

Concept note - Side event organised by EuroMed Rights, CLDH, ASGI & ALEF ahead of the Brussels VII Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region

“Dead on the land and dead at sea”: no alternatives for Syrian refugees in Lebanon

7 June 2023, 15:00-17:00 CET

Online

Description of the topic, issues to be addressed, draft agenda.

Socio-economic crisis and lack of access to asylum as main causes of vulnerability for Syrian refugees

Socio-economic crises impact local population in many ways, from depriving access to the full enjoyments of economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to health, education, and decent housing, to impacting democratic participation and accountability. These effects are felt more strongly by the most vulnerable sectors of the population, such as refugees, migrants and undocumented people.

Lebanon is a case in point, with the [world's biggest refugee population](#) per capita, and a spiralling socio-economic crisis. Refugees in Lebanon, who are for the vast majority coming from Syria, don't have access to the most basic services because they are forced to live in informal and precarious conditions due to the lack of an appropriate legislative framework, accompanied by the rampant economic crisis. Indeed, Lebanon does not have a national asylum procedure and since 2015, the government de-facto asked UNHCR to stop registering Syrian refugees. Therefore, local integration is not an option, leaving refugees in a severe level of vulnerability, being exposed to informal and irregular working conditions, lack of stable income, and risk of evictions amongst others.

Rising tensions with local population and reinforced narrative on returns

At the same time, the severe socio-economic crisis is impacting the local population as well. According to the UN, [more than 80%](#) of Lebanon's population is deprived of basic rights, including health, education, and a decent standard of living, while [more than 90%](#) of Syrian refugees live below the poverty line. In this climate, rising discrimination and hate speech against refugees is creating tensions with the local population, and strengthening the narrative of returns to Syria, despite the ongoing conflict and continuous reports of grave and systematic human rights violations – also against returnees – in the country. Since mid-April 2023, the Lebanese authorities have [raided houses](#) of Syrian refugees across the country, detained them and arbitrarily [deported at least 50 of them to Syria, handing them over to the Syria Army](#) across the Wadi Khaled and the Masnaa border crossing points. According to reliable sources, among the people who were [deported](#), some were reportedly arrested by the Syrian Army upon return to Syria.

Lack of prospects for durable solutions leave people with no alternative other than “irregular” migration.

Stuck between the impossibility of going back, staying in Lebanon or being resettled elsewhere, the only alternative left for Syrian refugees is boat migration. Increasingly so however, it's not only Syrians but Lebanese themselves that resort to this option. In 2022, UNHCR registered an increase in boat departures from Lebanon, with a total of 4,629 people leaving the country. This number is almost three times the number of individuals undertaking such movements in 2021 (1,570 people). Boat

migration from Lebanon can entail very lengthy and dangerous journeys, across areas of the Mediterranean where violations against migrants take place all too often: in 2022, various deadly incidents were reported, for instance in September or April 2022, with reports of people being [often exposed](#) to human rights violations, death or disappearance.

Objective: The panel discussions and the Q&A will aim at addressing the above-mentioned issues in order to shed light on a too-often forgotten context and route, and to put forward recommendations and strong calls for action to the EU and its Member States and to the international community.

Agenda

*Moderator: **Fadel Fakh, CLDH***

- *Introduction: The case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and elements for analysis – **Wadih Al-Asmar, President of EuroMed Rights***
- *The socio-economic and political crisis in Lebanon: social tensions and the impact on the local population & on refugees – **Stephanie Abboud, ALEF***
- *Intercepted at Sea: Anatomy of a Pullback – **Annia Ciezadlo, The Public Source***
- *From Lebanon to Italy: The Eastern Mediterranean route – **Matteo Astuti or Anna Brambilla, ASGI***
- *How to conduct strategic litigation on pushbacks in the Cyprus-Lebanon-Syria context – **Marielle Hayek, author of the guide and consultant with EuroMed Rights***
