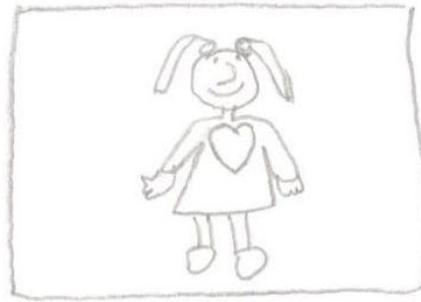


“How can I feel safe in a place that prevent us from practicing our rights?”

# Integration of Children on the Move in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities

Developmental Action without Borders – Naba'a  
Family for Every Child



أُمِّي وَأَبِي وَأَخَوَتِي



أنا ما بي أراجع سا فر عشان أبنِي مستقبلي برا البلد عشان وضع  
لبنان ما منيح وما في حقوق لانا.

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# Foreword

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The dream of a better future is one of the main drivers that encourages children and their families to leave their homes. Every child carries a powerful story about why they migrate, the risks they face, and the vision of a future they head toward. It is important that children's stories are heard and understood.

The concerns of parents, children and youth who had experienced migration, expressed during face-to-face discussions, reflect the findings of this research. In the absence of a suitable solution to the situation in Lebanon, many of them are unsurprisingly deeply anxious and worried about living in poverty and about the lack of prospects for living a life in greater dignity.

In the interests of Lebanon, integration processes should and can be improved to open up employment and livelihoods opportunities for all of the country's residents. In this respect, this research is an important document and a tool that we are committed to use for advocacy purposes and the improvement of integration processes, especially to ensure that their human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

The human development and emergency support of Naba'a and Family for Every Child is increasingly vital in this respect.

**Dr Qasem Saad**

*General Director*

Developmental Action Without Borders – Naba'a

# Acknowledgements

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This report presents the key findings from consultations carried out in Lebanon as part of the project on Integration and reintegration of children on the move between the Middle East and Europe, led by Family for Every Child. The project involves research in Greece, Germany and Lebanon – key countries of transit and destination for children and families on the move – and its findings will allow for a better understanding of what works and what is needed in policy and practice to improve children’s experiences of integration.

We are grateful to the dedicated team from Naba’a, who worked in challenging COVID-19 circumstances and difficult conditions within Lebanon. Many thanks to our facilitators Hiba Chehade and Fouad Idriss who provided invaluable support in managing semi-structured interviews with community leaders, stakeholders, smugglers and brokers, children’s and youth-focused groups, Photovoice training, and the day to day activity of the project, as well as guiding the photographers throughout the process. We would like to thank focus group facilitator Mohamed Chehade, who organised and facilitated the focus groups of parents and conducted part of the semi-structured interviews with smugglers and brokers.

Great thanks to children and youth photographers: Aya Abu Mallouh, Hanin Issa, Rayan Abdul Al, Kholoud Rmayed, Rawan Kofari and Mohamed Saghir, who provided great insight in the photography field work.

We would also like to thank Joanna Wheeler, Anne-Marie Barry and Jonathan Blagbrough for their conceptualisation, design, review and editing of the report, and their invaluable coordination and support.

Special thanks to the directors and heads of the institutions that hosted the exhibition: Borj Chemali Municipality, Deir Yasin, UNRWA Secondary School/Buss Camp, Mr Fateh Sharif, Al Afak Institution for Technology and Informatic/Tyre City, Mr Husein Khalife.

Thank you to all of those who worked hard throughout the project to ensure its success.

## **Abdul Latif Issa**

*Lead Researcher*

Naba’a

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# List of acronyms

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<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussions	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration	<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-governmental organisations	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>PRL</b>	Palestinian refugees in Lebanon	<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees
<b>PRS</b>	Palestinian refugees from Syria		

## Executive summary

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Worldwide, the number of families and children on the move between the Middle East and Europe has increased significantly over the past decade. Lebanon hosts the largest per capita population of refugees in the world, with the government estimating that 1.5 million Syrian refugees are currently present, in addition to around 15,000 refugees of other nationalities.<sup>1</sup> A huge proportion are children and young people – for example, there are over 500,000 registered school-aged Syrian refugee children and youth.<sup>2</sup>

Lebanon has been beset by multiple and compounding crises over recent years – the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unprecedented economic crisis that the country is witnessing, the catastrophic explosion of 2020 that affected nearly a third of the capital Beirut – and the suffering of the poorer communities in the country has significantly worsened. The consequences of the economic and social crises are especially dire for the immigrant and refugee communities in Lebanon,

evidenced in a 2020 vulnerability assessment, which found that nearly 90 per cent of Syrian refugee families are now living below the extreme poverty line.<sup>3</sup> These crises, compounded by discrimination against refugees in Lebanon, means that it is especially difficult for children and families to access basic services, let alone to integrate into communities.

In 2021, Developmental Action without Borders – Naba'a – was supported by Family for Every Child to conduct a research study on the integration of children on the move in Lebanon, as part of a larger project which aims to:

- Identify barriers and challenges encountered in the integration/reintegration of children on the move between the Middle East and Europe;
- Provide recommendations to improve the integration and reintegration of children on the move between the Middle East and Europe, and

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, Fact Sheet, Education Programme – Lebanon, December 2021. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1790>

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, Lebanon: Education. <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/education>

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, Lebanon Fact Sheet, January 2021. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Lebanon%20-%20Operational%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20January%202021.pdf>

- Support the development of practical guidelines/a toolkit to improve the integration/reintegration of children on the move between the Middle East and Europe.

The research in Lebanon involved key informant interviews, as well as consultations with families, caregivers and young people to understand their experiences of integration in Lebanon and their recommendations for change. A Photovoice process was carried out so that young people could give their insights in a creative and participatory way.

## Key findings and recommendations

### Significant barriers to integration for children and families in Lebanon

The minimum standards for integration are not being met in Lebanon due to multiple factors. As well as the impact of the economic crisis and the unstable political situation, refugees do not have a sense of belonging, and there is a lack of respect for civil rights, with discrimination on the basis of nationality and religion. The economic crisis has impacted the lives of all Lebanese citizens, and as a result there is increased discrimination against refugees and a reluctance to offer support. More funds should be allocated to programmes supporting refugees' communities, as well as to destitute Lebanese citizens, since improving the living conditions of all residents would lead to improved integration and lessen discriminatory attitudes towards refugees. Moreover, an increase in access to labour markets, in combination with work permits for refugees, would increase the sense of belonging and ensure education for refugee children.

### Protection issues for children pushed to migrate from Lebanon and towards Europe

As a result of the lack of integration options in Lebanon, many families consulted for this research had either already attempted to migrate to Europe, or were planning to. Children face significant protection risks as they make this journey, and especially so if they are unaccompanied. Many engage in risky,

difficult and harrowing passages, leading to physical sickness and psychological distress. Basic needs and services are lacking along the journey, and children who are moving with families are at high risk of separation. There is a need to expand and improve reception conditions across all European countries and to provide psychosocial support to children and adolescents to facilitate their integration and/or reintegration into countries of origin and/or destination.

### Lack of care and support for returned children and families

Despite the significant hardship and psychological trauma experienced by children and families on their routes to Europe, there is a lack of support for those who return to Lebanon. This further exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and the barriers to integration. NGOs need better resourcing to support refugees. For example, NGOs can and do play a strong role in assisting the Lebanese government to complement the public education system to absorb the enrolment of refugees children. An organisation like Naba'a has the potential to grow from "participant" to "partner" in the government's education programme.

### Children's ideas of integration

In consultations with families, several children expressed a desire to stay within the communities that they had formed (often with children from the same background), which were an important component for their integration. This was in conflict with parents' desire to migrate. The views of children and young people on the decision to migrate should be taken into account.

# Introduction

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Lebanon hosts the largest per capita population of refugees in the world, with the government estimating that 1.5 million Syrian refugees are present, in addition to over 15,000 refugees of Ethiopian, Iraqi, Sudanese and other origins registered with the UNHCR.<sup>4</sup> A significant number of them are children. The country has been beset by multiple and compounding crises over recent years – the unprecedented economic crisis and political instability leading to resource scarcity and public service collapse, the catastrophic explosion of 2020 that affected nearly a third of the capital Beirut, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic – and the suffering of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the country has significantly worsened. In 2021, it was estimated that 82 per cent of the population of Lebanon were living in multi-dimensional poverty.<sup>5</sup> The consequences of the economic and social crises are disastrous for the immigrant and refugee communities in Lebanon: a 2020 vulnerability assessment, for example, found that around 90 per cent of Syrian refugee families are now living below the extreme poverty line.<sup>6</sup>

Economic crises are exacerbated for refugees by discrimination and a lack of protections in Lebanon. Lebanon has not signed the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, and refugee status is at present determined mainly by the provision of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between Lebanon and UNHCR in 2003, which grants limited guarantees to refugees recognised by UNHCR. Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL), of which there are currently around 180, 000, and the 28,000 Palestinians who have fled from Syria (PRS),<sup>7</sup> are not covered by

UNHCR mandate, and are instead supported by the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). The absence of a legal framework concerning Palestinian refugees, as well as the political treatment of the Palestinian refugees by states in the region, leaves refugees in an extremely precarious and often destitute situation.<sup>8</sup> The Palestinian refugee camps and surroundings in South and North Lebanon governorates are considered among the poorest areas in Lebanon. Most of the population live in poverty ranging between unemployment and low income daily work, which hinders their ability to fulfil their basic living needs.

Without a legal framework setting out the rights of refugees, there are huge protection gaps. On top of the strain on families' ability to secure basic food rations and household items, there are significant negative impacts on education. Parents are forced to remove children from school due to the inability to pay fees, and teachers are not receiving their salaries. Access to education for refugee children has worsened over the past few years.<sup>9</sup> Many are unable to afford transport to attend public schools, and others arrive covered in mud, having walked miles upon miles to attend.

The lack of options to make a living and provide for their families, let alone integrate into communities, has left many with no choice but to increase the irregular migration attempts to get to EU countries. The dream of many Lebanese, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Palestinian refugees from Syria and Syrian refugees in Lebanon is to emigrate to a country that shelters

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<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, Lebanon Fact Sheet, May 2021. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon%20operational%20fact%20sheet-May%202021.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> UN ESCWA (2021) *Multidimensional Poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021): Painful Reality and Uncertain Prospects*. [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634-multidimensional\\_poverty\\_in\\_lebanon\\_policy\\_brief\\_en.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634-multidimensional_poverty_in_lebanon_policy_brief_en.pdf), p1.

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, Lebanon Fact Sheet, January 2021. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Lebanon%20-%20Operational%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20January%202021.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> UNRWA (2020) *Protection Brief: Palestinian Refugees Living in Lebanon*. [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/20-09-28\\_lfo\\_context\\_protection\\_brief\\_2020\\_final83.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/20-09-28_lfo_context_protection_brief_2020_final83.pdf), p1. These estimations are given by the Government of Lebanon for planning purposes, though there are nearly 500,000 Palestine refugees from Lebanon registered.

<sup>8</sup> ReliefWeb (2021) 'UNRWA raises alarm on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon', 1 April. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unrwa-raises-alarm-situation-palestine-refugees-lebanon>

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch (2021) 'Lebanon: action needed on Syrian refugee education crisis', 26 March. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/26/lebanon-action-needed-syrian-refugee-education-crisis>

them from the hardships of living in a country that is suffering from the worst economic crisis since the 1975–1990 civil war.

## About Naba'a

Naba'a is a Lebanese organisation working with Palestinian communities in the camps and gatherings in Lebanon, and with Lebanese communities, in addition to with refugees and migrant communities.

Naba'a aims to:

- Support young children who are at risk of violence and neglect in the communities to provide them with opportunities to develop their confidence and to grow up in a safer, more inclusive environment.
- Support children and youth who are at risk of dropping out from school and who are living in particularly hard circumstances, and to help them realise their potential.

- Work with local communities, to build the capacity of those communities to take a more coordinated and inclusive approach to participatory decision making and service provision.
- Influence the decisions of key policymakers and service providers who are responsible to the Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian and other migrant communities living in Lebanon for upholding the rights of children, and who are accountable for providing appropriate services.

The following programmes are implemented by Naba'a:

1. Child Rights
2. Inclusive Education
3. Advocacy
4. Emergency
5. Training and Capacity Building
6. Community Development

## Research methodology and tools

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This research explores these issues with children and families who are on the move in Lebanon. Naba'a spoke with families, many of whom live within Palestinian refugee camps and have already attempted the journey to Europe, and some of whom are planning it. The consultations gathered their views on the journeys they had made and on integration in Lebanon, as well as their recommendations for practitioners and policymakers in order to address the issues that are preventing the protection and integration of children within Lebanon.

The study was conducted through a qualitative approach that combined a number of research components across both the South and the North governorates in Lebanon, in order to develop a comprehensive picture of the movement of the Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian refugee population from Lebanon.

The various components of the **consultation activities** were:

- **Literature review:** review of published and unpublished literature, reports of articles.
- **Key informant interviews:** ten semi-structured interviews with NGOs and service providers, community leaders, smugglers and brokers who have first-hand knowledge about the community. Questions were asked about the situation facing children on the move in Lebanon, the context for and obstacles to integration into Lebanon, and support available to children and families for integration.
- **Focus group discussions (FGDs):** eight focus group discussions took place, comprised of 57 male and female participants, parents and adults, NGO support workers and with youth and young Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon across three locations in the South and North Lebanon governorates. Seventy-six per cent of participants were Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; 18 per cent Palestinian refugees from Syria; 4 per cent Syrian refugees in Lebanon and 3 per cent of Lebanese nationality. The distribution

was 54 per cent male and 46 per cent female. Forty-five per cent of participants were below the age of 25 (those aged 13 years and under were consulted with their families). Many of these families had already attempted irregular migration journeys to Europe and had returned to Lebanon. FGDs took place in the following locations (which have a mixture of Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian refugees): in the South Governorate, the Ein El Helweh Camp for Palestinian refugees near Saida, Burj El Chemaly and Buss (two camps for Palestinian refugees) and the area surrounding Buss in Tyre District. In the North Governorate, the Beddawi Camp for Palestinian refugees and its surroundings were covered.

- **Photovoice:** this participatory research process comprised six workshops with six to ten children or young people with lived experience on the move, and culminated in a moving photography exhibition in three different locations in Lebanon.

## Photovoice

A Photovoice (PV) research project was carried out with young people (one female and five males between the ages of 15-20) years by the Naba'a team after online training from Family for Every Child. Photovoice is a participatory research methodology which aims to empower and bring positive change to participants, who often belong to groups of people whose voices are marginalised or ignored. Participation provides a safe and creative space through which participants can use photography to approach difficult subjects and concerns, and to advocate on issues that they value. It stimulates interest about important topics that are related to the community and allows participants from diverse groups to communicate through the art of photography.

The workshop was conducted in November 2021. The participants were given basic training in photography, visual literacy and storytelling, the ethics of photography and the background for the research project. Out of nine original participants, six photographers completed the field work within two weeks. Participants spent half a day in the field, taking photos, and returned back to the office where as a group they identified common themes across the images. The themes centred on social cohesion, inclusion, aspirations for the future and opportunities in Lebanon. The photographers decided jointly with the facilitators about the audience they wanted to reach and what kind of messages they wanted to communicate, and from the 250 photographs taken, identified 50 images that they felt represented these messages. The photographs were displayed in a moving exhibition in a public space in three different areas of Lebanon.

While a summary of findings from the Photovoice project is included in this report, the full findings and details about the methodology can be found in a separate report.

## Ethics and safeguarding

An ethical protocol was developed by Family for Every Child and Naba'a to ensure that the children were protected, that the proper documentation was completed and that consent was obtained from research participants. The participants themselves either signed consent forms or gave oral consent, ensuring that they agreed to participate. At all stages of the research with children, Naba'a's Child Safeguarding Policy was implemented. The ethics procedures for the Photovoice research is covered in the separate report.

# Key findings

## Integration in Lebanon for children and families on the move

There are many conceptions and definitions of integration. According to IOM, the term integration can be defined as:

*"...the two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and host societies in which migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community."<sup>10</sup>*

Integration means a lot for the participants who were involved in the research. It means protection, a life of safety, work opportunities, equal access to services, equal rights for men and women and for all residents in Lebanon, child rights, privacy and economic stability. "These factors improve the sense of belonging and improve the integration process," concluded a group representative.

However, it was clear that integration in Lebanon is very difficult and that the prospects for children on the move in Lebanon are bleak. Not only is there a lack of constitutional protections for refugees, but basic needs are not being met, and children and families face obstacles to employment and economic opportunities, social security and health care. Refugees are subject to different kinds of discrimination, are barred from civic engagement and many lack any sense of belonging in the country, which is a fundamental aspect of integration. In the absence of state services and financial support, NGOs are unable to facilitate integration for children and their families. The following comments made by participants exemplify the hardships faced by refugees:

*"I never thought I would one day sell my home and jewellery to attempt to give my four children a dignified life."*

**Ali, 34 years old**

*"There is no future to our children in Lebanon. Better to risk one's life for a better one."*

**Khalil**

## Hazardous journeys to Europe

Participants agreed that a combination of factors, including conflict, political instability and economic insecurity, in addition to a lack of essential services, are behind their attempts to enter Europe via regular or irregular means. Most of those interviewed had made or were going to make journeys to Europe via different routes. These involve routes into Turkey, and some routes to Turkey via Syria; some participants had attempted the long arduous journey via Latin America. In the wake of their failure to obtain Spanish transit visas, migrants via this route have to cross a number of countries to reach their destination in Bolivia or Ecuador, and then stay there waiting for smugglers to arrange their return through European airports.

They then apply for asylum in those countries, in the hope that they have the chance to remain there. One pregnant woman waited for a month in a hotel in Ecuador before returning to Lebanon, after a broker from the smuggling network did not show up. For a large proportion of migrants, their migratory plan fails and they must return to Lebanon. Some migrants set off from Lebanon to reach Cyprus and other European countries in what are locally referred to as 'death boats'.

<sup>10</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM) (undated) Integration and Social Cohesion: Key Elements for Reaping the Benefits of Migration. Global Compact Thematic Paper.

[https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/our\\_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Integration-and-Social-Cohesion.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Integration-and-Social-Cohesion.pdf), p2.

## Boat of My dreams

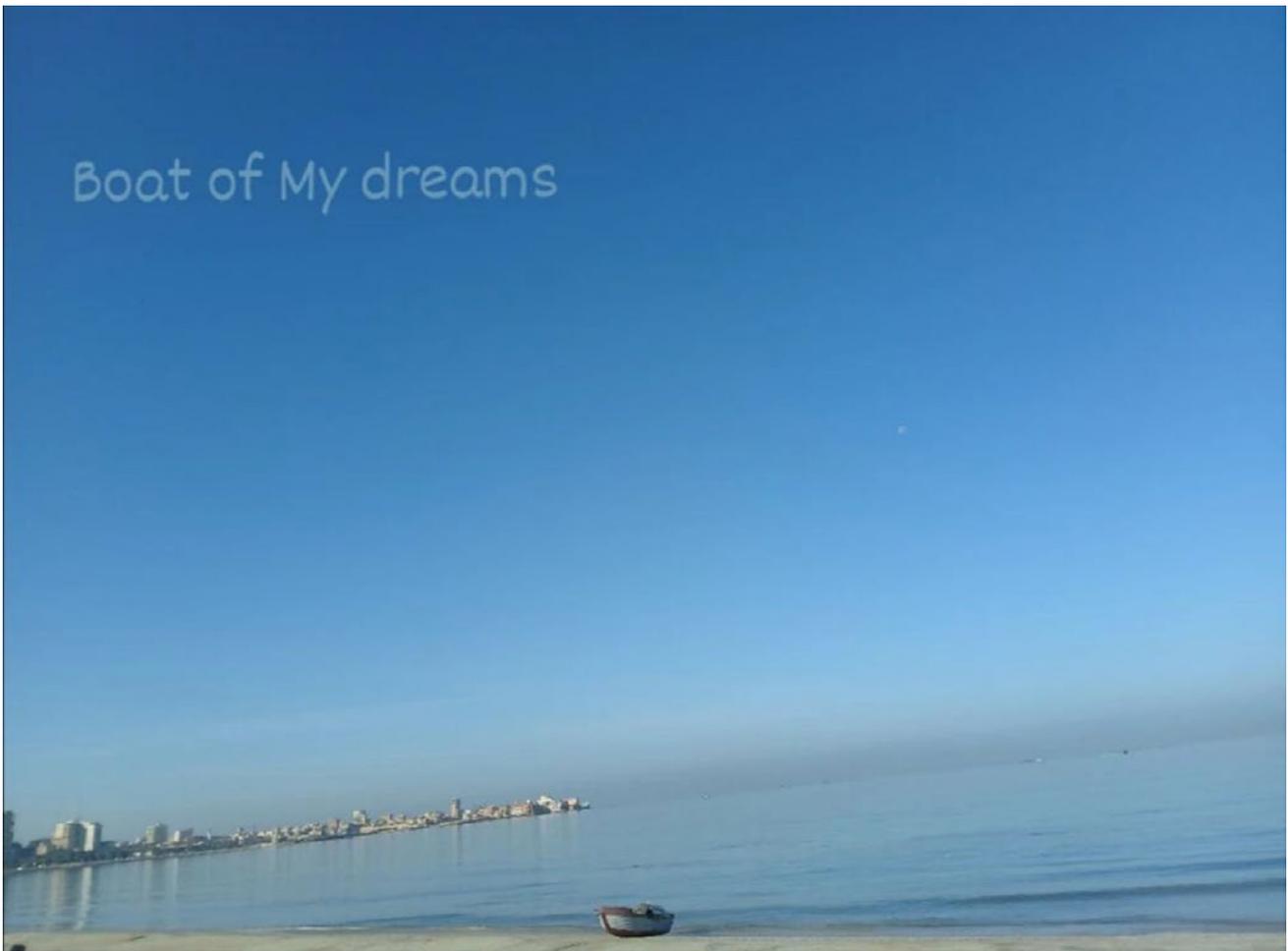


Figure 1: 'Boat of my dreams' - a photo taken by one of the Photovoice participants to depict the desire to leave Lebanon and move to Europe.

### Protection risks for children

The deterioration of living conditions and the unstable political situation in Lebanon have meant that the expectations of both Lebanese citizens and refugees have started to shift. These strong push factors and the pressing need for long-term stability and integration have pushed groups, families and individuals to move outside of Lebanon which has often resulted in riskier decision making and more dangerous journeys, particularly for children. During the focus group discussion, the caregivers emphasised that they experienced emigration from Lebanon in pursuit of a better life for themselves and for their children, and most would attempt the

journeys again. Some of them described having gone weeks or months without access to basic services and were traumatised by the ill-treatment and abuse they experienced or witnessed, including from smugglers and local gangs. The migration journey is undoubtedly fraught with dangers, challenges, and protection risks for children. The children are exposed to fatigue, hunger, lack of medicines, lack of proper nutrition and psychological distress. Basic needs and services are lacking throughout the transit areas, and in makeshift camps or centres there is often a lack of privacy; space is shared with adults in common areas, exposing unaccompanied minors to significant protection risks. There is also a high risk of separation for those children moving with their families.

## Returning after a migration attempt

Although it was not established in the research whether the families who had come back to Lebanon had returned via voluntary or forced return, it is clear that there were no reintegration programmes to support them, and little general support. Considering that significant sums of money will have been lost to smugglers for the failed migration attempt (payments are never refundable), and the trauma that will have been suffered throughout and after the journey, such families often return with even more significant vulnerabilities than they left with.

In spite of the tremendous hardships faced, most of the participants would attempt the journey again, since they see no hope in Lebanon:

One participant, who had previously sold his furnished house “for barely half of its actual price” to make the journey, said “Despite the failure of our attempts, which cost us more than USD 30, 000, we intend to undertake the journey again with the hope of reaching Europe.”

Another participant, who had returned from Ecuador, asserted that “In [a] desperate situation in search of basic survival, we will move whatever the danger.”

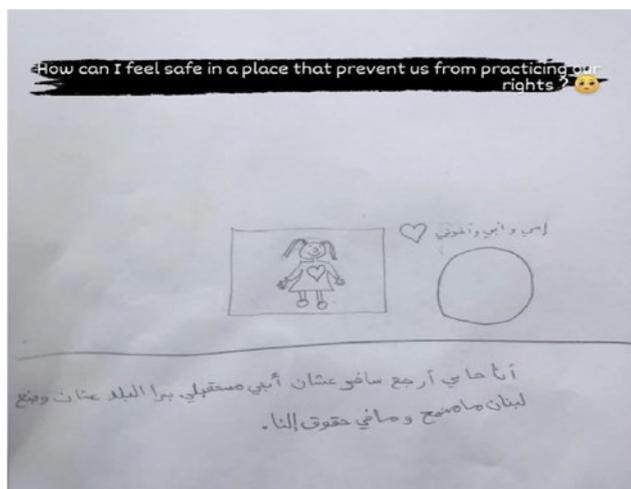


Figure 2: a drawing by a young participant in the FGD.

## Children and young people's perspectives on integration and migration

The focus group discussions revealed that young people face significant challenges in the integration process in Lebanon. They are exposed to all of the stressors already mentioned, and this can lead to psychological problems and undermine their overall well-being. Day to day life is difficult for many. Sedra, a 15-year-old Palestinian refugee, describes the hardships faced by the family, just to get their basic needs met: “Our life was so hard; my father was selling coffee in the streets with low income; my father was hardly able to cover the rent of the house in addition to daily expenses. After [a] quarrel with [the] house owner, we moved to another one; the school became far away from my house and our family life became harder.”

Many refugees feel isolated within Lebanon, with discrimination being a huge barrier to integration. One young person describes the social marginalisation they experience:

*“We become victims of social marginalisation and face difficulties and restrictions in accessing education, employment, social protection and other basic rights.”*

The young participants asserted that they did not have access to enough opportunities in Lebanon, with one describing Lebanon as a ‘prison’: “Lebanon is a big prison for us. I love Lebanon, but our life as Palestinian refugees has a set of prohibitions.” While youth are rights-holders, participants observed that their basic human rights are not available to them and that young people in Lebanon are looking to their voice being heard and understood: “As rights-holders, we need an environment that supports our social integration and protects us from exploitation,” said one 21-year-old participant.

Despite the difficulties, younger children spoke of the importance of the connections that they had made in Lebanon amongst their peer groups and some were afraid of the disruption that would come with their parents’ migration, as expressed by a 12-year-old Syrian refugee:

“I don’t want to travel or migrate; I know no one there; I am used to living here.” Children often have little say or participation in the migratory decisions made by their families.

The choices that refugees face in such a context are in clear focus, as young people talk about the compromises they make of losing the communities they have developed, and even their family members, in order to make a life elsewhere:

*“In the course of migration, we may lose our social connection or networks, as well as [experience] the absence of family members who would look after us and provide support. But a decent life is worth the adventure.”*

**Young Palestinian refugee**

## Key findings from the Photovoice project

While a summary of the findings from the Photovoice report is included in this report, full findings and details of its methodology can be found in a separate report.

Several key themes and issues related to integration in Lebanon emerged from the Photovoice process carried out by the six young people, all of whom were children on the move. These were:

- The contradiction between children’s rights and the actual experiences in Lebanon.
- Feeling that leisure activities are inaccessible.
- Feeling that trying to integrate into Lebanon is a waste of time.
- European countries are the hope for integration.

## Individual empowerment of young refugees in Lebanon

The Photovoice process itself turned out to be an important opportunity for children and young people to explore the meaning of integration and belonging in a creative and exploratory way. The exhibition in which the process culminated allowed for young refugees, who had already acknowledged that they felt in some way invisible, to feel that their voices were heard:

*“We were engaged in critical thinking with community leaders. For the first time, it was an opportunity for us to be heard and understood.”*

**Photovoice participant**

*“A beautiful experience mixed with feelings of sadness, joy and hope.”*

**Photovoice participant**

The process showed the importance of young people and children on the move being listened to:

*“The exhibition provides us the chance to display the suffering of the children and youth and the difficult life that hinders integration and pushes to emigrate.”*

**Photovoice participant**

*“I wish that the suffering of children [would] reach all the world; they might look after us to find a suitable human being solution.”*

**Photovoice participant**

# Conclusion

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In the past few years, Lebanon has been facing a confluence of crises which has had a devastating impact on the country's social, economic and political situation. This has had a catastrophic impact on the already marginalised refugee communities and on children on the move, whose vulnerabilities have been exacerbated. Without adequate legal protections, children and families on the move are often unable to get basic needs met, let alone receiving adequate support and services for integration. Despite knowing – and often having already experienced – the dangers and failures of irregular migratory trips to seek a life in Europe, the majority of regular or irregular migrants who made the fraught journey from Lebanon to Europe are willing to take extensive risks to do so again:

*“For us, migration is not a choice, it's a necessity”*

**Tala, FGD participant**

In consultations with families, several children expressed a desire to stay within the communities that they had formed (often with children from the same background), which were an important component for their integration. This was in conflict with parents' desire to migrate. The views of children and young people on the decision to migrate should be taken into account.

# Recommendations

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## General recommendations

- Promote children's social integration and empowerment in both countries of destination and/or countries of origin.
- Policies must address the specific conditions, risks and vulnerabilities of young migrants, and consider their resilience and adaptability.
- Analysis is needed of how young migrants return to their country of origin, and of whether their sustainable integration/reintegration is supported.
- Intensify advocacy mechanisms to eradicate stigmas, and to enable youth and adult migrants to know their rights, reach their potential and improve their contribution.
- Expand and improve reception conditions across all European countries.
- Further the use of participatory methods, such as Photovoice, to hear the voices of young people and allow them to reach stakeholders.

## Recommendations for policymakers in Lebanon

- Commission additional research on the relationship between the Middle East region and the European Union in the field of migration.
- Improve the living conditions of residents, regardless of their nationalities, through more programmes that support refugee communities and destitute Lebanese citizens.
- Increase refugees' access to labour markets, in combination with work permits.
- Emphasise preventing the displacement of refugees, rather than mitigation measures.
- Provide better structural support for integrating refugees already in Lebanon, such as civil rights, protection, job opportunities, equality, non-discrimination and participation in decision making.
- Support local and international NGOs who are already working with migrants and/or returnees to facilitate integration and reintegration.

- Ensure access to education for all children on the move.
- Listen to children's voices and engage with them for meaningful solutions.
- Create supporting guidelines, principles or rules on human rights protections for those making migratory journeys.
- Both qualitative and quantitative research are needed to identify and bridge data gaps and to provide a comprehensive vision of youth migration and/or integration. Making this data available helps child- and youth-focused policies and programmes.
- NGOs need to create specific programming and provide psychosocial support to facilitate children and adolescents' integration or reintegration in their country of origin.

## Recommendations for the European Union

In the absence of sustainable solutions to the Lebanese crisis, the Syrian crisis and the long-standing displacement of Palestinian refugees, tensions in the country will keep escalating. Cyprus and the EU as a whole must prepare for an imminent increase in asylum applications.

- End push backs and ensure a safe and legal pathway to protection in EU countries.
- Share responsibility with neighbouring countries.
- Increase and improve reception capacity and conditions in all European countries hosting refugees.
- Policies designed to manage the flow of refugees need to respect human rights and international law, and their commitment to refugees' protection.
- Create specific programming for children and adolescents.
- The knowledge and experiences of children and youth on the move should be used in the design, implementation and evaluation of migration and integration policies and guidelines.

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