



IRAP Berkeley

January 2016 Beirut Trip



**IS OUR
RESISTANCE**

BEIRUT ART PROJECT

URBAN JUSTICE CENTER



INTERNATIONAL
REFUGEE
ASSISTANCE PROJECT

The International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) is the first organization in the United States to provide comprehensive legal representation to individual refugees seeking resettlement. To date, IRAP has successfully resettled over 3,000 refugees in life-or-death situations, including Iraqis and Afghans at risk for their work with the U.S. government, children with medical emergencies, women survivors of domestic and sexual violence, and survivors of torture.

IRAP operates largely through the work of its 27 law school chapters. Each chapter is responsible for building legal teams between students and attorneys, providing training and supervision for case teams, and for ensuring that clients are receiving full legal representation. These efforts are supplemented by an annual National Student Summit in New York City and by trips to the Middle East, during which students receive additional training, gain on-the-ground insight, and conduct intake interviews of potential clients.

The Berkeley IRAP Chapter is composed of 24 students and 19 attorneys representing 17 cases impacting nearly 40 refugees—including wives, mothers, and children—in desperate need of resettlement. Our clients are currently located in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates. IRAP-Berkeley members are dedicated, passionate students, some of whom have served overseas with the U.S. military and have had a direct relationship with the type of clients we work for.

Note from the Chapter Directors

Since its founding over six years ago, the Berkeley IRAP chapter has enabled students to engage in the critical work of providing legal aid to those in desperate need of resettlement. This year was no different. As once vibrant, cohesive communities teeter on the brink of collapse with the onset of the greatest refugee crisis our generation has known, the students of IRAP Berkeley, along with their attorneys, have taken up the mantle and continue to provide life-saving legal assistance to those exposed to grave danger in the heart of several interlocking and interwoven refugee-producing catastrophes.

Working from the comfort of classrooms and libraries, it is often hard to grasp the magnitude of these crises; more often than not, students only experience them through the stories of their clients. Each year, however, IRAP students have the opportunity to step out of their classrooms and step into the midst of these crises by travelling to the Middle East and learning from organizations, aid workers, and refugees on the ground.

As directors of this chapter, we have both been afforded the opportunity to travel to the places where our clients are presently situated—or have been forced to flee to—and these experiences have increased the quality of our representation and enhanced our ability to advise our clients. In fact, only months after visiting Lebanon in 2015, one of our clients was forced to flee to Beirut, and our experiences in the region earlier that year proved invaluable in rendering legal aid and advice. That same client is to be resettled in the United States only days after the scheduled publication of this report.

The ability to step outside the classroom and into the crisis is life altering, but, more importantly, it consistently and fundamentally improves student caseworkers' ability to provide vital representation to their clients. Despite these benefits, however, the cost of these trips is high, and every year, only a precious few students, at great personal cost, have been able to spend whatever money they have had to spare to attend these trips, knowing that the experience will provide tangible benefits to those in need. As a result, last year, only three students were able to participate. But this year was different.

This year, IRAP Berkeley, graced with the support of the Berkeley Law faculty and generous donors, was able to send four students fully funded to Beirut, Lebanon to immerse themselves in the situations our clients face and to provide vital case intake services for the on-the-ground IRAP staff. Those four students were joined by two others who paid out of pocket to participate in a week of service and learning.

What follows is a report that encapsulates what they learned on their trip. Its goal is to educate fellow students and advocates about the situation on the ground in Lebanon, especially as it relates to the Syrian refugee crisis. Truthfully, though, the full value of this trip cannot be placed within the four corners of this report. The full value will manifest itself when our current and future clients contact us seeking advice and counsel, and our students are equipped to respond with detailed assistance that is a direct result of their lived experiences overseas.

To safe passages, and new beginnings,

Richard Weir



Co-Chapter Director
IRAP Berkeley

Jessica Caplin



Co-Chapter Director
IRAP Berkeley



Participants

This year, Berkeley Law sent six student delegates to Beirut with IRAP National, the largest Berkeley delegation ever. The participants were as follows:

Natalie Schultheis. J.D. 2017

Natalie is the IRAP Berkeley Legal Director. She also supports two Special Immigrant Visa cases for an Afghan and an Iraqi family. Natalie has worked with unaccompanied minors and with the Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project.

Rebecca Chraim. J.D. 2017

Rebecca is the Events and Development Chair for IRAP Berkeley. She is currently working to resettle a Yezidi family from Iraq. Rebecca has previously worked with the Palestine Children's Relief Fund in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon.

Hani Bashour. J.D. 2017

Hani is an IRAP Case Coordinator. He is supporting a Special Immigrant Visa case for an Iraqi client. Hani grew up in Beirut and his parents still live there.

Mary Dahdouh. J.D. 2018

Mary is an IRAP Case Coordinator and is supporting a Special Immigrant Visa case for an Iraqi client in addition to a UNHCR resettlement case for an Afghan client. This summer, Mary will be working with Human Rights Watch in New York City.

Tori Porell. J.D. 2018

Tori is an IRAP Case Coordinator currently working on a Direct Access Program case for an Iraqi family. Tori has lived, studied Arabic, and worked as a human rights observer in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine.

Hassan Ahmad. LL.M. 2016

Hassan is an IRAP Case Coordinator supporting an Iraqi client in a Request for Review of a Special Immigrant Visa case. A Canadian lawyer, he has represented refugees in asylum cases before the Federal Court of Canada.

IRAP Beirut Program

Monday, January 4, 2016:

AM/PM: IRAP Introduction and training

- Overview of the situation for refugees in Lebanon
- Introduction to refugee law
- The resettlement process in Lebanon
- Intakes and interview techniques
- IRAP intake guidelines
- What not to do during an interview
- Working with interpreters

Tuesday, January 5, 2016:

AM- Meeting with Iraqi LGBT IRAP client

PM- Exploring Jbeil/Byblos

Wednesday, January 6, 2016:

AM- Meeting with ICMC- International Catholic Migration

PM- Meeting with Helem

Capture the Moment: Mobiles for Education event

Thursday, January 7, 2016:

AM- Meeting with U.S. Embassy

PM- Visit to Jusoor and Yalla! Schools/Intake interviews

Friday, January 8, 2016:

AM- Intake Interviews/work session to write up intake interviews, compile documents, transfer files; group debrief

PM- Visit to Jusoor and Yalla! Schools/Editing and Submitting Intakes



Lebanon: A Snapshot

One of the smallest countries in the world, tiny Lebanon sits in a pivotal position in the Middle East, with the Mediterranean to its West, Israel along its Southern border, and Syria on its Eastern and Northern borders. Its population of 4.5 million, a third of whom live in the capital, Beirut, is a blend of religions. Roughly half (54 percent) of Lebanese are Muslim (27 percent Sunni and 27 percent Shia), while 40 percent are Christian, including Maronite Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and Greek Catholics. This milieu of peoples renders Beirut—the “Paris of the Middle East”—a thriving, bustling metropolis dotted with new investments. Amidst this world live over 1 million refugees in need of protection.

1%

Of all refugees
are referred for
resettlement to
a third country



70

Percentage of refugees
below the Poverty Line

World's
**HIGHEST PER CAPITA
CONCENTRATION
OF REFUGEES**

compared to its population

1:4



in
Lebanon
is a
refugee

There is a growing population
of newborns at risk of
statelessness



**Aug.
2014**

The last time the United
States conducted
resettlement interviews
in Lebanon

90%

Of refugees lack
legal status

The Refugee Situation in Lebanon

• • • From Violence to Safety? An Overview of the Process

Today, refugees numbering over one million comprise a quarter of the population of Lebanon.¹ How did these men, women, and children—many of whom were previously doctors, students, and scholars—come to this point, and what do they face on arrival?

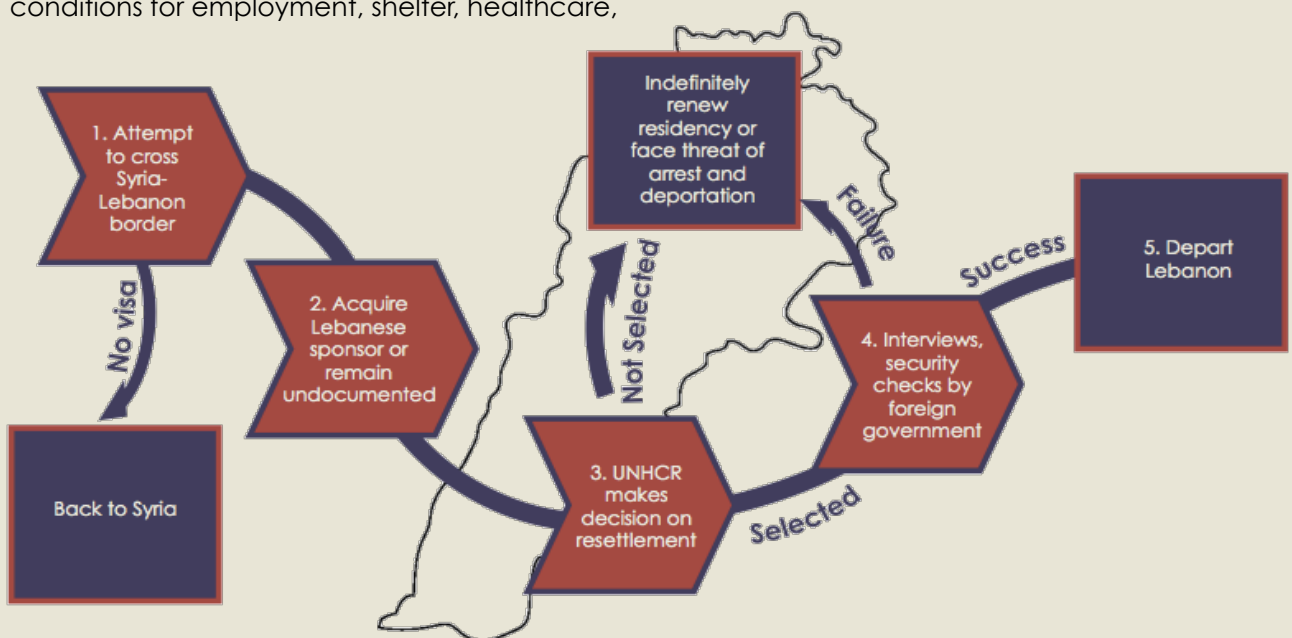
After fleeing barrel-bomb-filled skies and mass civilian slaughter in Syria, displaced persons must travel across warzones to the Lebanese border where, if able to meet certain strict criteria, they are permitted entry. All others must return to Syria, having already left everything behind.² Those lucky few who are permitted entry must then find a way to remain legally in Lebanon. Prior to May 2015, they could do so via registry with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).³ Today, however, newly arriving refugees are forced to find a Lebanese sponsor, increasing the risk of both economic and sexual exploitation.⁴ Refugees must pay for renewal of their residency permits every six months, despite significant debt and poverty.⁵ Consequently, the undocumented population in Lebanon is growing daily.⁶

Whether undocumented or with legal residency permits, refugees face desperate conditions for employment, shelter, healthcare,

education, and food. Members of minority groups, like the LGBT community, face further persecution and danger. For those in Lebanon, there is no clear escape from these conditions, and the vast majority of refugees in Lebanon will live within this context of great vulnerability until the end of the war in Syria.

A lucky, tiny minority (1 percent of all refugees in Lebanon), however, will be referred for resettlement abroad by UNHCR. Those with serious medical conditions or who face severe persecution in Lebanon are most likely to be selected.⁷ Selection, though, does not in any way guarantee resettlement. Applicants must then face the painful, sometimes years-long process of multiple intrusive interviews, piles of paperwork, medical screenings, and security checks.⁸ Many will likely be rejected by states on technicalities, misunderstandings, or the actions of distant family members.⁹

Rejected refugees are left to suffer an indefinite quest for survival in Lebanon, where the consequences of rejection are sustained conditions of debt, hunger, and poverty. For those selected, a new, challenging future in a foreign country awaits.



The refugee crisis in Lebanon is much more than a problem of physically displaced people—it is about basic human rights to legal status, labor, education, marriage, civil rights, health, and dignity. Cognizance of these factors can greatly deepen our understanding of the conditions refugees in Lebanon face and will substantially improve the legal aid IRAP Berkeley's student-attorney teams provide to our clients.

• • • Legal Status of Refugees

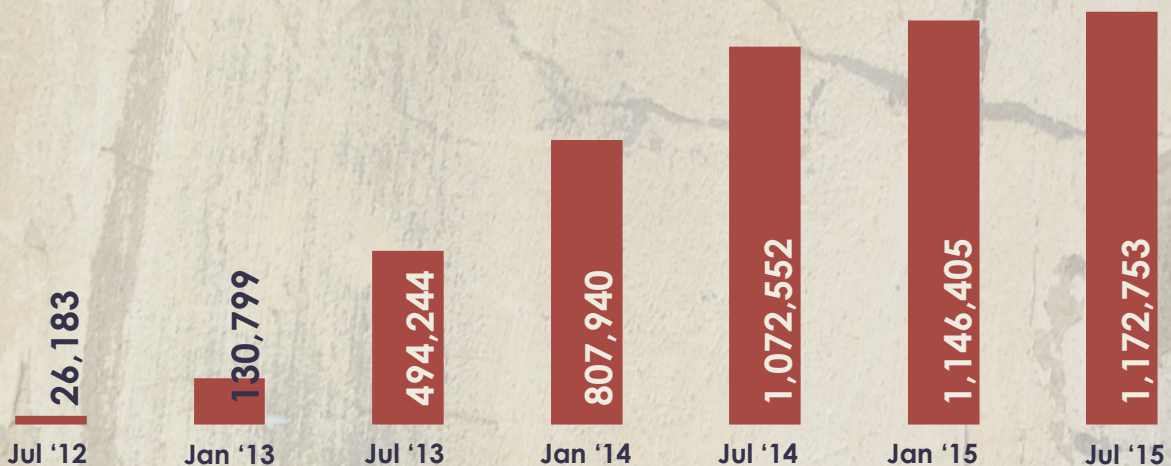
For the first two years of the Syrian conflict, Lebanon was considered the most generous nation in the world for welcoming refugees at the border, imposing almost no restrictions on arrivals and charging nothing for residency renewal. Syrians merely needed to present an ID or passport to freely move between the two countries.¹⁰ Once inside, refugees were able to register with UNHCR and to reside legally in Lebanon under their refugee status. They were not restricted to camps, but enjoyed freedom of movement to seek work or stay with friends or family as needed.¹¹ These policies lay in stark contrast to Syria's other neighbors, Turkey and Jordan, which limited Syrian entries from the very beginning.¹²

As the number of refugees in Lebanon rose to constitute a quarter of the population,

however, strain on infrastructure and security concerns rose. In direct response, government policies shifted. Starting in the summer of 2014, Lebanon introduced *de facto* changes to its treatment of Syrians, later codified in January 2015 with a series of measures imposing strict visa requirements on Syrians, which are in contravention of customary international law.¹³ While humanitarian exceptions in this law should have allowed more people into the country for their personal safety, the forces monitoring the borders were not granting exemptions and instead were implementing the new measures stringently, thereby sending desperate men, women, and children back to Syria where they faced the constant threat of death.¹⁴ Crucially, these measures all but ended the ability of Syrians to travel between Lebanon and Syria to see family or tend to business, which had previously been common.

For those able to enter or who had previously entered prior to January 2015, Lebanon has also tightened the requirements for Syrians seeking legal residence or who are renewing their legal stay. Under the January measures, Lebanon now requires refugees to apply for a residency permit, and Syrian refugees must either find a Lebanese citizen to sponsor their presence—often a source of great exploitation and abuse—or remain in Lebanon under their existing UNHCR refugee

Registered Syrian Refugees in Lebanon



Source: UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response Portal, accessed 13 December 2015

“When you’re able to see a human face talk about the beatings and ostracism they have endured, it’s hard to reduce them to a stereotype or statistic”

certifications, which will last two years.¹⁵ The General Security Office, which makes the registration determinations, has been found to vary its determinations wildly from area to area and to use the investigations as an opportunity to probe into the lives of, or to sexually exploit, refugees.¹⁶ Additionally, the cost of renewal is \$200 per person (children under age 15 can renew for free) via either option, and residency must be renewed every 6 months with an additional \$200 per person.¹⁷ This exorbitantly high price is unrealistic for refugees, 70 percent of whom fall below the poverty line, resulting in many newly undocumented people.¹⁸ As a result, undocumented refugees have begun to receive deportation orders. The Lebanese government is not currently enforcing these orders, but this broken system results in the exploitation of refugees in all sectors.¹⁹

As an additional measure, on May 5, 2015, the Lebanese government demanded that UNHCR cease the registration of newly arrived refugees, with the exception of newborn babies of parents already registered.²⁰ This new measure effectively denies Syrians referral for services with partner organizations, as they have not been determined to be refugees by UNHCR. It has resulted in a significant rise in the undocumented population. It has hindered refugees’ hopes of resettlement. It places children born to undocumented parents at tremendous risk of statelessness. And it forces newly arrived or recently undocumented Syrians to find Lebanese sponsors who may exploit their deep vulnerabilities.²¹

Alongside Syrian refugees, Palestinian Syrians face further restrictions with renewing permits, such that 90 percent of Palestinian-Syrian refugees are undocumented.²²

• • • Access to Employment

The financial implications of residency registration render refugees vulnerable to economic exploitation under both types of visas. Refugees with Lebanese sponsors are permitted to work; however, many sponsors are

employers or landlords who wield significant control and prey on the vulnerable.²³ Refugees in Lebanon under UNHCR refugee certifications are legally forbidden to work in Lebanon. They must prove that they are not employed, and can be visited by the Lebanese government at random hours, called constantly, and followed to ensure that they are truly not working.²⁴ If a refugee is not present when UNHCR officials come to interview them for RSD renewal, UNHCR may assume that the refugee is out working illegally and refuse to renew their RSD, rendering the refugee undocumented. As a result, refugees rely on charitable assistance and/or income from illegal work to survive.²⁵ Given the limited assistance available through the United Nations and other organizations, Syrian refugees who lack Lebanese sponsors have no choice but to work illegally, typically under highly exploitative working conditions.²⁶ This puts tremendous strain on families and violates the basic right of refugees under international law to earn a living.

Consequently, 90 percent of refugees in Lebanon are forced to borrow from local grocers or other informal lenders and fall within a “vicious” cycle of debt.”²⁷

As an illustration of the desperation and exploitation refugees face daily, one father whom we interviewed during our trip explained that his son was suffering from leukemia and that he was performing odd jobs to pay for his son’s chemotherapy. Though he expected his employer to take pity, given his circumstance, his employer had the opposite reaction:

“I expected my employers to be more generous after learning that my son had cancer, but instead they offered me even lower wages because they knew I was desperate.”

The response of this employer highlights the extreme vulnerability of refugees in Lebanon. More, without stipends to provide for

basic economic stability, parents are turning to their own children to help sustain the family.²⁸ Consequently, we noticed a marked increase in children begging on the street. Beirut has always had a small number of children selling flowers in traffic, shining shoes on busy streets, and asking for money at major intersections. However, this year it felt like their numbers had skyrocketed. Many children work as a family—we frequently saw siblings working together, with their mom a short distance away—or are affiliated with various street gangs. There are also thousands of unaccompanied Syrian children in Lebanon, many with no protection as they work. As a result, they are left highly vulnerable to harassment by police or locals, and economic or sexual exploitation.²⁹

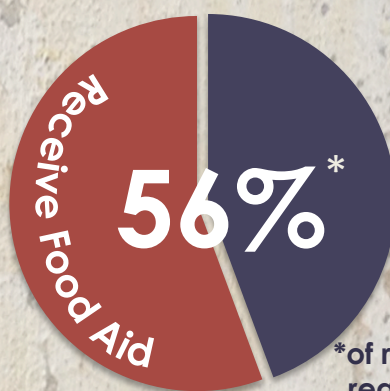
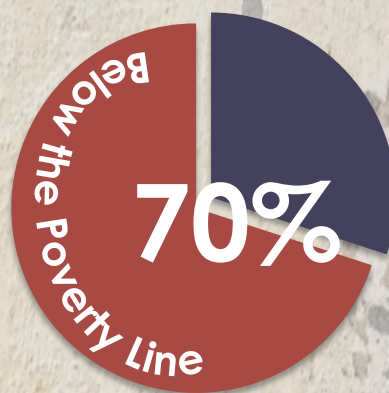
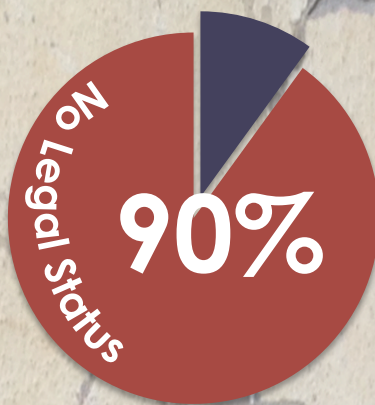
• • • Access to Shelter

Securing shelter is yet another major challenge for refugees in Lebanon. While refugees are not forced to stay in camps, generally seen as a positive development, the lack of official camps in Lebanon for non-Palestinian Syrians forces refugees to find their own shelters. Housing prices are high in Lebanon, forcing families to either share homes or apartments with many other families or to build homes in informal settlements.³⁰ Often, these families must still pay rent, even if their settlement is on public land. There are also situations of outright homelessness.³¹ Ninety percent of Syrian refugees are undocumented today, while documentation is a formal requirement to rent.³² Finally, for those without housing or with inadequate housing, the winter is an especially dangerous time, especially in the Bekaa Valley where it gets the coldest, and it can be very challenging for refugees to heat their homes.³³

• • • Access to Healthcare

Many refugees struggle to access affordable healthcare. Though healthcare in Syria had been affordable for most, it is not in Lebanon. Fortunately, UNHCR has established agreements with some medical providers to cover 75 percent of the costs of medical care

The Refugee Crisis in Numbers



*of refugees registered with UNHCR

Source: UNHCR Syria Regional Refugee Response Portal, accessed 28 Jan 2016; Human Rights Watch 2015

for refugees; however, this agreement is only for emergency procedures, not for regular care, and most refugees still struggle to pay the remaining 25 percent.³⁴ Additionally, some hospitals under such UNHCR contracts have raised prices in an attempt to recover money lost via this contract. Consequently, refugees often pay more than the agreed 25 percent of market price. Moreover, these contracts do not cover those not registered as refugees. During the course of our intakes, we found that, in some cases, refugees were more interested in finding medical care for their children than in resettlement. One refugee family in particular had come to IRAP because their son suffered from a complex condition and they could not find help from any other organization.

• • • Access to Education

More than half of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon are children.³⁵ In response, in 2012, the Lebanese government opened Lebanese schools to Syrian children in the country, with most schools instituting double and triple shifts to accommodate the rapidly increasing population.³⁶ Nevertheless, there are reports that some school directors have denied enrollment to undocumented children in opposition to the current law.³⁷ Moreover, availability and access pose separate issue for refugees. Though the schools are free, many families cannot afford transportation or the necessary school supplies. As a result, the schooling system is effectively unavailable.³⁸ Moreover, many families do not see the value in education when labor laws will bar their children from employment, are afraid that sending their children to schools will alert the government to their "illegal" presence, or must send their children to seek jobs or beg in order to make enough money to survive.³⁹

As one example, during one of our intakes, we interviewed a woman who told us how her son had been at the top of his class in Syria. Now, in Lebanon, she noted that it is nearly impossible for refugees to find space for new students in public schools as a result of the influx and overcrowding, and private schools are prohibitively expensive for refugee families whose income comes from undocumented work. Consequently, her son has not been able

to attend school since the family fled to Lebanon. "And now look at him," she insisted as she showed us a picture on her phone of an expressionless teenager moving boxes in a warehouse. "Religion without education will not produce good people," she then said. "Education is the most important thing. Only education will fix this war."

Despite these setbacks, the Lebanese government forbids parallel schools run by NGOs. This is particularly unfortunate due to the strain on the education system and the specific needs of Syrian students. To stay open, NGO schools must now show that they are providing a different service from state schools. This law represents a trend by the Lebanese government seeking greater control over refugees.⁴⁰

Our team visited two schools providing specific service to refugees: Yalla! and Jusoor

Yalla! School

Yalla! is located in the mountains just outside of Beirut in an area called Aley.⁴¹ Unlike Jusoor, Yalla! is not an official school that can grant diplomas, but was instead established to prepare Syrian children who may be behind or have been out of school for Lebanese public school. They focus on the most basic subjects: Arabic, English, Math, and Science. All of the students are Syrian refugees, such that they have a shared sense of community, although most come from many different areas within Syria. Some of the students at Yalla! are very recently arrived, while others have been living in Lebanon for a few years already. Yalla! is currently building a library of English books and is seeking donations for more.



Jusoor School

Jusoor was originally founded as an online organization offering scholarships for Syrians outside Syria.⁴² However, after the refugee crisis had begun, Jusoor changed its mandate and now has three schools across Beirut serving Syrian refugee children. Students are anywhere from five to fifteen years old.

Hibbah, the principal we met, as well as the other teachers and volunteers, told us about the enthusiasm that all of the children displayed for school and for their education. For many, school is an opportunity to escape cramped, one-bedroom homes shared by multiple families; to interact with other children who can relate to them and see them as normal classmates instead of unwelcome outsiders; and to take a break from the reality and constant reminder of tragedy that they fled and continued to live in.

We had the opportunity to visit different classrooms and help with lesson plans, and we were able to attend an English class for older students and an Arabic class for younger students. We found the lessons in both classes very basic and not necessarily commensurate with the ages of the students. In response, one teacher explained that:

The pace of learning at Jusoor schools is generally very slow, as the teachers must also deal with the trauma most of the students incur after living in a war-torn country.

Teachers generally spend the first six months acting more as counselors and helping the students adjust to their new environment than teaching substantive content.

Seeing Jusoor reiterated our belief in the importance of education—not just as a means for progression and improvement in life, but also as an incredibly useful tool for healing an entire generation that has been born into a disastrous war and heartbreaking situation. Although we met with other NGOs who aid refugees in the city, Jusoor was the first real glimpse of hope that we saw for saving the next generation of leaders in the Middle East.

• • • Access to Food

Since the start of the crisis, the World Food Programme (WFP) has dramatically scaled back food vouchers available to Syrian refugees due to unfulfilled funding commitments from donors. WFP first cut aid in July to \$13.50 a month per person.⁴³ Although vouchers for extremely vulnerable Syrian refugees rose to \$21 a month in October, the future of aid remained unclear. Additionally, under the “Capping at Five” policy, families are limited to five vouchers per month, amounting to \$108.⁴⁴ This is far from adequate to provide a month’s worth of food. Moreover, WFP is only providing vouchers to roughly half of all refugees currently in Lebanon, and that number has declined since November.⁴⁵

• • • LGBT Vulnerabilities

The distressing situation of refugees in Lebanon is compounded when a refugee identifies as a member of the LGBT community. Championing this cause in Lebanon today is an organization known as Helem (هلم).

Article 534 of Lebanese penal law makes sexual acts that “contradict the laws of nature” punishable by up to one full year in prison. Unfortunately, this statute has been applied to cases of sex between gay persons. Fortunately, Lebanese law recognizes that being gay without engaging in gay sex is not a punishable offense.⁴⁶ LGBT aid groups note that while 86 percent of all Lebanese citizens do consider homosexuality unnatural, only about 50 percent believe it is an issue that should be criminalized.⁴⁷

LGBT individuals are not immune from harassment. Aid organizations stated that police accuse those they suspect of being gay of engaging in public indecency or prostitution. This was especially an issue in a case—mentioned by aid groups—where an officer confiscated an LGBT individual’s phone and found photos evidencing the person’s sexuality in texts, photos, or social media outlets.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, few lawyers and experts are willing and/or able to work on cases of harassment of LGBT individuals. Even those in the legal profession who sympathize may fear risking their job or career from the potential political

“Before we elevate ourselves and ask what we can do for the refugees, I wonder if a bigger difference could be made if we first step back and ask what we can learn from them.”

backlash from a decision to represent LGBT individuals. Aid organizations note that as one example, a judge who recently ruled that sex between a transgender woman and a man was not a violation of 534 later faced backlash.⁴⁹

Aid groups focus much of their work on Know Your Rights presentations to counter the police's frequent reliance on people's lack of access to information.⁵⁰ Educating individuals on topics such as when they do not need to give a police officer their phone, is hugely important. Recently, LGBT groups have faced significant backlash, both legal and otherwise, from Lebanese law enforcement for their work with the LGBT community and have been accused of helping terrorists from Syria escape or evade police. This latter accusation is a response to Facebook posts by aid groups warning that people do not need to answer their phones if they do not know where the number is coming from, as LGBT individuals are increasingly facing harassment by phone.⁵¹

Specific Concerns for LGBT Refugees

In addition to LGBT aid groups, we met with an IRAP client, Adnan*—an Iraqi refugee who fled Mosul when it fell to ISIS.⁵² Adnan's case is especially unique because he is both an atheist and gay. He told us how these factors complicated his life in Iraq even before ISIS was a problem, and how after they came to power, the consequences for him and his family were severe. Due to his protection needs, it would seem that Adnan would be a perfect candidate for resettlement. However, he has lived in Lebanon for a year and a half with little progress from UNHCR and has been told that he may be waiting almost another year for news.

Adnan displayed incredible motivation to help others who had been in his position. There are few public spaces in Lebanon that are safe and available for LGBT refugees, such that much activism and communication within this community takes place online. Aid groups makes a conscious effort to not draw attention

to their office space so as to protect the identity of their clients. Adnan talked about how, even while in Mosul, he would translate and upload scientific articles about homosexuality to a website and would subtitle videos about being gay for Arab audiences. He hopes that by doing so, he will help other gay people in the Middle East accept themselves, so that they will not suffer as much as he has.

In addition to direct harassment, housing is an issue for undocumented LGBT refugees, as few landlords are willing to rent to them. This often leaves undocumented LGBT refugees with only expensive housing options.⁵³ Fortunately, those in the LGBT community have formed a network of people willing to house or willing to find housing for LGBT individuals. Unfortunately, having an LGBT shelter in Lebanon would be very dangerous for security reasons.⁵⁴

Additionally, to date, there is no way for trans Syrian refugees to receive documents that match their gender identity, and the process is exceedingly difficult for Lebanese people.⁵⁵

Finally, due to their extreme vulnerability and inability to legally work, many LGBT refugees work as sex workers or day laborers, although UNHCR provides internships for LGBT individuals.⁵⁶

Concerns about Western Approaches

Some aid organizations have also noted that LGBT activism in Lebanon often evolves in tension with Western forms of LGBT activism. The language and discourse surrounding LGBT identity and rights, largely developed in the west, lack Arab cultural equivalents. Absence of Arabic language terms necessitates a reliance on English words to discuss LGBT issues among Arabic speakers. Moreover, because many of the concepts surrounding LGBT rights and identity developed in the West, they sometimes have limited relevance to expressions of those identities in the Middle East. Consequently, providing nuanced, culturally-conscious aid can run in opposition to the goals of western organizations.⁵⁷

*Not a true name

• • • Attitudes toward Refugees

In the early days of the crisis, when the number of refugees was lower, many villages, local organizations, and religious institutions were able to step in and provide for the needs of Syrians fleeing the war (the border village of Aarsal, in particular, took Syrian families into their own homes and worked to resettle them).

However, in recent years, the sheer volume of refugees has made these efforts insufficient. The refugees, from a concentrated number in the east of the country, have spread out looking for work; one can now see groups of young Syrian men wandering the streets in every city in Lebanon. This has placed a strain on local institutions in every part of Lebanon. As a microcosm of this problem, we visited the old Mamluk masjid in Trablus, which was a place where homeless Syrians could come to sleep, wash, and eat during the first few years of the crisis. However, the sheer number of refugees has led the masjid to lock its doors day and night. This is a highly unusual status quo, as it is fundamentally accepted that any Muslim has the right to enter any mosque. However, with a quarter of the country now comprised of refugees, we found that the initial warm hospitality of the Lebanese has turned into what could be described as a mixture of pity and resentment.

• • • The Future: What's Next?

As time passes, and as the number of refugees in Lebanon rises still further, this tiny state will feel increasingly unable to respond to mounting pressure on both its systems and infrastructure. The response will likely be further restrictions and barriers to legal residence, employment, access to shelter, healthcare, and food. Those who will suffer most are those most in need of aid. Increasing restrictions on refugees will undoubtedly impact our IRAP clients who flee to Lebanon, as they will be forced to satisfy numerous legal standards and will be unable to access UNHCR registration. Our ability to properly represent them will likewise become increasingly challenging. Representation will quickly involve not only support compiling and drafting paperwork and legal memoranda, but responding to immediate and long-term protection needs for our clients and their children.

Refugee Conditions in the Coming Years

Legal Status

- Residency restrictions will result in a near total lack of documentation for the refugee population in Lebanon

Employment

- As more refugees look for Lebanese sponsors, labor exploitation will rise
- Simultaneously, undocumented refugees will be forced to engage in illegal labor and will thus be subject to additional threat of exploitation.

Shelter

- Without proper documentation, refugees will face increasing difficulty legally renting apartments.
- Inability to work will accelerate debt and poverty, rendering rents out of reach for refugees.

Healthcare

- Accelerating debt and poverty, along with prolonged adverse conditions, will lead to a rise in medical problems, placing further strain on healthcare systems.

Education

- Increase in the number of undocumented refugees and the rising strain on sources of income will compel parents to remove their children from school to work.

Food

- Donor fatigue will result in further food aid cuts.

Resettlement and the Current Crisis



• • • The Process in Lebanon

Since the start of the Syrian crisis, Europe and Canada have both increased their quotas for Syrians, while similar U.S. quotas have lagged behind.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the United States is still a world leader in refugee resettlement overall, and is slated to admit 100,000 refugees in 2017.⁵⁹ With few exceptions, the United States is one of the only countries resettling Iraqi refugees.⁶⁰

Refugees in Lebanon referred to the U.S. resettlement program (USRAP) must be reviewed by ICMC, the main Resettlement Support Center (RSC).⁶¹ ICMC's U.S. resettlement goal for refugees from Lebanon and Turkey for FY2016 is 11,000, a sharp increase from FY2015 (5,885).⁶²

The drop in resettlements in FY2015 is due to a lack of any DHS adjudications during that period. Despite the one million refugees now in Lebanon, the U.S. Embassy has not conducted interviews since August 2014, citing both security and capacity issues.⁶³ Consequently, only old cases—514 total—resettled in the United States in FY2015. Since October 2015, ICMC has received more than 400 new UNHCR referrals for U.S. resettlement.⁶⁴

When functioning, DHS circuit rides typically occur 4-5 times a year. In Lebanon, DHS will typically adjudicate about 200 cases per circuit ride. The next circuit rides scheduled for Lebanon in 2016 are for February/March, May, July, and September. DHS approval rates on these circuit rides is approximately 80 percent.⁶⁵

In addition to Syrian and Iraqi refugees, there are approximately 20,000 Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Lebanon, none of whom are eligible

for resettlement, as Palestinians are assisted by UNRWA, rather than UNHCR.⁶⁶

• • • Worst Cases, Best Claims

Only 1 percent of refugees are ever resettled.⁶⁷ Those who are not are left to survive alone in their host country. A critical piece in determining resettlement is a refugee's situation at the present moment—not what they have endured previously, but what they are currently experiencing. Thus, a refugee who has witnessed (and/or suffered) unspeakable crimes in her past but who is now able to live in *relative* comfort will likely not qualify for resettlement. Therein lies the paradox: the more your client is suffering now, the better their case.

During our intakes with refugees, we met with several families who are able to sustain themselves in Lebanon—children are attending school, food is available, and the family has shelter. In these cases, though it was clear that the children, at least, were scarred from their past experiences, it seemed that the family was an unlikely candidate for resettlement.

Organizations like IRAP need to make extremely tough decisions on a daily basis about whom to help, and those decisions are never about who deserves it and who does not, but rather who deserves it *more*. In the current crisis, when it comes to choosing which case to take on, we often may need to decide between the *greater* of two evils. How do you choose whom to help when each person you meet has been broken by this world in some way?

“It broke my heart to see that even safety and resettlement likely wouldn’t be enough to help these children, and that although their story was heart-wrenching, it wasn’t heart-wrenching enough.”

Final Impressions

There is only so much that can be learned from desk research. This is all the more true for a crisis that is rapidly unfolding, deteriorating, and changing daily. To properly represent our clients—to serve as legal counsel, advocates, and support networks—it is thus critical that we understand the nuances of their lived experiences and the forces they fight against each day, particularly in their place of so-called refuge. The ability to meet with key stakeholders and to hear about the experience of refugees in Lebanon first hand, on the ground, was thus invaluable. Our week in Beirut has without doubt served to strengthen our ability, and the ability of IRAP Berkeley, to help bring deserving men, women, and children to greater safety.



In the end, I think Yalla!, IRAP, ICMC, etc. all leave you with the same bittersweet feeling: **the situation facing Syrian refugees in Lebanon is absolutely heartbreaking, but there are great people working to help.** I am really glad I joined this trip, because I met amazing people whose work my family and I can support.

—Hani Bashour

I'm sure **the enthusiasm with which members approached the trainings and subject matter will be used to constructively engage with our future clients,** whether they be in the Middle East or anywhere else.

—Rebecca Chraim

While the situation for refugees in Lebanon is unique, there may be similarities in the treatment of refugees in different countries, and **identifying these similarities allows us to identify patterns of oppression so that we may dismantle them.**

—Natalie Schultheis

My outlook...changed the most because I was meeting refugees face to face in Beirut on a completely regular basis in regular places—whether it was the bookstore, or the coffee shop, or a bar—and **being able to casually speak with them about what they've been through and the threats their families still face was much more profound than sitting behind a desk interviewing refugees for legal aid...** This trip also helped reinforced the fact that **I'm doing what I should be doing with my life, that I'm where I should be doing it, and that I'm doing it with whom I should be doing it,** which is a pretty incredible feeling honestly.

—Mary Dahdouh



How You Can Help

As we have sought to demonstrate throughout this report, the situation for refugees in Lebanon may be heartbreaking, and it may be desperate, but it is not hopeless. All of the organizations mentioned here, and more that are not, work tirelessly to support the over one million brave men, women, and children whose lives have been shattered by violence and who strive courageously every day to improve their circumstances and that of their children. It is not enough to read these words and return to the comfort of our homes. We call on everyone to educate themselves to the situation of refugees in Lebanon and beyond, to advocate for their rights and protection, and to donate—your time, your money, your service—to their cause. Imagine if the stories in this report were not about others in a distant land, but were about your own loved ones instead.



International Refugee Assistance Project
Refugeerights.org



Helem
<https://www.facebook.com/Official-Page-for-Helem-Lebanon-133916233311662/>



Jusoor Syria
<http://jusoorisrael.com/>



Yalla! School
<http://www.yalla-enfants.com/nos-projets/aley/>



International Catholic Migration Commission
<http://www.icmc.net/>

Educate. Advocate. Donate.

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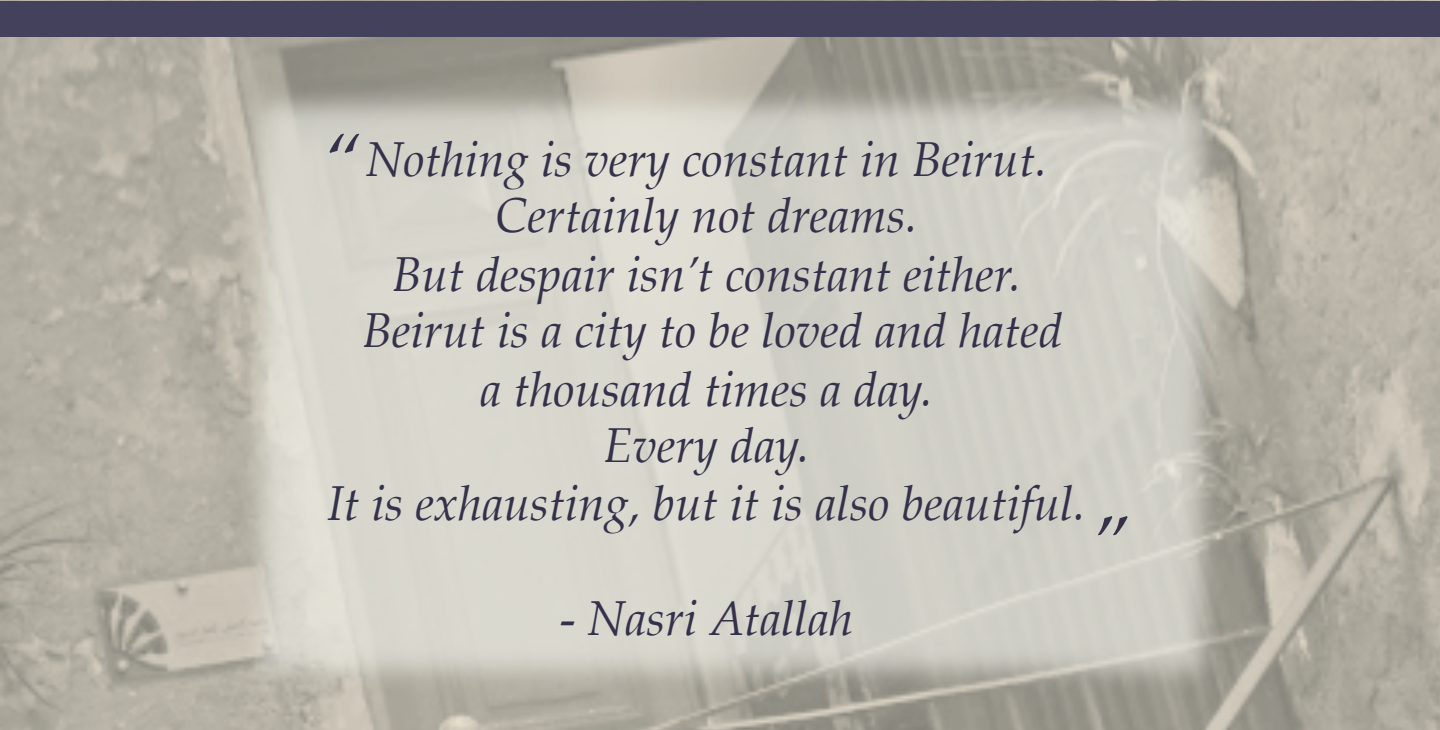
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*“Nothing is very constant in Beirut.
Certainly not dreams.
But despair isn’t constant either.
Beirut is a city to be loved and hated
a thousand times a day.
Every day.
It is exhausting, but it is also beautiful. ”*

- Nasri Atallah



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—IRAP Berkeley Board, 2015-2016

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