

اللاجئون شركاء

REFUGEES = PARTNERS
في الإنسانية، في المسؤولية

PROMOTING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR
THE WELL BEING OF REFUGEES, MIGRANTS AND
HOST COMMUNITIES IN LEBANON

[R=P Workshop Series](#)

**“TOWARDS A NEW POLICY TO PROMOTE
SYRIAN REFUGEES ACCESS TO LEGAL STATUS IN
LEBANON”**

CONCEPT NOTE

[Refugees = Partners \(R=P\)](#) is organizing a series of three workshops titled “Towards A New Policy to Promote Syrian Refugees Access to Legal Status in Lebanon.” The workshops aim to address the legal and structural challenges that permit and/or hinder refugees' access to legal status in Lebanon through the assessment of the impact of recent developments on vulnerable communities, mainly Syrian refugees, and some key innovative approaches to assist in creating an inclusive socio-economic framework.

The first of these workshops was held on the 29th of June 2021 on “The Impact of Limited Legal Status on Syrian Refugees Access to Livelihood in Lebanon,” from 4pm to 6pm at the Antwork, Beirut, Lebanon ([link to the final statement here](#)).

The second workshop will be held online (via Zoom app) on the 21st of September 2021 on the “Challenges and Opportunities: Syrian Refugees Access to the Labor Market,” from 4pm to 6pm.

I. BACKGROUND

Following their arrival in 2011, Syrian refugee households have encountered considerable challenges and obstacles in their pursuit of dignified living and decent work conditions and opportunities in Lebanon. One of the major obstacles has been the Government of Lebanon's (GoL) "policy of no policy" and hostile policy of non-integration and non-resettlement that has repeatedly denied refugees rights as protected persons and treated them as "security threats,"¹ provoking their legal and socio-economic status.

The portrayal of Syrian refugees as security threats has prompted the implementation of unlawful and discriminatory policies and regulations at the national and local municipal level, which violate both national and international law. More recently, various governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Labor (MoL) and General Security Office (GSO), have implemented draconian measures and imposed austere restrictions on refugees' access to legal status as well as their access to the labor market as a means to "combat illegal foreign labor."² At present, the discourse surrounding Syrian refugees has predominantly revolved around their immediate return.

The absence of a policy framework to govern relations with Syrian refugees has resulted in increasing insecurity which has consequently reduced the likelihood of Syrian refugees' active participation in the development of the Lebanese economy. Furthermore, the lack of legal residency remains a key protection issue affecting Syrian refugee access to services and livelihood, hindering their movement, and exposing them to exploitation and possible arrest and prosecution. The rate of legal residency among the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon has continued to decline in 2020, such that only 20% of individuals (above 15 years old) reported having legal residency, compared to 22% in 2019 and 27% in 2018 (VASyR 2020).³

The institutional and societal discrimination that refugees and migrants face in Lebanon, besides their deteriorating living conditions, has been aggravated by several developments over the past few years. The economic crisis, the severe financial inflation, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut port explosion, pushed vulnerable communities further into precarity, with the exacerbation of poverty and destitution experienced by thousands of families. According to VASyR 2020, 9 out of 10 Syrian refugee families in Lebanon are currently living under extreme poverty.

¹ Janmyr, M. (2016), *ibid* 15; Mourad, L. (2017), *ibid* 4; Carnegie Middle East Center (2018), *ibid* 2; Janmyr, M. and Mourad, L. (January 8 2018), "Modes of Ordering: Labeling, Classification and Categorization in Lebanon's Refugee Response," retrieved from: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jrs/fex042/4792968>; and Taslakian, P. (June 12 2016), "Curfews and human rights within the Syrian context in Lebanon", retrieved from [lb.undp.org: http://www.lb.undp.org/content/dam/lebanon/docs/Governance/Publications/PEACE%20BUILDING%2012th%20web%20p11.pdf](http://www.lb.undp.org/content/dam/lebanon/docs/Governance/Publications/PEACE%20BUILDING%2012th%20web%20p11.pdf)

² Ministry of Labor (June 1 2019). "Launch of the Plan to Combat Illegal Foreign Labor". Available at: <https://www.labor.gov.lb/Temp/Files/4d8a7b3e-2771-40ab-90fe-8a7ed6d70215.pdf>.

³ UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP (2020). Vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon 2020. Retrieved from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85002>

On the other hand, due to the economic crisis, Lebanon has been witnessing an increase in economic migration as its citizens (both skilled and unskilled laborers) are fleeing the country in search for job opportunities and a decent living. The net migration rate for Lebanon by 2021 increased by 32.06% from 2020.⁴

In order to mitigate the impact of Lebanon's discriminatory policies and practices on Syrian refugees' access to livelihood, there is a need to create and push for an inclusive socio-economic framework that engages all residents, including refugees, in countering development disparities while addressing the current crisis challenges and opportunities.

II. WORKSHOP DETAILS

Refugees = Partners project is a research-based initiative implemented in coordination between the Lebanese Economic Associations (LEA) and the Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCP), to promote an inclusive socio-economic environment by creating a counter-narrative on rights and protection of the Syrian refugees through advocacy, social activism, and calls for policy change. The project intends to accomplish this through evidence-based knowledge and a wide-reaching media campaign that highlights the shared humanity between the Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees, with a focus on the socio-economic impacts and contributions of Syrian refugees to the development of local communities.

The initiative, which is a joint effort by Lebanese and Syrian civil society organizations, intends to create a platform for constructive dialogue, identify challenges, opportunities, and share responsibilities, counter the polarizing and hostile narratives surrounding refugees, and enhance the emergence of inclusive policies that benefit both Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees.

Refugees = Partners invites you to take part in the discussions on the current conditions and challenges experienced by refugees to access dignified living in Lebanon, and to suggest practical and sustainable alternatives, mainly on the subject of refugees' access to legal status. The workshop offers an opportunity to engage in substantive discussions on serious issues facing Syrian refugees, thus, assist in guiding tangible recommendations and more effective strategies to push for policy change.

III. WORKSHOP MAIN THEMES

- Situation Ante: Structural challenges of refugees' access to legal status in Lebanon.
- Access to legal status as an opportunity for the active participation of refugees and migrants in the enhancement of the Lebanese economy.
- The refugee crisis as an opportunity to transform and reform.

⁴ MacroTrends, Lebanon Net Migration Rate 1950-2021. Available at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/LBN/lebanon/net-migration>

- Building a future: Lebanese and Syrians as active socio-economic partners today and in the future.

IV. WORKSHOP MAIN OBJECTIVES

- The socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants contributes to the promotion of equality, justice, and the culture of production, while also reducing opportunities for economies of violence and social tensions.

V. WORKSHOP ASSUMPTIONS

- The negative impacts of the refugee crisis could be mitigated through alternative policies or more efficient institutions.
- Alternative policies need to adopt a human-centered approach that respects human rights and invests in knowledge production and dissemination, objectively addressing the current crisis 'challenges and opportunities.
- The socio-economic inclusion of refugees contributes to the sustainability and stability necessary for economic prosperity.
- Evidence-based knowledge and research can support more efficient policies.

VI. WORKSHOP FORMAT

Refugees = Partners is organizing a series of three workshops held every two months. The first workshop was held on June 29, 2021, from 4pm to 6pm at the Antwork. The second workshop will be held online (Zoom link to be shared accordingly) on September 21, 2021. The third workshop will be scheduled accordingly. Below is the comprehensive tentative agenda for your reference:

Workshop I: "The Impact of Limited Legal Status on Syrian Refugees Access to Livelihood in Lebanon."

Suggested Questions/Topics:

1. In what ways does the lack of legal status impact Syrian refugees 'access to livelihood (i.e., work, income, health, food, education, rent, shelter, etc.)?
2. How is the economic crisis impacting the livelihood of vulnerable communities including Lebanese, migrants, and refugees? What are the recent estimates on Lebanese and migrant workers migration?
3. To what extent have regulations towards refugees in Lebanon been discriminatory and exclusionary? Who benefits and loses from these discriminatory regulations? And, have these policies exacerbated or alleviated the marginalization of both Lebanese and refugee communities?

4. What is the political economy of the refugee crisis? Who has designed the policies and what is the role of the international community? Who has benefited and/or has been adversely affected by the economic policies? Do refugees have an impact on the economic policies and interventions?

Workshop II: “Challenges and Opportunities: Syrian Refugees Access to the Labor Market”

Suggested Questions/Topics:

Labor market:

1. Did, and in what way, has the refugee influx affected and changed the structure of the labor market in Lebanon? What are the sectors that have absorbed most refugees? What are the trends of Syrian labor prior and post 2015?
2. In what ways the current economic crisis in Lebanon has impacted the labor market participation among citizens and foreign workers, including refugees? What are the sectors that were most affected? Did new labor sectors appear or flourish due to the crisis?
3. What opportunities does the economic crisis offer for workers and productive sectors in Lebanon? What policy-decisions are required to initiate local and national livelihood opportunities that take into account the structural challenges?
4. What are the main objectives of the livelihood sector of the LCRP? Did it manage at any time since 2012 to contribute to refugees’ access and conditions of work?

Economic Indicators:

1. What are the gaps in terms of the data and indicators on the Lebanese economy? Do we have well-established evidence on the performance of the economy, particularly, in the past couple years? (i.e., growth, employment, consumption, and investment)
2. Are there reliable data on the unemployment rates and the labor force participation rate in Lebanon in the aftermath of the Syrian conflict, and more particularly, from 2011 to 2015, from 2015 to 2019, and more recently, from 2019 to 2021?
3. Considering the structural economic challenges in Lebanon, what economic and labor policies can help boost the economy? What role can Syrian refugees play in reducing the deficiencies of the Lebanese economy?

Workshop III: “Promoting Syrian Refugees Access to Legal Status in Lebanon”

Suggested Questions/Topics:

1. What are the viable strategies and policies that can help expand job opportunities for all and improve work conditions, including fair wages and social protection?
2. How can the economic relations between Syrians and Lebanese improve the social capital between the two communities? And how can these relations assist in building an effective cooperation during the reconstruction phase in the future?

3. How can the guarantee of basic human rights, such as, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, right to work, decent living conditions, and social protection, enhance the economic performance?
4. What are the strategies and policies that could expand economic opportunities to the benefit of both Lebanese and refugees?

VII. WORKSHOP EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- A draft policy proposal that presents an overview of the legal and structural challenges of refugees' access to legal status in Lebanon while addressing the potential socio-economic opportunities of an inclusive development strategy, that can guide in monitoring and evaluating policy influence and help engage in policy dialogue that can potentially lead to policy change.
- Explore opportunities to expand partnerships with a wide range of actors, exchange resources, advocacy efforts, and access to data and information.

VIII. NEXT STEPS

- Follow up meetings and exchange of data and information on the above highlighted topics.
- Plan and schedule the final workshop date.