection of their country of origin.

The policy governing entry and residency for Palestinian refugees from Syria has evolved over time. Prior to 2013, Lebanon had adopted a flexible policy and hosted more than 75 per cent of the total number of Palestinian refugees from Syria. As of August 2013, while transiting through Lebanon remained permitted, Palestinians from Syria were required to prove that they had family ties there, or that they were coming for a medical appointment, or to an embassy. A few exceptions to these rules, at the discretion of the General Security Directorate, could be observed. Since 3 May 2014, faced with an ever-increasing influx of refugees from Syria, the Lebanese General Security Directorate has considerably tightened the conditions of entry for Palestinian refugees from Syria, resulting in the majority being denied entry to Lebanon. At the same time, the Lebanese authorities have implemented restrictions to the renewal of residence visas for Palestinians from Syria already present on its soil. Many reside illegally in Lebanon, which results in limitations to their mobility, access to services and assistance, and administrative procedures such as birth registration. Along with difficulties related to their residency status, Palestinians from Syria face significant economic hardship. Lacking access to the labour market, families live mainly on economic assistance provided to them by UNRWA, as well as food assistance distributed to them. According to a study conducted by UNRWA and the American University of Beirut, 90 per cent of them live below the poverty line, being unable to cover their basic needs (Chaaban et al., 2016). The absence of a legal framework for Palestinian refugees who are forced to leave their country of residence, as well as the political treatment of Palestinian refugees by states in the region, raises the problem of secondary migration during conflict.

From 2014 to the present day: the implementation of a restrictive migration policy

On 15 March 2014, a new government led by Tammam Salam was formed in Lebanon after a political coalition between various political factions was enforced. Seats within the government were distributed among three blocs: 'March 8', 'March 14', and a bloc consisting of the President and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. After the formation of the government, the LSF prohibited the entry of Palestinian refugees (Doraï, 2015), issuing a circular for all airline companies to refrain from transporting any Palestinian refugees from Syria to Lebanon. The circular was accompanied by the deportation of 30 Palestinian refugees on 4 May 2014.

On 23 June 2014, for the first time since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, the government of Lebanon established a ministerial committee to tackle all matters related to Syrian refugees. The committee was headed by the Prime Minister and included the Minister for External Affairs, the Minister for Internal Affairs and Municipalities, and the Minister of Social Affairs. The importance of the Syrian refugee crisis and the need to reach consensus is reflected in the membership of the committee, with representatives from the three blocks of the 'National Consensus government'. The committee was commissioned to take the necessary steps to respond to the influx of Syrian refugees in coordination with the relevant administrations. The membership of this committee and its process of formation is indicative of the importance of the Syrian refugee crisis, hence the government's need for the consensus of all political blocs. The government of Lebanon issued *The Syrian Displacement to Lebanon Policy Paper*, an unprecedented step of its kind since the start of the war in Syria. The policy paper represented an official guide for managing the refugee flow into the country, cancelling the open-door policy, and putting an end to the relaxed procedures in welcoming Syrians. Instead, the aim of the policy was to decrease the number of Syrian refugees in the country through halting their registration with the UNHCR and encouraging their return to Syria. The policy paper did not explicitly state the government's aim to completely close the borders, or stipulate any outright forcible steps to that end. Rather, it allowed the entry of refugees, albeit on an exceptional basis and for urgent humanitarian situations. The policy paper was issued against the backdrop of Lebanon's participation in the Geneva Conference on the plight of Syrian refugees, convened less than two months prior to its announcement. International support agreed upon at the Conference entails not only monetary support (of which Lebanon has so far only received 44 per cent), but also, in accordance with the principles of international solidarity and sharing of responsibility, the facilitation of the entry of Syrian refugees to other countries and their residence in these countries.

The government of Lebanon sought to pressure other countries to take in Syrian refugees and to increase the international community funds allocated for host communities. Indeed, in December 2014 the United Nations called for funds of up to \$55 million to support the lives of millions of Syrian refugees and as well as to provide support for host communities. According to an article published in the *Legal Agenda*¹⁵ on 9 December 2014, by stating its intent to ‘decrease the number of Syrians registered with the UNHCR’, the government has indirectly admitted the right of Syrians to refugee status, albeit conditionally and temporarily, despite having previously denied such rights. For only with the status of refugee and its associated rights can a distinction be made between those eligible and those not, those in need of protection and those not, according to internationally recognised criteria (Saghieh and Frangieh, 2014). From August 2014, the LSF action took that distinction into consideration as it started to document people according to the categories ‘displaced’ and ‘not displaced’. Notably, the Syrian displacement policy paper indicates that if an individual breaks Lebanese law or fails to meet the conditions of entry into the country, the award of the category of ‘displaced’ would be revoked. Such regulations are vague and potentially dangerous, given that a considerable number of Syrian refugees have lost their identification cards and their residency permits. In the formulation and implementation of this policy paper the government of Lebanon has adopted an approach of ‘soft power’ to reduce the numbers of refugees in a policy that, at least ostensibly, accepts the existence of the right to asylum.

A similar mechanism was adopted in measures aimed at decreasing the numbers of ‘displaced people’ in Lebanon, in a policy which opened with a statement ‘encouraging the Syrian displaced to return to their country or to other countries through all available means’. The use of the term ‘encouraging’ is very telling in this context and can only be understood as the government’s intention to adopt non-coercive measures, or at least appear to, in its implementation of the policy. By the use of the term, it is clear that the government lacks the capacity to implement such measures, having few tools at its disposal to force the return of refugees, and is therefore primarily dependent on the willingness of refugees to return, preferring this to deportation or coercive measures.

In the same way, coupling this ‘encouragement’ with emphasis placed on ‘strictness in the implementation of the Lebanese law’ and the threat of ‘removal of the “displaced” category’ makes it fairly evident that the government’s intention is to mobilise all available ‘soft’ means to pressure Syrian refugees to leave Lebanon. One of the primary means employed by the government since the onset of its mandate has been refraining from renewing residency permits.

The policy paper on Syrian refugees was followed by several procedures (decision number 197/1, December 2014) implemented by the Ministry of Labour that sought to specify employment open exclusively for Lebanese nationals, indirectly reducing the categories of employment opportunities available to foreigners, including Syrians.

SYRIAN REFUGEES AT THE MARGINS OF LEBANESE SOCIETY

Along with the tightening of entry requirements and limitations to access to the labour market, Lebanese authorities have developed restrictive policies affecting Syrians in informal settlements leading to their marginalisation (Kikano et al., 2021). These policies relate to a decision, made at the very start of the refugee crisis, not to open camps for Syrian refugees, based in part on the fear of permanent settlement stemming from both the state and the refugees themselves. In Lebanon, this refusal to officially open camps for Syrians on its territory derives from the fear of repeating the complex relationship and history of conflict that resulted from the presence of Palestinian refugee camps. By contrast, the Iraqi crises of 1990–1991 and post-2003 demonstrated for Jordan, Syria and Lebanon that the absence of camps, combined with a relative freedom of entry and residence at the beginning of the crises (this has to be nuanced according to the countries and periods concerned), a fairly easy access to public services and employment in the informal labour market, have increased the possibility of mobility of refugees and therefore their re-emigration to third countries (Chatelard and Doraï, 2009). However, the decision not to open refugee camps involves both state policies and logics developed by the refugees themselves. Lebanon, where the Palestinian presence – and therefore the camps – is marked by a history of conflict and a complex relationship with the Palestinian refugees, has so far refused to officially open camps for Syrians on its territory. The fear of creating ‘Syrian’ spaces in Lebanon, which might lead to the development of political and/or armed movements, remains strong for Lebanese political leaders. Political parties are also deeply divided on the Syrian conflict, with some groups supporting Assad’s regime and others supporting opposition groups.

In January 2017, the Lebanese government and the United Nations approved the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2020. In contrast to the *The Syrian Displacement to Lebanon Policy Paper* in 2014, which aimed to stop the Syrian exodus and encourage return by all available means, the new plan dealt with the various humanitarian and development aspects of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. The plan outlined issues related to refugee status, the difficulty in obtaining legal residency, and the impact of this on the lives of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, in addition to reviewing and amending the applicable

policies in order to remedy this situation. Also included were various infrastructure development plans for the refugees and the host communities, including water, energy, sanitation, education, food security, health and housing. It was estimated that these sectors required an investment of \$2.8 billion, to be sourced through grants and soft loans from the World Bank along with funding from the Lebanese government, non-governmental organisations, and other donors. In recognition of the prolonged duration of the Syrian refugee crisis and its repercussions on the host communities, the 2017–2020 plan focused on both short- and long-term development, with projects counting on the involvement of the following ministries: the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Energy and Water, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and the Ministry of Economy and Trade. It coincided with the beginning of the financial crisis in Lebanon, where warnings of the unstable financial situation in Lebanon explained the importance of the financing plan for the Lebanese government and its official bodies, as concerns regarding liquidity resulted in the Banque du Liban instituting various financial engineering operations in 2016 to attract capital from abroad at very high interest rates.

In response to the plan, the Lebanese General Security Directorate issued new instructions to grant residency, exempt from fees and delays, to a category of Syrian refugees. This included all Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees before 2015, regardless of their legal status (illegal entry, overstaying, or obtaining residency based on registration with the UNHCR after 2015); it excluded refugees who had obtained residency after 2015 not based on registration with the UNHCR (such as a pledge of responsibility, a lease contract, or other categories).

In parallel with the development of the Crisis Response Plan, the Lebanese President Michel Aoun pressed for the ‘safe’ return of displaced refugees, expressing this concern in several statements and during a meeting with the President of the UNHCR on 3 February 2017, where the President said that Syrian refugees cannot stay in Lebanon. An appeal was also made to the international community to facilitate the return of the displaced by establishing safe areas inside Syria.

In March 2017, the Lebanese General Security Directorate issued new instructions to grant free residency to a category of Syrian refugees and exempt them from delay and residency fees as a translation of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2020. The decision included all Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees before 2015, regardless of their legal status (illegal entry, overstaying, or obtaining residency based on registration with the UNHCR after 2015). It excluded from this decision the refugees who obtained after the year 2015 a residency that is not based on registration with the UNHCR (such as a pledge of responsibility,

a lease contract or other categories). However, during the same period in March 2017, the Lebanese army evacuated more than 80 camps in the Bekaa Valley near the Rayak al-Askari airport by a military decision, the reasons for which are unknown, as is the party that issued the instructions. A suicide bombing led to a massive raid carried out by the Lebanese army on camps in Aarsal on 30 June 2017, resulting in extensive arrests.

In 2018, the Lebanese government took several steps that had a direct impact on Syrian refugees, including the issuing by the Ministry of Labour of Resolution No. 29/1 on 18 February 2018, restricting some professions to the Lebanese, and the launch by the General Security Directorate on 20 April 2018 of a campaign to close all shops and institutions managed or operated by Syrians. This campaign was repeated at the end of 2018. In addition to these measures, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that the UNHCR not issue any statements related to Syrian refugees, and withdrew residency from UNHCR workers in an attempt to pressure the organisation, accusing it of working against facilitating the return of refugees. On 6 June 2018, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil issued the UNHCR an ultimatum, giving it two weeks to draw up a plan for the return of Syrian refugees. The President of the Lebanese Republic added to the conflict by issuing statements criticising the UNHCR and demanding the assistance of Arab countries to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees. An international 'Friends of Syria' conference was held in Brussels, during which donor countries pledged to provide \$4.4 billion to neighbouring countries hosting refugees.

Policies exerting pressure on Syrian refugees continued in 2019, as the Ministry of Labour tightened working conditions for Syrian workers and enforced stricter procedures, paperwork and higher fees. The Supreme Defence Council, headed by the President of the Republic, also intervened in the refugee situation, calling for a halt to unauthorised labour. On 1 July 2019, the army demolished 20 shelters for Syrian refugees under the pretext that they were violating the construction laws, following the prohibition of the building of any concrete facilities by Syrian refugees and only permitting the use of removable materials.

CONCLUSION

In 2020, Lebanon entered a stifling political and economic crisis that led to a rapid and dramatic collapse of the local currency. The country also suffered from the outbreak of coronavirus which exacerbated the impact on those businesses that had remained economically viable. The economic crisis has had a huge toll on Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Due to the restrictive policies pursued over the past decade, and given their fragile economic and legal situation, refugees have been subjected to enormous pressure with regard to their

livelihoods, residence and health. Alongside this difficult economic situation, the General Security Directorate implemented measures to prevent the entry of some categories of refugees to Lebanon, and on 28 July 2020 circulated a decision to facilitate the exit of Syrians residing in Lebanon legally or illegally; and the Ministry of Labour launched a campaign to regularise the conditions of foreign workers, requiring payment of fees due.

Through the years, the Syrian and Lebanese people have to varying degrees shared existential threats, as their access to the basic requirements of daily life has dwindled in the light of the worsening economic crisis. In a statement to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on 8 January 2021:

Nine out of every ten Syrian refugee families in Lebanon are currently living in extreme poverty. This percentage reached 89% in 2020, up from 55% only one year previously. Families are currently on less than 308,728 Lebanese pounds per person per month, which is less than half the minimum wage in Lebanon.

Fears have become centred on the food insecurity of refugees, and these fears are supported by the nearly threefold increase in food prices in Lebanon in the transition from 2019 to 2022. At the same time, opportunities to find work have diminished due to the severe economic collapse in the country. This reality leads families to depend on financial coping mechanisms that are detrimental, including child marriage, abandoning schooling, and reduced spending on education and health. It is also expected that the rates of child labour will rise significantly due to poor access to educational services and financial difficulties.

The high concentration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon can be partly explained by the historical and previous migratory links existing between Syria and Lebanon. Regional mobility pre-existed the independence of states in the region. When national borders were created at the beginning of the 20th century, this circular migration transformed into transnational networks. Since the end of the civil war in Lebanon, bilateral agreements have been signed to facilitate the circulation and employment (with restrictions) of people. In 2011, labour migration turned into asylum seeking, relying on pre-existing cross-border networks. The settlement of Syrian refugees is also the result of an open-door policy during the first two years of the conflict. Changes in the Lebanese asylum policy are related both to internal political issues and to international pressures. The Lebanese political scene is divided, with some political actors opposing the Syrian regime, others supporting it. Lebanese authorities have oscillated between support to Syrian refugees and imposing constraints, with some observers calling it ‘a policy of no-policy’. In this chapter we have tried to analyse the genealogy of Lebanese asylum policy through the evolution of the migration pattern, from labour migration to refugees’ settlement.

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NOTES

1. Lebanese President, Decree n:11262, 30/10/2003.
2. Treaty signed on 22 May 1991. The Treaty resulted in a leap in the relationship between the two states. Within the framework of this Treaty, many objectives were determined. To accomplish these objectives, several joint organisms were established on the authority of this Treaty to watch over the implementation of its provisions and any others that might be issued.
3. The Higher Council shall set up the general policy of coordination and cooperation between the two states in all fields (political, economic, social and many other fields), and shall supervise its implementation and adopt the plans and decisions taken by 'the Follow-Up and Coordination Commission', 'the Foreign Affairs Committee', 'the Committee for Economic and Social Affairs', 'the Committee for Defense and Security Affairs', or any committee established subsequently.
4. Amnesty International (2005).
5. Since 2005 the Lebanese political scene has been divided into two main blocs, the 'March 8' gathering politically affiliated to the Syrian regime, and the 'March 14' for the political parties opposed to the Syrian regime.
6. United Nations Security Council (2005).
7. *Lebanese Official Gazette* (2005), Decree n: 15488, 17/10/2005.
8. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2011).
9. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2012a).
10. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2014).
11. EU Representative (2012).
12. Ruwad Frontiers Association was founded by a group of Lebanese human rights activists active on refugee issues through the Ad-Hoc Committee in Support of Refugees and Asylum-seekers (ACSRA) (1999–2002) and for one year with a civil company called Frontiers Center (FC) (2003). Building on this history, FC's mandate is to defend and advocate on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons. FC is developing a professional quality legal counselling and advocacy programme. Its staff and partners are trained and advised by experts with experience in international human rights and refugee law and legal aid development and includes counsellors with backgrounds in law and social sciences.
13. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2012b).

14. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (2022).
15. An English version has been published by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

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