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The EU as a (re)producer of colonial continuity? The externalisation of migration to Lebanon and its implications for Syrian refugees' social realities

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Iscte-University Institute of Lisbon

September, 2025



SOCIOLOGIA  
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

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Department of History

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“For me justice is indivisible. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.



## Acknowledgments

During the course of this research, one question kept haunting me: If we were to imagine a hypothetical moment before birth, not knowing with which nationality or into which part of the world we were going to be born in, when the probability of finding ourselves part of a vulnerable group of people in need of international protection was as high as finding ourselves in a privileged position, would we still take our chances or would it change anything about the international migration regime we would choose?

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<sup>1</sup> names are pseudonyms

## Resumo

Esta dissertação de mestrado explora as dinâmicas racializadas e colonialistas da estratégia da UE de externalizar a migração, com foco específico no Líbano. Ao longo dos anos, a UE aprofundou a externalização da migração e o controlo das fronteiras através de uma cooperação estreita, acordos e tratados com países da região Mena, com o objetivo de impedir a entrada de refugiados no território da UE. Esta dissertação visa expandir os estudos tradicionais sobre migração com uma estrutura interseccional feminista e descolonial. A partir deste ponto de vista teórico, discuto criticamente como as práticas racializadas e colonialistas inerentes às políticas migratórias da UE afetam as realidades sociais das comunidades de refugiados sírios no Líbano. Esta investigação baseia-se em trabalho de campo realizado entre março e junho de 2025 em Beirute e inclui 19 entrevistas semiestruturadas com refugiados sírios e especialistas na área da migração. A utilização de uma metodologia participativa descolonial e informada sobre o trauma permitiu mudar a consciência e o foco para as histórias e experiências narradas pelos refugiados sírios, colocando ênfase na centralização das vozes marginalizadas. Além disso, a abordagem de investigação inovadora permite olhar para além dos aspetos visíveis da migração, tornando esta dissertação uma contribuição original para o avanço dos estudos descoloniais sobre migração. Através da combinação do quadro teórico e metodológico subexplorado escolhido, foi possível realizar uma análise que revela estruturas discriminatórias sistémicas e dinâmicas de poder relativas às realidades sociais dos refugiados sírios no Líbano, ligando-as às práticas migratórias racializadas e colonialistas da UE.

**Palavras-chave:** Líbano, União Europeia, Externalização da migração, Refugiados sírios, Continuidade da colonialidade, Estudos feministas descoloniais sobre migração

## Abstract

This master's dissertation explores the racialised and colonialist dynamics of the European Union's strategy of externalising migration with a specific focus on Lebanon. Over the years, the EU has deepened the externalisation of migration and border control through close cooperation, agreements and deals with countries from the Mena (Middle East and North Africa) region with the purpose of keeping refugees from entering EU territory. This dissertation aims to expand traditional migration studies with a decolonial feminist intersectional framework. From this theoretical standpoint, I critically discuss how the racialised and colonialist practices inherent in the EU's migration policies impact Syrian refugee communities' social realities in Lebanon. This research is based on fieldwork carried out between March and June 2025 in Beirut and includes 19 semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugees and experts in the field of migration. The use of a decolonial participatory trauma-informed methodology allowed to shift the awareness and focus towards the stories and experiences narrated by Syrian refugees, putting an emphasis on centring marginalised voices. Furthermore, the rather innovative research approach allows to look past the visible aspects of migration, which constitutes a research gap in current academia, this dissertation hence making an original contribution to advancing decolonial migration scholarship. Through combining the chosen underexplored theoretical and methodological framework an analysis was rendered possible that uncovers systemic discriminatory structures and power dynamics concerning Syrian refugees' social realities in Lebanon and linking them to the EU's racialised and colonialist migration practices.

**Keywords:** Lebanon, European Union, Externalisation of migration, Syrian refugees, Continuing coloniality, Decolonial feminist migration studies

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## Glossary of acronyms

ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
Eunavfor Med Irini	European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation Irini
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
IOM	International Organization for Migration
Mena	Middle East and North Africa
SAR	Search and Rescue
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# 1 Introduction

Migration is tightly linked to the concentration of capital, of resources and of finances, while for one it means a free choice, for the other it means subordination (Baumann, 1998, p. 43). With a concentration of wealth in the Global North, it is visible that this inequality heavily impacts migration dynamics, people from the Global South increasingly facing living conditions that are not sustainable. When these conditions are met with violent conflicts, wars, or political instability, this shapes migration dynamics. The ongoing Syrian refugee crisis represents one of the most complex political, social, economic and security demanding issues that the international community has faced. Even though some argue that the times of a “refugee crisis” as Europe experienced it in 2015 are over, this position is neglecting the fact that it remains crucial to look past the visualities of migration that is focused solely on the numbers of people arriving in Europe or drowning on the way there. I argue that we need to shed a light on the circumstances that shape refugees’ social realities even before the attempt to cross the Mediterranean. In recent years, the European Union (EU) has deepened the externalisation of migration and border control through close cooperation, agreements and deals with countries from the Mena<sup>2</sup> (Middle East and North Africa) region including Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon.

Externalisation in existing literature is defined as the expansion of border and migration management and control from countries of the Global North towards countries of the Global South (Stock et al., 2019). While common dynamics of the EU’s externalisation strategy can be detected, each country is specific. Automatically coming to generic conclusions about the issues being created for refugees in countries of the region that the EU has made migration deals and agreements with would lead to limited and incomplete knowledge. Through focusing on one specific case while simultaneously taking into account broader externalisation migration dynamics in the Mena region in relation to the EU’s policies allows for a more profound and detailed analysis. Hence, I dedicate my research to the case of Lebanon and the implications of externalisation dynamics for Syrian refugees there. Lebanon was chosen specifically for this research as it is the country with the most refugees per capita not only in the Mena region but in the world (UNHCR, 2024a) and plays an increasingly important role in European migration policies hosting so many refugees from war and conflict zones in the region. While this research does showcase problematic dynamics concerning the Lebanese political system and the ways of discrimination of Syrian refugees, it nevertheless refrains from diving deeper into a critique of the Lebanese migration governance. Instead, this dissertation has the goal to render visible the racialised colonialist practices of the EU and their deep implications for refugees’ daily lives and the multifaceted ways they are facing discrimination.

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<sup>2</sup>Debates about the accurate terminology to label the region are extremely relevant, questioning Eurocentric and orientalist attitudes that shape the term Mena. As ISCTE uses the term officially in its curriculum description, it is applied in this dissertation. Nevertheless, contesting the term’s origins and potentially inherent colonialist notions is critical for decolonial research.

There is insufficient academic research on the more invisible dynamics of the externalisation of migration towards countries of the Global South and their implications for refugees in hosting countries. This dissertation therefore seeks to contribute to decolonial migration scholarship that fosters a deeper understanding of the specific challenges, obstacles and discriminations refugee communities are facing due to the EU's externalisation policies, amplifying voices that are often marginalised. My research will specifically concentrate on the interplay between the external dynamics concerning the EU's migration strategy of outsourcing refugees and the internal struggles of their social realities in Lebanon.

As will become clearer through reading the chosen framework and methodology, I do not put my focus on the analysis of the work of European agencies focused on border management like the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) or international institutions like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) but instead wish to follow a decolonial feminist intersectional theoretical framework concentrating on the narratives and experiences told by Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Through fieldwork in Beirut and applying a decolonial participatory trauma-informed methodology throughout the conducted semi-structured interviews, their stories are placed in the centre of the research and supported with the knowledge of experts in the field. Following this approach allows to shift awareness from a liberal institutional focus and more traditional migration studies towards the lived realities of affected refugee communities. Through my research, I aim to answer the following main research question "In what ways do the EU's racialised and colonialist practices regarding their strategy of externalising migration impact Syrian refugees' social realities in Lebanon?" as well as the three secondary questions "How does colonial continuity manifest itself in the EU's strategy of externalising migration?", "In what concrete ways do Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon experience discrimination and marginalisation?" and "Why is a decolonial feminist intersectional framework crucial for understanding the EU's migration strategy towards countries of the Global South?".

First, I will give an outlook of the existing scholarship on dynamics of externalisation to explain through which ways the EU is offshoring refugees and the issue of migration to third countries. This will be linked to the raciality and coloniality of externalisation policies. Then, diving deeper into the thematics of this research and in order to understand the theoretical framework that is used to answer the research questions, in chapter 2 I will elaborate on the approaches that have shaped this research and centre a decolonial feminist intersectional theory. A decolonial feminist intersectional framework aims to conceptualise migration from a focus that opposes Eurocentric arguments mostly centred on the Global North. In the third chapter, I will elaborate on the importance of integrating a decolonial methodology into my research in order to answer the research questions. Additionally, I outline how I used a decolonial participatory trauma-informed methodology during my conducted fieldwork in Beirut and how this also shaped the outlines of the 19 semi-structured interviews I led with Syrian refugees as well as experts in the field in Lebanon. Finally, in chapter 4, follows the analysis of the conducted interviews, uncovering systemic discriminatory structures and complex marginalising dynamics that

Syrian refugees in Lebanon are experiencing and, most importantly for this research, putting them into connection with racialised colonial continuity of the EU's externalisation policies.

## 2 State of the art

The following chapter aims to give an overview of the existing literature on current developments of the EU's strategy of externalising migration, especially towards the Mena region, and, in addition, links these dynamics to racialised colonialist practices impacting refugee communities in hosting countries. I will also elaborate on important terms that co-shape issues linked to migration and are relevant in respect to externalisation scholarship.

### 2.1 Defining realities

The next section focuses on defining the terms refugee, migrant, asylum seeker and displaced person as these terms are often used wrongly, this being very problematic and potentially leading to dire consequences for the people involved. While these terms all have different significations, they are often interchangeably used in daily life discourses, in nowadays media portals, political discourses and the deriving migration policies. The failure to accurately describe the distinct situations of specific groups of people not only creates confusion but even severe issues for them as the different definitions are linked to specific legal frameworks.

The intentional use of one particular term over another to describe a person on the move involves a choice on the part of the speaker and carries implications about their opinions and understandings about those they are describing, and the rights they believe those being described are entitled to. (Diab, 2021, p. 136). Furthermore, It needs awareness that not all people are on the move because they prefer to, there is a clear distinction between privileged tourists choosing where to go and how long to stay and the underprivileged that see no other bearable way than unrooting themselves from places, homes, that hold no future for them (Baumann, 1998, p. 47). The term "people on the move" has become a commonly used reference in policy and scholarship for the mobility of people, the core of the concept rooted in people leaving their homes, for unspecified reasons. This way, it builds an umbrella term for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers or (internally) displaced people but also comprises people moving for education, work or tourism (The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration, 2008). Therefore, the concept is based on a very broad meaning on mobility that needs clarifying specification who is talked about in particular situations as it does not differentiate between people who leave their homes to follow new opportunities and people who are forced to leave due to war or persecution. This simultaneously has the advantage of avoiding widely established negative connotations linked to the terms refugee and migrant and allows to shift the focus to a human rights perspective and to the issue of the protection of their rights (Pijnenburg& Rijken, 2021, pp. 283).

For states, these terms decide on what grounds the different individuals are treated and whether a state or the EU is obliged to assure help and protection outlined in international law, the decision of which term is used therefore becoming extremely political. In this respect, it is essential to differentiate between the different terms as they have crucially distinct implications for individuals. Additionally, we

have to bear in mind that sometimes people fit into more than one category and that sometimes it is not easy to distinguish as well as comprehend the complex social reality of the motivation behind the person's decision to leave their home country, as someone fleeing from drought or natural disasters (Diab, 2021). While migrants choose to move, be it for economic, educational or other reasons linked to quality of life, and face no threats returning to their home countries, asylum seekers are individuals applying for asylum on account of their persecution on the base of their race, religion, nationality, sexuality or political beliefs in case of their return to their home country (UNHCR, 2016). The 1951 Refugee Convention defines the term "refugee" as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2010a, p. 3).

Kohlenberger touches upon the question of displacement and the ways that hosting countries shape the perception of legitimacy of displaced persons seeking refuge (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 11). Arendt (1949, p. 755) notes that the term "displaced persons" is also problematic as, according to her, it mirrors the ignorance by the international community, in contrast to the term "stateless persons", of the fact that these people lost their protection by their governments and states. Arendt's (1949) reflections, though written over 70 years ago, remain extremely relevant in the field of migration and regarding current developments. While she is speaking about the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and the issues that refugees were facing back then, no international legal background protecting them from their precarious situation as well as the abandonment of the international community, these dynamics are in many ways reproducing itself. The shifting of migration policies towards externalisation practices pushes people on the move into a state of insecurity, the protection of their rights not satisfyingly safeguarded by international legal regimes (Pijnenburg, 2024). From a legal perspective, refugees are protected by international law through the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as the 1967 Protocol and the 1969 Convention (UNHCR, 2010a).

Lebanon has not ratified the Refugee Convention or its protocols but is still bound by the international legal principle of non-refoulement. This fact as well as the definition of the term refugee is especially important for the purpose of this dissertation as refugees are not recognised as such in Lebanon. This creates major issues and additionally raises questions about the EU proclaiming their stance on human rights, reiterating their commitment towards the Refugee Convention while making deals with a country that does not even officially recognise them as refugees. Scholarship shows that the UNHCR's practices in Lebanon are restrained due to the non-ratification as well as the suspension of official registration of Syrian refugees as of 2015 (Janmyr, 2018). The implications of this legal issue for refugees in Lebanon will be shown in the empirical part of the dissertation. In this context, Vara & Matellán (2021) voice that externalising migration management to third countries puts refugees at risk of human rights violations, mentioning Libya and Turkey, both countries the EU made migration deals with, as stakeholders used to prevent migration flows towards Europe. The authors underline that

“transfer of responsibilities to third countries in the management of migration does not exonerate the EU and its Member States from the infringements of human rights that might take place on the territory of third countries” (p. 328). This remains true, even if the demonstration of the violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (Council of Europe, 2021) proves to be complex.

Scholars focused on human rights law and externalisation of migration towards the Mena region all agree on the EU’s responsibility to uphold human right standards even when violations are committed outside of their geographical territory (Mcdonnell, 2024; Liguori, 2019; Müller& Slominski, 2020). While they confidently enumerate jurisprudence concerns for refugees, they fail to engage with the people that are affected themselves.

## 2.2 Between irregularity and illegality

This discussion cannot be led without mentioning the disparities between the usage of the terms “irregular” and “illegal” in the context of migration. Many scholars like Kohlenberger (2022) or Scheel& Squire (2014) have reflected on the question of these terms as well as refugees’ possibilities to seek asylum in their research. If it is “illegal” migration to cross the Mediterranean to seek asylum in Europe, how can a person reach the place of asylum in a legal way (de Oliveira, 2016, p. 168)? Kohlenberger (2022, p. 27) describes this paradox of asylum as the impossibility to seek asylum outside of European borders which leads to refugees having no other way than finding irregular, or as often named, illegal ways to reach Europe. This raises concerns whether the right of asylum is protected if there is no legal way to seek it. How can the protection of asylum-seeking persons be assured if the right to the access to this protection is still being contested? If you must reach the country’s border to officially seek asylum and are not able to do it from an embassy, in what ways does this restrict or hurt international refugee law (de Oliveira, 2016, p. 169)?

Further, the subject of access to mobility regarding which passport one possesses becomes apparent when Ukrainian refugees are allowed to enter the EU without a visa, even before the exceptional regulations of their refugee status were established, but a Syrian passport does not come with the same rights (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 172). The will to host and support Ukrainian refugees, even by countries like Hungary and Poland overtly refusing to do so with refugees from the Mena region, demonstrates the importance of countries’ political will and interests in relation to adhering to international refugee law (Diab, 2022, pp. 40).

In this regard, Cordodel& Fragkou (2024) analyse the legal and policy framework of the EU in the context of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 as well as 2022, comparing migration management between the arrival of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees. In expanding the category of risk management with a biopolitical approach, the authors showcase the racialised dynamics of EU policies categorising Ukrainian refugees “at risk” while refugees from the Mena region are classified “as risks”. They determine “racialized government schemes” (Corcodel& Fragkou, 2024, p. 417) and show how the term

risk is not static but rather used to instrumentalise refugees as either vulnerable or as threats, creating hierarchies between refugees of different origins. Insofar, their framework includes notions of decoloniality and is valuable for this research, rendering visible the racialised policies of the EU which reproduce hierarchies between a white superior Global North and an “irregular” or sometimes framed “illegal” migrant from the Global South.

### 2.3 Human smuggling and trafficking as expressions of externalisation

The reflections on irregularity or illegality regarding migration and especially the crossing of the Mediterranean to reach European land are linked to human smuggling and human trafficking dynamics and experiences. In this regard, existing scholarship on the implications of the EU’s externalisation policies in the Mediterranean examines its connections with and involvement in human smuggling and trafficking. Smuggling is a practice embedded in specific social and political contexts.

Perkowski& Squire (2019) focus on a critique of the European anti-smuggling agenda and show EU institutions’ complicity with smuggling networks by choosing a framework that allows them to juxtapose these practices with the narratives of people on the move. Their approach that both includes elements describing the EU’s migration policy towards human smuggling while increasingly shifting the awareness towards the stories and lived experiences of people who travelled or sought to travel across the Mediterranean harmonises with the aims of this dissertation. This shift towards knowledge production based on qualitative interviews with people narrating their experiences, away from top-down analysis, is necessary in order to fully grasp the complexities of the impacts of EU policies. This is true whether the focus lies on unwrapping the impacts and implications of the EU’s anti-smuggling agenda or on its externalisation policies on people who are directly affected.

Through not guaranteeing legal entry paths, the EU indirectly supports international human smuggling and trafficking which has become a lucrative business. The externalisation policies of the EU are used to prevent arrivals through cooperation with different states from the Mena region, an attempt to halt a phenomenon that they themselves produce, using it as a justification for restrictive policies as well as to blame the smugglers (Corcodel& Fragkou, 2024). Corcodel (2024) links the EU’s externalisation approach to migration to a continued coloniality in EU migration and asylum law that is reproducing racialisation and exclusion of migrants from the Mena region. In addition, many authors have dedicated themselves to questions of international human rights law in the context of the externalisation of migration (Slominski, 2013; Liguori, 2019; Müller& Slominski, 2020; Pricopi, 2020), agreeing on Europe’s responsibility for human rights violations as a consequence of externalising policies. These include enforced border control and militarisation of borders to prevent human smuggling through boats crossing the Mediterranean from countries of the Mena region, push-backs, violations against the principle of non-refoulement and outsourcing of refugees to third countries. Frelick et al. (2016) detect an increasing effort of keeping displaced people out of the EU’s zone of

jurisdiction, developing mechanisms of externalisation that prevent people from reaching EU territory in the first place. This has the aim of preventing obligations of protection and respect of rights of asylum seekers being triggered as is the case when people reach EU ground.

Further, authors like de Oliveira (2016), Aloyo & Cusumano (2021) or Alagna (2023) suggest that assuring legal pathways to entry Europe would limit the demand for smugglers and traffickers, people only resorting to these conditions and sometimes incurring debts as the EU policies do not foresee any practical legal pathways for refugees to leave Lebanon towards Europe. Resettlement stays a faraway dream for almost all refugees currently residing in Lebanon, the UNHCR (2025a, p. 90) projecting 161 400 refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2026, 157 000 of them with Syrian nationality (UNHCR, 2025a, p. 99), Lebanon being the country with the highest needs in the Mena region.

Lebanon's limited capacities to host and protect refugees is linked to a number of aspects. They include the economic crisis since 2019, the ongoing war in Gaza since 2023 and Israeli attacks on Lebanese territory since then, the southern Lebanese border heavily being affected by combats between Israel and Hezbollah. A ceasefire agreement was pronounced end of November 2024, but the Israeli attacks resumed end of March 2025 with a strike on the suburbs of Beirut and went on with attacks in different locations of the country. Moreover, increasingly negative political public discourse, heightened controls and raids, risk of deportation and limitation of access to institutional protection (UNHCR, 2025a, p. 91) shape the current capacities of the country, subjects that will be discussed in the empirical part of this dissertation.

## 2.4 The raciality and coloniality of externalisation

Opi (2021) examines in which ways the EU's strategy of border externalisation impacts refugees on the move towards Europe in countries the EU has signed migration agreements with. He notes that neo-colonial characteristics are inherently reinscribed in the migration deals with the cooperating countries. The dynamics of offshoring migration create the delusion that the Global North's society is now safer and protected from unwanted disposable refugees presenting threats to the EU. While refugees used to be objects of care, now, they are instrumentalised as security threats. They are constructed as strangers, as strange bodies in the host communities, living a life that is shaped by "being out of place" in their daily life and surroundings, this circumstance being shaped by them leaving their homes (Ahmed, 2000, p. 78). Instrumentalising refugees as a potential terror threat to the EU is used to justify anti-Muslim racism (Davis, 2016, p. 83) and has reshaped the form of discrimination of displaced persons wanting to seek asylum in the EU. The images that pop up from time to time in media coverage of refugees in boats arriving at European borders are systematically framed to be perceived as dramatic natural catastrophes, a force of nature that threatens to invade Europe when in fact it is only the result of years and years of a European migration policy focusing on isolation and externalisation of the responsibilities linked to migration (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 18).

EU external migration attempts in the Mena region have further been analysed in the context of Lebanon's behaviour as a refugee hosting country and its cooperation with the European Mediterranean Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (Fakhoury, 2021; Freier et al., 2021). These analyses focusing on the state and institutional level of contestation or acceptance of EU externalising dynamics in the Mena region as well specifically towards Lebanon are certainly helpful to observe how government actors react to EU policies. Nevertheless, they fail to see beyond top-down dynamics and completely neglect to illustrate implications of EU externalisation policies in the Mena region for refugees and the way they shape their social realities.

Further, scholars (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2015; Pallister-Wilkins, 2017; Molnar&Takács, 2021; Cusumano& Riddervold, 2023) have concentrated on the EU's different instruments for enforced border control, militarising the EU's external borders through Frontex, through the launch of maritime operations like Sophia or Eunavfor MED Irini (Riddervold, 2018; Pricopi, 2020; Laux, 2021), but also private security companies, constructing an industry of border management. These maritime missions that served as an instrument of externalising migration fostered the practice of curbing migration and keeping people from arriving on EU territory. Their presence did not foresee a focus on safe and rescue (SAR) activities but instead served as a symbol of border enforcement to decrease migratory flows (Cusumano, 2019). "The EU borderscapes of the 21th (sic!) century are thus characterized by multi-local suffering as a system has been constructed, which offers protection nowhere, and produces rights violations elsewhere" (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2015, p.414).

While morality and ethics are deemed as a very Western approach, the EU finds itself as a carrier of double standards, preaching about human rights while fostering the dehumanisation of refugees. The referral to the EU's high humanitarian norms and practices as is practiced throughout its migration discourse is stained with a bitter taste when looking at actual practices of offshoring refugees to third countries and rendering it more and more difficult for them to access their right to asylum (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 57). This restriction of accessing the right of asylum and the shift of a focus towards externalisation through third country deals had already been increasingly establishing a couple of years back. This is an important aspect to take into account for this research as the current dynamics that shape the EU's migration strategy towards Lebanon and the impacts for refugee communities there did not appear out of the blue but are embedded in an already long-time ongoing colonialist process.

## 2.5 Externalisation through deals with third countries

Throughout the years, the EU has made agreements and deals with several countries, starting with a significant migration deal of 6 billion euros with Turkey in 2016 (European Commission, 2015) to prevent Syrian refugees from crossing the borders to the EU and following deals with countries in the Mena region like Tunisia and Egypt. Refugee commodification as described by Freier et al. (2021, p. 2748) is exactly what is happening through all the migration deals that the EU has been making over

recent years. Refugees are being instrumentalised to either gain financial profits or to bargain their staying away from Europe, completely ignoring humanitarian principles. While the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration refers to the deals with third countries showing effect, less migrants crossing the Mediterranean, and claims that this type of international cooperation with third countries aims to prevent dangerous journeys and saves lives in doing so (Brunner, 2024, p. 43), the externalisation strategy of the EU is not in any way tackling root problems of migration but instead focusing on symptom control (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 20). I argue that this is also happening in regard to Lebanon, reproducing problems in the lives of refugees and creating new issues they have to cope with in their daily lives as will be shown in the empirical chapter.

In this regard, it is as well necessary to understand the historical role of Lebanon as a refugee hosting country of threatened minorities in the Middle East (Diab& Jouhari, 2023, p. 3) and how these structures have shaped the current situation. Lebanon plays an important role for its status as a refugee host country, not only the economic crisis pushing the country to its limits but also the involvement of Syria in the Lebanese civil war and their occupation of Lebanon for decades challenge the country's as well as the Lebanese population's attitude towards Syrian refugees (Borelli et al., 2025, p. 7). Furthermore, Lebanon is a country fitting approximately 413 times into the EU but is hosting the highest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometre worldly. The Lebanese government estimates a count of 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 11 238 refugees with other nationalities (UNHCR, 2024a) as well as 200 000 Palestinian refugees due to the ongoing war in Gaza (OCHA, 2025) in the country. This clearly showcases the EU's failure to comply with the Refugee Convention's principle of burden sharing (UNHCR, 2010a). States in the Global South hosting displaced populations have become more and more aware of their geopolitical positions in the context of migration dynamics and the control of a certain migration "diplomacy" of making sure refugees stay within their borders in monetary exchange with the Global North that is increasingly dependent on them to keep the refugees from entering their territories (Freier and al. 2021, p. 2748).

In 2024, the 1 billion euro deal EU with Lebanon was made to improve border and migration control, to foster border management cooperation that could guarantee halting arrivals of irregular migrants to the EU and in exchange get financial support to care for refugee population (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2024). Even though the deal marks an important moment in the migration relations between the EU and Lebanon and reconfirms the EU's main goals of rendering Lebanon into an externalised border, it is nevertheless crucial to not solely focus on this specific deal from 2024 as it only represents one point in a process of the EU's externalisation migration policies towards Lebanon and did not happen in a vacuum. The larger context as well as prior developments and factors influencing the situation in Lebanon need to be considered.

The cooperation between the EU and Lebanon in migration is regulated by the ENP since 2004 which was renewed in 2021, with the Lebanon Compact being introduced in 2016. The Compact foresaw

support for the Lebanese economy in exchange for increased policymaking to improve Syrian refugees' situations but failed to achieve its objectives (Forster & Knudsen, 2022). Moreover, an agreement between Cyprus and Lebanon was established in October 2020, agreeing on the interception of migrant boats departing from Lebanon and their coordinated return.

The two routes that are relevant for the Lebanese case are the so-called Eastern Mediterranean route, entering the EU through Cyprus or Greece, and Central Mediterranean route, entering through Italy (Diab & Jouhari, 2023, p. 7). It is a complex undergoing to find exact numbers of migration attempts, and whether they were failed or successful, as findings from the different data-collecting agencies, both official EU agencies like Frontex as well as international organisations like the UNHCR or the International Organization for Migration (IOM), are sometimes incomplete or contradictory. It was nevertheless observed that there was a yearly increase of people attempting to migrate from Lebanon's coast to the EU till 2023 (Diab & Jouhari, 2023, pp. 7), this situation changing for the year 2024 seeing a decrease with 26% less refugees arriving in Europe from Lebanon (IOM, 2025a, p. 14).

## 2.6 Failing the principle of protection

Kheshen (2024) and Borrelli et al. (2025) further see a risk of fundamental international norms and laws aiming for the protection of refugees being threatened and potentially compromised through the EU's migration policies and this process having drastic implications for refugee communities. "In the case of Europe, it's the violence of austerity and borders where migrant lives are negated, allowed to drown in sea buffer zones" (Davis, 2016, p. xiii). Policymakers need to consider their responsibility in the approach of offshoring migration which has effects passing their borders, directly affecting refugees' realities (Borelli et al., 2025, p. 9). "[I]nternational refugee law remains only as strong as the underlying political will, interests, and fears" (Diab, 2022, p. 41). The EU focuses on the externalisation of the management of refugees to reduce their obligations regarding international refugee law and the principle of non-refoulement (Diab, 2022, p. 40). The externalisation of migration to third countries allows the EU in some respect to ignore their self-declared principles as guardian of universal human rights as they are pushing responsibility to act in conformity with international human rights to their partner countries where the refugees are hosted (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 92). Kohlenberger (2022, p. 21) sees it as paradoxical to first question refugees' rights, rights that have been contested and fought for historically, and subsequently grant them humanitarian aid, in third countries, expecting unconditional gratitude in return for something that is specified in international law. The EU's continued strategy of outsourcing migration is now expanded by efforts of the European Commission to guarantee faster deportations, to allow deportation centres ("return hubs") in third countries as well as voicing the European Return Order (ERO), the evaluation of people that, regarding certain still unspecified criteria, pose a higher security risk (European Commission, 2025a). The proposal is still undergoing the review of the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2025).

In addition, the proposal from the European Commission (2025b) of the “save third countries” concept is aiming to render possible to send asylum seekers to non-member states of the EU even if the person does not have any prior connection to that country.

As shown, there is a lot of research on the direct visibilities the EU’s externalisation policies is producing including push-backs, the conditionalities of human smuggling and trafficking in the Mediterranean from the Mena region or the EU’s different marine missions of increasing border control (Aloyo& Cusumano, 2021; Alagna, 2023; Perkowski& Squire, 2019). Additionally, questions about protection through international human rights law and its violations through externalisation policies as well as moral responsibilities towards people on the move have been debated extensively (Pijnenburg, 2024; Slominski, 2013; Müller& Slominski, 2020; McDonnell, 2024).

Nevertheless, the existing literature on the implications of these academically well-known and widely problematised issues falls short to provide satisfying answers for the research questions of this dissertation. While these scholars produce valuable knowledge on different aspects of the dynamics of the EU’s externalisation of migration towards the Mena region, they fail to encompass a view that goes deeper into the realities of the people affected. While research on Lebanon in this regard does exist (Janmyr, 2018; Kiwan, 2019; Tsourapas, 2019; Fakhoury, 2021& 2022; Facon, 2022) again it does not sufficiently capture dynamics on the ground and often stays on an institutional level. This does in no way mean that their contributions are not very relevant and valuable, but it needs expanding of their research on a level that shifts away from ignoring people on the move themselves and integrates and directly centres the lived realities of refugees.

With this research, I aim to contribute to the existing scholarship on externalisation of migration towards the Mena region. Most scholarship on the subject fails to see the underlying continuing coloniality of externalisation migration policies.

I seek to fill the gap in the current literature by complementing it with an alternative way of looking at externalisation, working with a decolonial people-centred framework which provides the capacity to shed a light on the more invisible dynamics of the EU’s exclusionary migration strategy and its implications for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The next chapter is dedicated to explaining the theoretical framework that underlies this research as well as elaborations on why the application of this approach is relevant for this specific research.

### 3 Theoretical Framework

After the discussion of the externalisation of the EU migration strategy, in what ways it manifests itself and a first insight into its impacts on third countries and the refugee population, now follows a deeper discussion of the used theories and the final framework that underlies this research. In order to find the appropriate theory for the existing research puzzle and the research questions raised in this regard, it is necessary to take into account existing different theoretical approaches and observe in which ways they can contribute and in which they fail to provide answers.

#### 3.1 The road towards decolonial theory

Securitisation of the EU migration policy has been researched broadly over the last couple of years (Léonard& Kaunert, 2022; Moffette& Vadasaria, 2016; Paterson& Mulvey, 2023), also in combination with feminist theories (Stachowitsch& Sachseder, 2019) as well as in the context of externalisation of migration towards Lebanon (Meier, 2021; Beck, 2023). While I mentioned the instrumentalisation of refugees as threats and their simultaneous securitisation linked to EU migration discourses and practices in previous sections, securitization theory has its limits, especially regarding my research. My focus is not to showcase the way the EU is securitising refugees and migrants in general, this can undoubtedly be done through analysing the Pact on Migration and Asylum coming into effect mid-2026 (European Commission, 2024), other policy documents, press conferences, speeches and interviews by representatives of the European Commission, however, the implications of these processes of securitisation stay in the dark. Securitization theory often suffers from Eurocentrism (Buzan& Hansen, 2009; Barkawi& Laffey, 2006), fails to integrate aspects of decolonisation (Bertrand, 2018 ; Gomes& Marques, 2021) and to engage with the pursued methodological approach of focusing on the narratives of the Syrian refugees I interviewed. The complex implications of the externalisation policies of the EU on their social realities reach so much further than the traditional concept of securitisation allows to detect and analyse (Markiewicz, 2023). Moreover, securitisation theory fails to encompass notions of gender which leads to silent voices being prevented from entering the arena of subjects considered as deserving protection (Hansen, 2000).

As colonialist structures are essential for this research, postcolonial theory is of essential value. Even though Fanon's discussion, which can be considered a cornerstone of postcolonial and critical race theory analysing racism, colonialism and their effects on the colonised dates back almost 40 years, his statement about Europe being inherently racist (1986, p. 92), remains true today. He prophesied colonial continuity (Fanon, 1961) that is now inherent in migration dynamics of the Global North. The deeply rooted racism linked to the colonial history as well as its continuation today in different, less apparent and transparent ways, mirrors in the migration strategy and policies of the Global North and, specifically relevant for this work, the EU.

Nevertheless, the prefix “post” in postcolonial theory implies a notion of the past, something that has already ended. While this certainly proves useful it can also potentially mislead to the belief that colonialism is over and not still affecting current global hierarchies and power dynamics. This is where the prefix “de” in decolonial offers a more radical approach of deconstructing continuous practices of colonialism and represents a process of opposing domination in a more active and reiterative way than postcolonialism does (Mignolo, 2007). In this regard, I deem it important to underline that stressing congruities and highlighting common denominators is essential when taking into account different terms like postcolonial, anticolonial and decolonial and their respective theories (Bhambra, 2014). Despite their varying emphases and the importance of language choice in research, they nevertheless are similar in their core critique and spirit to express resistance against colonial domination and a world free of colonialist dynamics (Parrenas et al., 2017; Thomas, 2020). Therefore, while I predominantly work with a decolonial framework in this dissertation, this can in no way be done without overlapping postcolonial ideas and principles.

### 3.2 Decolonising migration studies

This dissertation applies a decolonising approach to migration studies and as this field is engaging with processes of decolonisation, borders, mobility, nationalisms and migration, questions of the limited reflection of academic dynamics in the field as discussed in the literature review are imminent. Colonialising dominating practices continuously reinvent themselves in present Europe, often hidden under the light of vocalised progressiveness and the protection of human rights. This aspect of colonialist dynamics also plays a relevant role in the field of migration and will be mentioned in the empirical part of this dissertation.

Vergès (2019, p. 30) elaborates on the colonialist dynamics regarding France and its policies in her book but this idea can also be understood and developed in the contexts of the European migration regime: Without the existence of colonialism in the past, we would not have a Europe reproducing this structural racism, imperialism and orientalism through its migration policies and strategies. Colonialist practices are not part of the past but still manifest their ways through racialised and gendered discourses (Smith, 2021, p. 52), as well as through legal practices. Critical migration scholars like De Genova (2013) have elaborated on the ways in which refugees’ “illegality” is transformed into a natural and ahistorical notion within the Global North’s current law, this constructed illegality being highly neocolonial.

The West is still making ideological claims of being superior to other parts of the world, this becomes apparent in the externalising migration policies applied by the EU. Orientalist clichés (Said, 2003) are reinvented to justify a strategy of enforcing border control and “protecting” Europe from the securitised refugee, instrumentalised and imagined as an intruder, a terrorist or simply a threat. That these externalisation policies have further implications for the social realities of Syrian refugees in

Lebanon and in what complex ways they manifest themselves, often not visible at first sight, is the central quest of this research. I aim to connect the EU's externalising colonialist and racialised migration policies to the effects on Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon and to render these dynamics more transparent.

Considerations on the ongoing impacts of colonisation, of epistemic authority, on how and by whom research is shaped are significant and a responsibility of everyone working in the field of migration studies, going beyond superficial levels. The term decolonisation has been trending in education which goes hand in hand with the risk of using the term as a simple metaphor when writing academically and wanting to use a decolonising theory, potentially leading to a too simplistic adoption of decolonising discourses (Tuck & Yang, 2021, pp. 2). In this regard, it is a responsibility as a white researcher to understand that the scientific and academic discussion is predominantly one that is set by rules of the Global North, dictating in what ways knowledge can be created and understood (Smith, 2021, p. 50). The coloniality of migration studies persists, white scholars are still dominating the field (Raghuram & Sondhi, 2023). The approach to the research of this dissertation follows the conviction that research is an extension of knowledge (Smith, 2021, p. 225). Decolonisation needs to be more than just a simple buzzword to attract readers or to follow into a line of what is in academic "fashion" momentarily. Unfortunately, most academic arguments are Eurocentric and focused on the Global North. Decolonisation entails a reflective and critical understanding of the researcher regarding the ways in which imperialism and colonialism play into the shaping of knowledge building in academic contexts (Smith, 2021, p. 22) and the ways in which we as scholars reproduce coloniality (Raghuram & Sondhi, 2023, p. 13). Citing scholars from the Global South is not enough, only understanding and applying that knowledge leads to decolonisation without appropriating it.

Moreover, as Nassr-Eddin and Abu-Assab (2020, pp. 194) argue, we need to be critical of the terms Global North and Global South, switching from the designation "East" and "West" does not mean that we do not have to stay aware of the eventualities of reproducing certain binary notions like ignoring differences in privileges or poverty, class, gender, racial, and ethnic inequalities in the Global North. The Global South should not be generalised as a place of misery and the Global North as a (safe) haven, it is from a very colonial perspective to do so. Additionally, the assumption that there is only one political agenda or people in the Global South pulling on one string is simplistic (Nassr-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 192) and calls for a deconstruction of the Global South. A decolonial approach is crucial in order to unlearn history as we have been taught, reclaiming realities of places (Nassr-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 195). This also means to unlearn that only abiding by hegemonic Western discourses and rules is the way to do research. As Vergès (2021, p. 19) states in this context of moving away from mainstream colonialist practices in academic research, "there is a difference between aid and radical criticism of colonialism and capitalism, and between aid and fighting against exploitation and injustice." We need to look at the structures of oppression and fight to change the colonial system in place instead

of scratching the surface and addressing the symptoms. Current EU externalising migration policies represent one of these oppressing colonialist structures.

Decolonisation of research can only happen when knowledge is produced that has causes of oppression at its core and focuses on the roots of these issues. It should never be about claiming to have the solution or to be the saviour, it is about a solidarity that connects each other (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 196). According to Mahmud (2017), a critical theory of Europe can also be developed from within.

Writing about Europe from within is therefore a fundamental deconstructive operation for a critical theory of Europe. It is the decolonial work that many anthropologists of Europe have been carrying out by making visible the cultural practices and worldviews that enchant Europe with symbolic and political value. Writing *out* of Europe, therefore, acquires a third sense, a deconstructive sense. (Mahmoud, 2017, p. 280)

This allows to deconstruct and decolonise from a perspective that the postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1999) calls critical intimacy. According to her, writing from within, in my case from within Europe, enables to form a constructive decolonial critique and deconstruction of colonialist practices. The familiarity and intimacy with the EU can be used not to recentre Europe but to destabilize its hegemonies through an inside revolt against its narratives. A critical approach is further relevant to this research insofar as it places value on the impact for the community the researcher is engaging with (Diab, 2025a).

### 3.3 The role of feminist theories

For the purpose of underlining why it is crucial to add a feminist component to the theoretical background of this research, not simply abiding with the framework of decoloniality, the next section focuses on understanding why expanding decolonial theories with feminist theory is essential to this research.

Davis contextualises feminism as an approach that cannot be put into one single box but instead is a form of conceptualisation as well as a methodology and a confidant to find techniques for addressing struggles (Davis, 2016, p. 28). “Feminism insists on methods of thought and action that urge us to think about things together that appear to be separate, and to disaggregate things that appear to naturally belong together” (Davis, 2016, p. 111). In the context of this research, it is necessary to understand that feminist theory is not simply tailored towards detecting and fighting the structural oppression of persons defined as women but as well any person in an unprivileged role living in a patriarchal system. Vergès specifies the ability of feminism to discern this systemic discrimination and marginalization of refugees in affirming that “[w]hat justifies a reappropriation of the term ‘feminism’ is that its theories and practices are rooted in the awareness of a profound, concrete, daily experience of oppression produced by the state–patriarchy–capital matrix” (Vergès, 2021, p. 23). Hence, structural racialised oppression of

marginalised people can be detected and looked at through choosing a feminist lens in research (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 199).

### 3.3.1 Elements of intersectionality

Crenshaw expanded feminist theory with the term intersectionality in 1989 and depicts its experience through the examination of how courts frame and interpret Black women's stories as plaintiffs (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 141). The concept of intersectionality describes how people are disadvantaged, discriminated and marginalised through multiple categories of identities like race, gender or class that intersect with each other and reproduce societal hierarchies (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 151). The failure to consider intersectionality reproduces the discrimination and marginalisation of specific groups. As Crenshaw states: "Race and sex, moreover, become significant only when they operate to explicitly disadvantage the victims; because the privileging of whiteness or maleness is implicit, it is generally not perceived at all" (p. 151). As Bhopal (2023) underlines, White privilege needs to be acknowledged through the recognition of a racial hegemony that seeks to maintain Whiteness on top of a colonialist hierarchy which is framed and reproduced through an inherently racialised system comprising not just laws or political structures, but also daily-life structures. Consequently, a "lack of an intersectional perspective prevents us from ascertaining how colonialism is itself a gendered process" (Smith& Kauanui, 2008, p. 247).

The creation of the image of an unwanted non-white refugee from the Global South cannot be understood without a reflection upon historically produced racialisation and colonial continuity (Mégret, 2021). This notion of intersectional discrimination can be detected through the framing and instrumentalisation of male Muslim immigrants as dangerous, terrorists or potential threats, while female Muslim immigrants are mainly viewed as vulnerable and victims that have to be saved, linking to a notion of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988, p. 289). Furthermore, the concept of intersectionality is especially helpful in the contexts of conducting this research as it allows for a deeper and more complex analysis of the different layers of discriminations and marginalisations that refugee communities are facing in Lebanon.

Crenshaw (1989, p. 154) insists that when feminist theory does not include the role of race in its analysis, solely focusing on white women's experiences in patriarchy, certain privileges are overlooked, and the feminism remains white. This argument connects to the principles of decolonial feminism, which I will elaborate later, and the term civilizational feminism coined by Verges (2019) through which she describes white western feminism that fails to encompass the role of slavery, of colonialism and imperialism. Similarly, hooks (1984, pp. x) criticises feminism that has its emergence from privileged women, lacking the variety of human experiences. She contests that it will both need privileged and marginalised individuals to bring forward a visionary feminist theory as white women controlling the feminist discourse have been ignorant of their white privilege. Moreover, Western feminism, while

fighting on many fronts, still neglects the problematic reproduction of world views and value systems dictated by the Global North as well as the distinction from an “Other” (Smith, 2021, p. 50). Feminism as used in this research is based on a notion of intersectionality that steps on the ignorance of those analyses which ignore or fail to encompass interconnected categories of discrimination and marginalisation like sex, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, class or ability, as nothing is rooted in isolation (Davis, 2016, p. 44).

Nevertheless, while intersectionality remains an important milestone of feminist theory that most academics applying feminist theories could not imagine excluding from their framework, decolonial feminism sees limits to this concept on its own as the aspect of colonial and imperial power structures that shape oppression is lost (Vergès, 2019, p. 34). Davis (2016, pp. 18) reiterates the importance of intersectionality in research but also links the concept to an upper scale of sexism, racism as well as the often-untreated aspect of imperialist dynamics in our societies.

Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality has unfortunately been appropriated by hegemonic discourses of the Global North in the context of migration, gender and sexualities, it often nowadays only functions as a label (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, pp. 193). According to Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab (2020, p. 193), while oppressive structures affect us differently, intersectional academia sometimes fails to bring together different struggles, neglecting to move beyond identities in order to mobilise against a mutual opponent, a system that exploits, makes suffer, infuses pain, inequalities, injustice, suppression and misery. Decolonial feminism expands what intersectionality cannot do, adding the aspect of colonial and imperial power structures that shape the oppression of specific groups of people like refugees. Bringing these frameworks together allows to combine gender politics with critical race theory and colonial power structures. Intersectionality, feminism and decoloniality complement each other, all coming from a perspective of marginalised rather than from a privileged or dominant one, as well as setting importance on an aware approach of positionality and self-reflection (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 200).

### 3.4 Arriving at a decolonial feminist intersectional framework

Decolonial feminism developed in regions of the Global South, feminist movements fighting together in a joint battle against politics of colonialisation, dispossession, structural sexual violence and femicide (Vergès, 2019, p. 20). Vergès (2019) advocates that through decolonial feminism coloniality and slavery are not contextualised as sole remnants of the past but instead as reoccurring notions that still play a crucial part in understanding nowadays practices infused with racialising and sexualising strategies. The decolonial feminist intersectional framework allows to think both about the reasons behind migration as well as the stories unfolding behind them, listening to people in the Global South taking on these journeys, as lies at the core of this dissertation.

As discussed in the literature review, externalising migration policies are inherently colonial. They instrumentalise refugees through orientalist framings (Said, 2003) that rely on defining and framing them as threats to the EU, as potential terrorists spreading violence and barbarism that the EU has to protect itself, its economy and social structures from. The colonialist characterisation of people into the “frightening other” that needs to be securitised interplays with the externalisation of migration policy towards countries of the Global South. Feminism helps to understand this interconnectedness of power dynamics between the ones framed as active and speakers, the Global North and specifically the EU for this research, and the others, refugees of the Global South, as having the passive role of being talked about and spoken for (Ahmed, 2000, p. 61).

Vergès (2019, p. 25) finds that the ideology of defining the Global South as inferior to the Global North persists, whether it is in the context of political or media discourses or practices, or in academia. This is specifically relevant for this research in regard to the EU’s externalising migration practices that are imposed on countries of the Global South like Lebanon through cooperation agreements and deals that provide financial means in exchange for their pursuit of assimilating their migration policies. Farris (2017) problematises this notion of instrumentalising Lebanon as an “underdeveloped” country of the Global South and describing it “as an entirely “non-western” problem, rather than as largely the result of western colonialism and continuous exploitation of the resources of non-western regions” (p. 141).

What Quijano (1991; 1994) described in his work translates to present migration policy dynamics. Colonialist imaginations lead to the assignment of certain characteristics to refugees which are as a consequence defined as risks that the Global North needs to safeguard itself from through increased border control management. These control strategies reinscribe colonial dynamics, keeping undesired subjects from entering EU territory in order to deny them rights that they could not as easily refuse them if they did indeed manage to enter (Jerrems, 2019: 15). “The correlation between externalisation and control is effective to regulate power relations, as well as to introduce a new form of coloniality that coexists with the evolution of power relations at a worldwide scale” (Afailal& Fernandez, 2018, p. 218).

Hence, a feminism that does not take into account coloniality imposes its limited understandings on the Global South and in doing so reproduces racist dynamics and orientalist notions as well as replacing the original enemy, white patriarchal, state and capitalist structures, with Islam (Vergès, 2019). The concept of femonationalism (Farris, 2017) describes how feminist ideals are misused by European politicians to campaign against migrants and Islam. The core argument of femonationalist discourses is that Muslim men and migrants from the Mena region in general cannot comply with feminist ideas of equality due to their cultural roots. While these femonationalist dynamics (Farris, 2017) shape today’s EU migration discourse and the rhetoric of many European politicians, the aim of this research is not to analyse and discuss the different notions of the European migration discourse and in what ways it shapes the constructed perception of refugees as well as instrumentalises Islam for political means of scapegoating one specific community. Islamophobia and orientalist aspects are nevertheless linked to this research as the EU partly justifies its externalisation policies through femonationalist arguments

portraying male refugees as threats endangering the (imagined) equality between men and women in Europe (Colella, 2021; Fanghanel, 2022; Rahbari, 2021; Delgado Morán & Teano, 2020; Fernandes et al., 2025).

Decolonial feminism takes on these femonationalist arguments and the subject of the externalisation of migration and allows to expand existing theories with factors of coloniality and imperialism that otherwise are not, or not sufficiently, highlighted in research. Additionally, it is also a fight for epistemic justice, a critique of white-centred academia, demanding the equal value of knowledges and contesting the imposed supremacy of knowledge of the Global North.

Davis (2016, pp. 20) insists on the necessity of creating a framework that is aware of and able to connect various issues and social struggles together, having to engage people through raising awareness that they are affected in the long run as well. While she focuses on the struggle of Ferguson and Palestine, this idea remains true for dynamics linked to migration and the imperialist system that fosters the displacement of people. In this sense, this research wishes to contribute to the collective resistance against an international migration system that is neglecting its humanitarian values through externalising migration and offshoring refugees.

It is when feminism touches and affects people or also academic research that normally would not identify with feminist ideas, concepts or theories, when the field of migration studies finds itself questioning its former or traditional approaches often linked to top-down strategies, it is then that feminist theory in academia attains its fullest power. Through adding the decolonial lens, underlying colonialities of Western, and in this case EU's migration practices, can be uncovered and exposed (Quijano, 2007). The present moment we are living in now is inseparable from coloniality which is mirrored in nowadays externalising migration strategies (Afailal & Fernandez, 2018). Decolonial feminist theory renders it increasingly impossible to stick to certain traditional concepts and theories as well as to particular methodologies that do not take into account the various relevant dynamics that are also interconnected with migration studies. Patriarchal structures, power hierarchies, systematic inequalities, intersectionality, colonialism and imperialism are all aspects that feminism is able to address and that are very relevant in regard to this research.

To sum up, the decolonial feminist intersectional framework can therefore be defined as combining the principles of decolonial theory, feminism and intersectionality with the aim of detecting and analysing multifaceted elements of oppression. At the core of this framework lie the contestation of dominant power structures and narratives as well as the emphasis on centring marginalised voices. In regard to the specific focus of this dissertation, the complementation of migration studies with this framework is crucial as it complements and expands traditional views of scholarship on externalising elements and dynamics of the EU's migration policies. Thus, aspects that would otherwise remain undetected can be rendered visible.

In this regard, this dissertation aims to expand the underexplored usage of a decolonial feminist intersectional framework in migration studies (Cappiali & Pacciardi, 2025). While there are scholars

stressing the necessity to decolonise migration studies and working with a decolonial framework (Bashi, 2023; Astolfo& Allsopp, 2023; Padilla, 2025; Dos Ventos Lopes Heimer, 2021) or a decolonial feminist framework (França& Oliveira, 2022; Landström& Crawley, 2024; Sahraoui, 2024; Garny& Neji, 2024), research that looks at the externalisation of migration and its impacts on refugee communities using a decolonial feminist intersectional framework remains insufficient.

## 4 Methodology

The methodology for this work was chosen in line with a decolonial feminist intersectional framework as discussed in the section on the theoretical approach of this dissertation with the aim to “produc[e] knowledge that actually points out these intersecting and interlocking systems of oppression” (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 193). Decolonial methodology relates back to this approach aiming to create a platform for decolonial research, people at the receiving end of colonialism describing their lived realities themselves instead of describing it for them (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 196). “Decolonialism allows people to define themselves, it allows people to find their own terms and terminologies” (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 197).

This does not eliminate the asymmetrical power dynamics between researcher and researched. It is therefore a necessity for researchers to reflect on their privileged role in relation to the individuals they include in their study and the power dynamics that shape this relationship between researcher and subjects of research. Having the role of a privileged researcher means becoming aware of the responsibility that comes with it, the power dynamics that somehow allow the researcher to distort, render invisible or overemphasise certain aspects or outcomes of the research in the context of an ideological framework that might not be visible at first sight but lingers in the background. It is a path of being in the privileged position of having the power to either expand knowledge or reproduce ignorance (Smith, 2021, p. 229). Ahmed states that we need to shift our focus from the “production of otherness to the (re)production of strangeness” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 61), meaning that we need to complement our research with questions about existing epistemic power dynamics deciding who is speaking, for, about, with or to whom. Hence, decolonial methodology bases itself on the premise of exposing colonialist structures, directing its attention towards research subjects that tend to be neglected or are often not visible at first sight. Reflexivity and self-awareness of the researcher play a crucial role as well as a shift towards a democratization of research, not insisting on a specific method but insisting on the involvement and participation of the vulnerable researched communities (Denscombe, 2025; Thambinathan& Kinsella, 2021).

Decolonisation starts with the method (Raghuram& Sondhi, 2023, p. 6). The decolonial methodological framework supports methods like participatory research that support the co-creation of knowledge with the community members that are participating in the research (Raghuram& Sondhi, 2023, p. 9). Participatory research refuses monology and searches for a dialogic exploration of knowledge production (Ahmed, 2000, p. 63). Ahmed (2000, pp. 62) suggests methods that place the informant on an equal level as the researcher, creating a shaping of knowledge that is based on listening, cooperation and collaboration instead of extraction, shaping knowledge together, democratising knowledge production and ethnography. “When we think about policy and practice, we cannot create change without listening to the experiences of people on the ground, and their own needs and their own voices” (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 192). Some researchers, and I want to consider myself part

of them, root their academic purpose in doing research that involves people marginalised by society and the work for and with these communities to establish positive change. “If one is interested in society then it is often in the margins that aspects of a society are revealed as microcosms of the larger picture or as examples of a society’s underbelly” (Smith, 2021, p. 260). Doing research within marginalised communities asks for research tools that allow marginalised voices that are often silenced to be expressed and strive to portray the lived experiences in a sincere and authentic manner (Smith, 2021, p. 261). This is why this research is based on a decolonial trauma-informed and participatory approach, not only integrating the experiences and stories narrated by the participants but also recognising the psychological and emotional effects and input on both the participants as well as the researcher themselves.

There is no easy guideline to follow when aiming to produce decolonial knowledge, what is central though is to go beyond rhetorical promises of decolonisation, to orientate oneself and admit to the limitations of the research (Raghuram& Sondhi, 2023). This understanding is challenging to make work in practice as it needs a lot of self-reflection, self-critique and taking responsibility for your work. In this regard, researchers are obligated to go beyond simplistically following their personal beliefs, presuppositions and expectations as well as realise in what ways their interactions in the context of their research impacts the people they interview or include in their research (Smith, 2021, pp.222). Moreover, it is the duty of feminists to question themselves, the theories and methods they are applying as well as inquiring what they might miss or what is not visible to their eyes (Vergès, 2019, p. 33).

Questions that need to be part of a decolonising methodology include by whom the research puzzle is defined, who the research is relevant for and of value and who is deciding that, what knowledge can be gained for the community and the researcher, if there are possible negative outcomes and if so how they can be prevented and finally, who the researcher reports to and in what ways they and their research are supported (Smith, 2021, p. 226). This includes reflecting on the prepared interview questions as well as the engagement with used terms that might sheer the research in a specific direction. Another aspect needed to take into consideration especially when working with minority or vulnerable groups like is the case in this research is not to victimise the community or denying them their agency, even when the intrinsic motivation for the study is to improve the communities’ lives (Smith, 2021, p. 228). The complexity of their stories and the highlighting of their narrated nuanced experiences are theirs to define, the methodology refraining from viewing them as numbers or statistics (Kanso, 2025).

To sum up, emphasising participatory research methods diversifies, redesigns and dehomogenises research, challenges humanitarian narratives of homogeneity and works at the intersection of vulnerability, while focusing on conducting ethical research. Furthermore, trauma-informed participatory research is an inclusive approach that promotes storytelling and the agency and dignity of the participants, producing knowledge that has the aim to be created for and, most importantly, with them.

#### 4.1 Fieldwork in Lebanon

In line with the decolonial methodology, I conducted qualitative fieldwork in Beirut, Lebanon from March till June 2025. I did my field research in accordance with both ISCTE ethical guidelines as well as the Lebanese American University's (LAU) with which I was affiliated as a visiting research fellow. It involved meeting and talking with experts in the field of migration and the region and Syrian refugees. Semi-structured interviews were chosen and guided in line with the aforementioned principles of the decolonial methodology as well as the defined research questions. This allowed me to aim for a dialogic knowledge production with the concerned community, the Syrian refugees interviewed narrating and explaining their stories themselves instead of being spoken for and the experts interviewed representing a collaboration and expansion of co-created knowledge. Taking these aforementioned aspects into account means conducting the interviews with respect and empathy towards the lived experiences and narrations and uncompromisingly and meaningfully placing the people most impacted by the studied issues in the center of the research in prioritising and involving their voices in the process of the research (Diab, 2025a, p. 3). In this regard, it is essential not to fall into the trap of using the term to "give voice" as this again would rely on colonialist notions of a superior Global North instrumentalizing itself as the saviour, reproducing power hierarchies.

Although the focus does lie on the experiences of different people, as being true for the led interviews during this research, this does in no way mean that the decolonial feminist intersectional perspective has its focus on the individualisation of people. It instead aims for a critique of the hegemonic systems in place (Nassr-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020).

For this research, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted during my fieldwork in Beirut, 10 with Syrian refugees, 9 with experts on the topic. The details and conditions of the interviews will be outlined in the next section, first discussing the modalities of the interviews led with the 10 Syrian participants, subsequently describing the outlines of the interviews conducted with 9 experts.

I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with 10 Syrian refugees. The focus on Syrian refugees was consciously chosen as they represent the largest refugee community in Lebanon, at the same time 48.4% (ODP, 2025) not possessing the official UNHCR refugee status which renders them especially vulnerable in numerous regards illustrated in the following analysis. Conducting interviews with refugees from different nationalities, while being very valuable to create a well-grounded overview of refugee's hardships in Lebanon, would have led to the research losing its specificity.

In addition, it is in no way the intention of this research to downplay or dismiss the issues being created for the social realities of internally displaced people inside of Lebanon due to the ongoing conflict with Israel, tensions between Hezbollah and Israel escalating with the outbreak of the war in Gaza in October 2023. Cross-border clashes led to vast destruction of houses and infrastructure, creating a precarious living environment and increased poverty in a country already struggling politically and

economically. There are currently 875.2 thousand internally displaced persons in Lebanon (IOM, 2025b). Even though their destinies deserve attention and awareness, including all internally displaced persons in Lebanon in this research would accumulate to a research that loses its specificity and particularity, drifting away from a people focused approach to a generalised set of data that fails to highlight and demonstrate the specificities of each case or the complexity of displacement and differences of affectedness depending on the unique vulnerable marginalised group.

Moreover, while all interviewed participants were of Syrian nationality, diversity within this aspect was ensured through interviewing people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, different age ranges, different years of arrival in Lebanon, gender parity as well as both participants that fled to Lebanon with their families and on their own, aiming to shape an inclusive and differentiated image and portrayal of the Syrian refugee community. Moreover, dehomogeneity of the research is maintained as the complexity of different issues within the Syrian refugee community linked to specificities concerning Syrian regional backgrounds, religious affiliation, gender and age is very vast. Therefore, while the narrations in the interviews do not capture the whole and complex spectrum of experiences within refugee communities in Lebanon, they do paint a diverse and specified picture of the complex situation.

The participants were recruited through a cooperation with an independent, non-profit, non-governmental Lebanese-registered local NGO in Beirut that has well-established community centers and strong relations with refugee communities. Core conditions, commitments and responsibilities of the partnership were defined in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by both parties. This included transparency and accountability, a high level of communication as well as sensibility and respect towards the agreed roles. Additionally, it remained an untouchable principle and priority throughout the interview process to curb the risks of possible negative implications for the participants while setting up the framework and settings of the interviews.

Through this collaboration a diverse representation of participants was facilitated, ensuring gender parity, age range, different years of arrival in Lebanon, social status, educational and working background, variation in religious background, different places of regional origin and displacement experiences. After the NGO provided the researcher with a list of participants that aligned with the research criteria, the final selection comprised 5 Women and 5 Men between the age of 25-52 years with arrival dates in Lebanon from 2015 till 1 month before the conducted interviews (May 2025). The year 2015 was chosen in alignment with the NGO's informed approval as it marked a strong increase of Syrian refugees crossing the border towards Lebanon due to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. Social status of the participants varied, participants being either married, divorced, separated from their partner, widowed or single. Ethnic backgrounds ranged from Syrian Arab, Syrian Armenian, Syrian Kurd to Alawite Syrian Arab; regional origins varied from Aleppo area, Deir ez-Zor, Albukamal, Afrin, Raqqa and Homs. Educational background of the participants differed between high school or higher education graduation as well as not finishing school. Through these established criteria, research rich in diversity

aiming to be as inclusive as possible and taking into account the many multitudes of the participants’ lived stories and narrations in this small frame of conduct was assured.

Name	Age	Ethnic background	Place of Origin	Year of arrival in Lebanon
Adib	43	Syrian Arab	Raqqa Governorate	2015
Ahmad	25	Syrian Kurd	Afrin	2022
Fatima	41	Alawite Syrian Arab	Homs	2025
Hussein	33	Syrian Arab	City of Raqqa	2015
Laya	32	Syrian Kurd	Albukamal	2020
Mariam	51	Syrian Arab	Aleppo area	2017
Nour	45	Alawite Syrian Arab	Homs	2025
Samir	45	Syrian Arab	Raqqa Governorate	2023
Wissam	25	Syrian Arab	Deir ez-Zor	2017
Zeinab	52	Syrian Armenian	Aleppo area	2024

Table 4.1 Overview of Syrian refugee participants

Hence, participants were 10 Syrian refugees with whom in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in May 2025 in urban Naba’a in Beirut at the NGO’s center. The interviewees were offered a monetary compensation of 10\$ as a compensation for their significant time commitment and to minimise barriers to participation due to commitments linked to financial needs. This assured the financial pressure did not lead to a selection bias only reaching refugees affording to take the necessary time for the interview, as most Syrian refugees work in day-based jobs, and depend on the daily based payment. The interviews took place at a center of the NGO in Beirut, guaranteeing a safe space for the participants, and lasted 30 to 45 minutes. They were guided by a predetermined set of questions covering themes like access to health care, education, work environment and their daily struggles, nevertheless followed the principle of allowing the flexibility of exploring other upcoming themes. The interviews were led in a semi-private setting in Arabic, with only the researcher, a translator, a field officer of the NGO, a Syrian refugee herself, and one participant at a time present. Besides, it was assured that a female translator be present during the interviews conducted with women to establish a space of comfort and confidentiality.

Informed consent was obtained before the interviews through a written consent form in Arabic provided by the NGO as well as oral explanation by the researcher. Additionally, it was clarified to the participants that they could at any point decide to take a break, stop the interview or choose not to answer particular questions. Specific attention was given to explaining these modalities even after signing the consent form as their vulnerability as well as the potential distress or trauma regarding the discussed subjects of the interviews was taken into consideration. The interviews followed the concept of consecutive interpretation, with the translators, that were briefed beforehand, also integrating into the team and communicating both with the participants as well as the field officer in case of follow-up questions or possible misunderstandings, allowing the interviews to turn into a safe, comfortable and more casual space for the participants.

The direct quotes in the analysis by the participants were translated from Arabic to English with help of the recordings. Nevertheless, despite relying on a mother tongue interpreter and the recordings, the possibility and risk of some things getting lost has to be considered. The recordings of the interviews were afterwards used for a thematic and narrative analysis which allowed the uncovering of the multifaceted issues of refugee's social realities. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed through pseudonymisation. Pseudonym names were chosen over numbers to avoid dehumanisation of the participants (Lahman et al., 2015). The pseudonym names chosen correspond to the participant's gender, additionally, typical names of the region were chosen to preserve their cultural background.

While this research provides valuable insights to refugee's lives and their coping mechanisms to deal with unique issues and forms of discrimination, it is subject to limitations through the small sample size of 10 participants as well as the focus on Syrian refugees who, while they do form the largest refugee community in Lebanon, do not represent all different refugee communities with backgrounds of several nationalities.

Additionally to the interviews with 10 Syrian refugees, 9 interviews with experts in the field were conducted in April and May 2025. The group of experts was chosen according to their background working in the field of migration in Lebanon as well as directly with refugees, both academically as well as on the ground in local NGOs. My affiliation with the Institute for Migration Studies (IMS) at LAU was helpful in the selection of the experts as well as in establishing contact with them. Following the same principles as the interviews with the refugee participants, semi-structured interviews guided by a predetermined set of questions were conducted, 5 took place online, 4 in person. The experts include one project director and one project manager of NGOs providing different services and social centers for refugees and migrant workers, a Gender and Migration expert, a Research Technical Manager at the local NGO with which the cooperation for the interviews with the Syrian refugee participants was made, a scholar and practitioner mainly working on peace transitions with a focus on forced displacement issues, a lawyer specialised in international criminal law and human rights, a project coordinator and researcher specialised in international affairs and the region, a human rights defender and researcher working within the Lebanese civil society and a researcher focused on refugees and migration.

In decolonising research, it is especially important to approach the interviews with sensibility and awareness towards power structures and potential epistemic hierarchies. Insofar, the interviewed experts were recognised as holding knowledge from a specific power position, allowing space for the reflection of their and the researcher's assumptions and biases, continuing the approach of disrupting colonial power dynamics and placing the often-silenced voices of marginalised groups into the center of the research. In this regard, the expert interviews represent an addition and expansion to the interviews led with refugees, but do not portray the dominant or superior perspective of this research, instead co-creating knowledge that actively seeks to diversify mainstream approaches of the Global North. Even the term experts should be put into question as it implies their superiority to the interviewed refugees,

here contesting whether it would not be more accurate, if even, using this term for the interviewed refugees as they are the only ones experiencing the social reality that this research wants to put into focus.

#### 4.2 Reflexions on Positionality

As already mentioned while explaining the theoretical framework of this dissertation, it needs a positioning of researchers within their research, our personal backgrounds and aspirations, inspirations and motivations pushing us to do that specific research in the first place which can be contextualised within a framework of positionality as a process of acquiring as well as unlearning knowledge instead of a process of saving (Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab, 2020, p. 197). While some scholars even question whether positionality and reflexivity statements are just a tool to reassert and reproduce the privileges of white scholars (Raghuram& Sondhi, 2023, p. 9), Nassr-Eddin& Abu-Assab (2020, p. 199) argue that white researchers should not disconnect from the privileging structure but instead question in what ways they are part of it. “White researchers and practitioners can mobilize their privilege to engage in this work and contribute as a form of allyship” (Ballo et al., 2021). In this following statement I aim to do so.

Decolonial feminism constates the inability of seeing the self as white, neglecting the complicity and responsibility of admitting that the long past of racialization in Europe did not stay without consequences, consequences that still matter today (Vergès, 2019, p. 42). Hence, decolonial feminism expects from the researcher an awareness about their whiteness and their own positionality, in my case and for this research my position as a white European researcher that I need to consider as well as the privileges that come with it. As understanding decolonial knowledge and applying it without appropriation lies at the heart of this research, the focus lies on a critique of the EU, wishing to contribute to the decentralisation of Eurocentric frameworks and narratives through referring back to and leaning onto the already mentioned notion of critical intimacy (Spivak, 1999 ), opposing persistent notions in academia that continue to reproduce the Global North’s dominance in migration studies and aiming for a “[r]esearch for social justice [that] expands and improves the conditions for justice; it is an intellectual, cognitive and moral project, often fraught, never complete, but worthwhile” (Smith, 2021, p. 270).

Connecting this self-reflective framework and criticism from within the familiar space of Europe with decentralised decolonial knowledge plays a very crucial role in avoiding the simple appropriation of knowledge produced in the Global South for Global North academic purposes and practices. In this respect, both reflecting on the conditionalities that put me in the position of conducting this research as well as on the power dynamics that persist during the interviews with Syrian refugees that I conducted during my time doing field work in Beirut is crucial. Further, it is essential to ask questions of how, as a white European researcher, I can contribute to decolonising academic research and whether this is even possible. Simply being aware of my whiteness is not enough, it needs reflecting on who should

represent the knowledge (Raghuram& Sondhi, 2023, pp. 10) as well as recognizing my limits as a European researcher to decentralise Eurocentric frameworks and narratives. In this respect, there is also the responsibility of reflecting on whether my research possibly contributes to the marginalisation of refugees in Lebanon or refugees in general.

## 5 Analysis

The following part is dedicated to the thematic and narrative analysis of the 19 conducted interviews. The individual themes of the narrations often overlap and this needs to be taken into thoughtful consideration as the interconnectedness of the ways of marginalisation that the refugee participants are facing plays an important part in seeing their multi-faceted discrimination.

### 5.1 Caught between Syria and Lebanon

The participants come from a diverse set of backgrounds and fled to Lebanon for different reasons and under differing circumstances. What unites them all though is the hope for a safer place and a better life in Lebanon than in Syria.

Ahmad fled because he had been a member of the Kurdish party who took to train him for three years before he fled because he did not want to fight for them. Mariam fled to Lebanon in 2017 with her two daughters, getting away from the regime as well as her violent husband. Adib was separated from his family for some months, and him and his family were held captive in a refugee camp by the Syrian Democratic Forces after fleeing from ISIS.

I didn't expect to make it to Lebanon alive. (...) I came to the Levant [refers to the Kurdish refugee camp] because I remembered that they told me not to come here. They told me that if I came, they would take me directly to the military. So, I stayed in the Levant for two months. (A. Author's interview, 20.05.2025, Beirut)

Some of the participants had already fled to Lebanon in previous years but returned home to Syria in between, having to leave another time as the tensions grew again. For a lot of them this means that they did not have the means to neither build up a home in Lebanon nor Syria, finding themselves constantly on the move. Zeinab fled Syria in 2013 but went back to Syria one year ago because her son got caught without papers and was deported, her two daughters stayed in Lebanon and were sending her money. When the situation escalated again, she managed to escape again, this time illegally. Her son is not registered with the UNHCR and is again in a precarious situation in the country.

Nour and her family, Alawite Syrian Arabs, fled to Lebanon only a month ago, in April 2025, when a masked group of men came, claimed her family's house and told them to leave. Fatima, who also came to Lebanon recently, tells the story about having to dress up like a Sunni to be allowed to cross the border, having to pay a ransom of a 1000\$ to be transported across the border. The prices were rising as the conflict was getting more intense and more people were seeking to leave, people having to sell some of their belongings to afford the journey. People who do not have enough money have no option but to stay and face the horrible violence directed at their communities. Prices now at the time of the interview in May 2025 ranged from 30\$-250\$ per person to cross the border from Syria to Lebanon, Sunni paying

the lower price and Shia paying the higher sum as smugglers know that they are willing to pay more, not having another choice if they want to escape.

For the participants who came to Lebanon a while ago, the trust in the political system is very low and they would not feel safe returning back to Syria even after the regime change. Some participants lost close family members in the war and were confronted with family members being kidnapped, killed or raped. Mariam shares: "I don't believe that a president now, a terrorist who killed so many people, would come and preserve innocent people's blood" (M. author's interview, 23.05.2025, Beirut). She even decided to convert to Christianity only to be safer, but she is nevertheless afraid of getting caught and killed if she goes back to Syria because of the stories she hears from other people.

Furthermore, what ultimately needs to be taken into consideration is the sheer fact that most of the participants do not have a home left waiting for them, their houses and villages destroyed or other people squatting in them, no work waiting for them and all their friends, family and neighbours having chosen similar paths to flee Syria. Additionally, the interviews with Nour and Fatima, refugees from the Homs region who fled the country only recently, confirmed what the UNHCR (2024b) has been repeatedly stating, reminding member states of the EU that the political situation in Syria is not stable, that those individuals fleeing persecution and violence must be guaranteed safety and asylum and, very importantly, that all returns must be based on an informed and voluntary choice. This said, it might be safer for specific communities right now after the regime change but there is heightened violence directed against Alawites. The Assad family which was ruling the country for over 50 years and is responsible for innumerable crimes like extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearance and forced displacement belonged to the religious minority of Alawites (SNHR, 2024). As a consequence, and after Assad loyalists captured and killed government units in March 2025, now Alawites are facing violence in the form of beheadings, kidnapping or mass killings. Around 1 400 people were massacred in between March 7-9 2025, by forces and individuals with loyalty towards the new government, the National Transitional Authority (Michael, 2025; Suleiman, 2025).

According to the Research Technical Manager, there are currently around 90 000 new refugees in Lebanon who came in very bad conditions. She elaborates that

support for refugees, for all refugees, is so minimal. And yet, they're not accepted here in Lebanon. Because they were with the regime, and you know, the regime was in Lebanon before, and he [Bashar al-Assad] did what he did in Lebanon. (Author's interview, 2.05.2025, Beirut)

Here she refers to the complexity of history, Syria occupying Lebanon for almost 30 years, from 1976 till 2005 (Achcar & Warschawski, 2007, p. 5). Lebanon now having to host Syrian refugees often challenges old feelings of resentment towards the Syrian population.

The country cannot be considered safe to return to and it remains in question whether the political situation will be turned around again and lead to persecution of other communities that are considered safe at this present moment. The Research Technical Manager constates that after the fall of the regime,

people are more willing to talk, they are not afraid anymore of being killed or taken by the regime, but they know that they cannot live inside Syria still. Hussein is thinking out loud about going back to Syria, “going back, but to what? To zero. I have nothing there” (H. author’s interview, 21.05.2025, Beirut). He also thinks that it might be safe now in certain areas but that the war is going to come back. The project coordinator elaborates on this issue, insisting that the regime change does in no way solve the root causes of displacement:

If you think that after the Assad regime Syrian refugees will return, I don't think this is the picture. As long as the root cause has not been dealt with, we will still have displacement, we will still have Syrian refugees, and the EU will still be dealing with refugees as well from their own side [refers to Ukrainian refugees]. As long as the Middle East is this conflicted, the issue of displacement will remain. And maybe it will even be more. (...) It's not only Syria, you know, it would be Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, everyone. If you're not dealing with the root cause, nothing will be solved. (Author’s interview, 12.05.2025, Beirut)

## 5.2 Officially unofficial

Lebanon is a non-signatory country of the Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol which means that it does not grant asylum or an official refugee status, consequently there being no state protection for refugees (UNHCR, 2024a). At the end of May 2025 there are approximately 1.4 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon of whom 722 000 are registered and 678 000 unregistered according to the UNHCR (ODP, 2025). This high number of unregistered Syrian refugees is due to a 2015 enacted policy of the Lebanese government that prohibited the new registration of refugees (UNHCR, 2019). As Janmyr (2018) states, without an official registration refugees are increasingly pushed into precarious conditions. This inability to register with the UNHCR created new issues for refugees like access to education, healthcare and other services (Kinsky, 2020, p. 14) as explained in this analysis. The UNHCR in the following, while not being able to register new refugees, still proceeded to process data of new arrivals (ODP, 2025). Nevertheless, this top-down approach of the UNHCR which prioritises a pragmatic approach towards host countries like Lebanon and their governments sacrifices international core principles of humanitarian work and inherently comes at a high cost for Syrian refugees (Janmyr, 2018).

The Technical Research Manager emphasises that a lot of refugees prefer cash instead of food baskets as they do not want others to choose on their behalf, their needs might be different ones than solely food, them needing glasses for their children instead of a basket full of tea. This is linked to stripping refugees of their agency, denying them their own choices and decision-making and solely binarily categorising them as vulnerable victims that need the superior Europe or international community to save them, who will and should be content with any kind of help they receive (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 12). This is reinforcing colonialist top-down approaches.

Gündoğdu (2015), in a dialogue with Arendt (1949), sees refugees living in a state of rightlessness despite the existence of international law fundamentals established to render impossible exactly that, a state of not having the right to have rights. “[T]he stateless person is not an object of pity, but a theoretical perspective on a shattered world, since the deprivation of the right to have rights threatens a crisis of civilisation and is a harbinger of fascism” (Curthoys, 2020, p. 47).

The process of getting the official UNHCR papers is often confusing though and their aid either very limited or non-existent. Hussein tried to register for the official UNHCR refugee status several times, but after repeated efforts to organise an appointment without a clear answer about how he should proceed, he gave up. Among the participants, half of them have the official refugee status, some having received some financial aid, some only for a very short time and others not at all.

The most challenging for NGOs according to the Technical Research Manager and the Gender and Migration expert is to provide legal documents for refugees and migrants, people often being married for over 10 years, but still not possessing any papers, their children not registered either. As a lot of the participants do not possess the official paperwork as a registered refugee, they often fear being caught by official authorities as they would be sent back to Syria, showing again their vulnerability in regard to the almost impossibility of claiming their rights (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 75). Stel (2020: pp. 55) states that this vulnerability and precarity of Syrian refugees is indeed manufactured and an expression of an intentional unwillingness of action. The Gender and Migration expert explains that

when it comes to legal documentation, a lot of the refugees have missing documentation, which of course leads to further complications on several different ends, including even mobility, so if they intend to move from one area to the other, there's a certain cross point, there's a certain army checkpoint, and these are all imminent risks on them and on being deported. At times, they even had UNHCR cards, they would show the general security that they do have this registration with UNHCR, and they would still get deported, and it made no difference. (Author's interview, 15.05.2025)

Especially the two families that only arrived recently to Lebanon know that going back would put them in situations fearing for their lives. In addition to the fear of being arrested or possibly deported, some of the participants were faced with situations that required help from official authorities or the police, but they could either not make an official demand or request because of their illegal status or were not taken seriously because of their nationality being Syrian. Laya went to the police when her 15-year-old daughter got abducted to seek their help but had to experience the police doing nothing to help her find or get her back, having to find other ways on her own. The situation fortunately resolved itself in the end.

The (non-existent) legal frameworks of Lebanon create a condition of statelessness for many Syrian refugees, as legal birth registration is a complex process (Kinsky, 2020, p. 21). Hussein shared that he has three children but that he does not have birth certificates despite registering them at a local hospital

in Beirut. As he does not have the necessary proof, he could not go back to Syria with them. As Arendt (1949, p. 759) states, their lawlessness is rooted in the fact that they are not part of any community whatsoever anymore. Fakhoury et al. (2021) see the EU's migration policies towards Lebanon as co-responsible for insecurity of refugees to access basic health services, leading to a high number of births staying undocumented. This places entire families in a vicious cycle of being unable to access basic services for themselves and their unregistered children or seeking resettlement or repatriation.

New refugees are currently not receiving the same aid and support that normally a refugee would receive. Further, refugees that are officially registered have seen a decrease or stop of the services provided by the UNHCR, the Gender and Migration expert seeing various dynamics like the Covid-pandemic, the war between Russia and Ukraine, and the election of Trump playing a role in this area. The Technical Research Manager knows that Syrians with an asylum process in action have to wait very long to receive a decision and, on top of that, the UNHCR has recently sent messages to refugees that they are stopping their work in Lebanon. Kohlenberger (2022, p. 82) sees a continued immobility of refugees who are stuck in a hosting country as they are kept from continuing towards a country of arrival nor in most cases can consider their country of origin as safe to return.

### 5.3 Dreaming of asylum and protection

Nour describes the feeling of being completely overwhelmed trying to establish a life here, not knowing where to start and feeling lost. The experts emphasise the paradox of not being able to seek asylum from somewhere else than when you cross the border of a country, especially as Lebanon is not a safe country, emphasising the reflection on the contested value of the right to leave one's country if there is no way to enter another one (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 87). The human rights defender knows that more privileged individuals that comply with Schengen visa requirements like having a certain amount of money in their bank accounts apply for that and once in Europe seek asylum there. Another way is to go to Turkey, get registered with the UNHCR there and try to seek resettlement to a third country. These regulations of restrictive asylum modalities towards the Mena region can be traced back to the EU's legislation of migration and asylum which "reproduces colonial epistemic formations in a manner that disadvantages people from former colonies" (Corcodel, 2024, p. 479).

The project director goes into detail about the difficult process of seeking asylum and the many little mistakes that can lead to a person unrightfully being denied protection.

I had one friend who, his resettlement process was going through very neatly, and then a mistranslation in, this was a couple years ago, he was a fireman in Sudan, and in Arabic, the Turkish people use the civil defence, and he was told that because of prior military service he was being rejected. He wasn't in the military. He was a fireman. But a mistranslation error cancelled this whole thing, and now he's been here for 15 years since then. He's stuck. He is stuck. (Author's interview, 28.04.2025, Beirut)

He describes how part of his job at the NGO is that he is the one having to deal with that failure, him working on the ground directly being confronted with peoples' destinies, on a previous assignment at the US-Mexican border having to tell people every day that their journey was over, that there was no way of crossing the border, this being emotionally challenging. Samir came to Lebanon in 2023, is still not registered as a refugee, his family is still in Syria. "I am away from my family. There is no comfort. In the end you are a human being, you miss. There is no comfort" (S. author's interview, 21.05.2025, Beirut).

#### 5.4 Endless precarity

The project coordinator specialised in international affairs and the region explains that, as access to official job markets are linked to employment requiring documents, refugees are pushed towards job opportunities that are unstable, unsafe and linked to structural exploitation on the physical as well as mental level. Furthermore, wages are extremely low and dependencies on employers extremely high, increasing refugees' vulnerabilities. The project manager talks about the problematic that Syrians are always in competition with Lebanese when it comes to housing and work, often renting houses that are in with poor condition and being employed for exploitation purposes. They often work for lesser pay, without insurance, can be fired at any moment and often face situations of humiliation. These dynamics are mirrored back in the interviews with the Syrian refugees, the participants often facing racism when trying to find a job, Wissam explaining "when I want to get a job, if they see that I am Syrian, they can treat me like that" (W. author's interview, 23.05.2025, Beirut).

The project manager problematises how Syrian refugees often take the jobs that Lebanese do not want, mostly in construction and in factories. Before, there was a somehow peaceful system in place, many Syrians coming to Lebanon and sending money back to Syria. The Research Technical Manager highlights that most refugees work in three sectors: construction, agriculture and services. Usual jobs include work in supermarkets, work on construction sites and cleaning which completely undermines and denies any other skills that they might have. This is mirrored by Adib's experience, him repeatedly saying that he would do whatever job he can find, even if it was to earn one dollar. He was a farmer back in Syria and now struggles to find work, taking on day-to-day tasks. Samir talks about how he now has to rely on whatever job he can find, no matter what kind of task, "I carry, I unload, I load. One day I carry a block, another day I carry a fridge" (S. author's interview, 21.05.2025, Beirut).

Additionally, in these jobs, the wages are very low, non-contractual, oral agreements dominating, the work environment being informal which puts a lot of power to exploit to the employers. The project director shares,

I know people who have been beaten by their employers, people who have been burned by their employers. (...) You know, I'm thinking of one woman who had been, she had asked for her wages, she had not been paid at all for her whole entire time, and her employer just took a hot iron all over

her body. And eventually, when the bombing started, she was able to escape with the wounds still fresh on her body and arrived at a shelter like that. And so that's the kind of violence I see. It's not this sort of anti-racist street violence or like anti-refugee street violence. It's the violence of abuse and exploitation. And sexual violence is very common against, especially, women domestic workers. (Author's interview, 28.04.2025, Beirut)

The human rights defender and the Research Technical Manager insist as well that not only are refugees prone to exploitation since most of them do not possess any legal papers, with the UNHCR reducing their support to the minimum competition between Syrian refugees is being created. Their dependency on any kind of job leads to price dumping, wages getting lower and lower as employers know they will find someone else for the job easily no matter how little they pay. The participants often accept or tolerate inhumane working conditions where they completely depend on their employer's mood whether they get paid or not, working without any day off because they either need the money to be able to pay rent or because they are afraid of being replaced by someone else if they refuse to comply with specific demands. None of the participants had a secure job position with a legal working contract. Fatima talks about the fact that job opportunities are very rare and precarious, her cousin working 12 hours per day and being paid 40\$ a week, asking for more money not being an option as employers know that another Syrian refugee will be happy to take the job. This creates competition inside the refugee community, everyone having to fear to be replaced by someone else which leads to even more exploitation.

In some cases, like for Hussein, health and the inaccessibility of health care plays an important role concerning his ability to find work and make his living. He had found a job in a vegetable shop when he arrived in Lebanon for about 7 months, sleeping in the shop as well. After that, he worked in maintenance and transportation but after he had a car accident, he could not continue his work and is having trouble finding another job as he is limited due to an injury in his leg that makes it impossible to do hard physical work. He now finds little daily jobs through friends that call him whenever they know of an opportunity, or he simply goes out on the street to look for a paid task. "Some days I sleep without food. Without eating. I don't like to ask anything from anyone, but this is the reality" (H. author's interview, 21.05.2025, Beirut).

The Technical Research Manager shared that often what happens is that refugees have to give their UNHCR card that they receive money on to supermarket owners as a guarantee in case they do not have money to pay for their groceries that month. In addition to precarious work and low working conditions, refugees are pushed into taking illegal pathways to find a job to sustain themselves. One of the participants, Mariam, described how there is a group on social media through which people who found a job but do not need it or cannot accept it for various reasons sell their names to other people who do want to take the job offer. Mariam has the name of a woman whose husband did not want her to work in the streets and is now working for the municipality.

Furthermore, in most cases, the work environment is a space of potential risk concerning government controls of official paperwork. Fatima's husband works in construction and found himself being controlled. When him and his colleagues failed to show the necessary documentation, they faced beatings and had to pay the officials money in order not to get deported. The Gender and Migration expert shares how he had cases of individuals who had been let go without any kind of financial reimbursement and without any prior notice, the lack of legal documentation of the refugees prohibiting them from taking legal action against their former employers and work exploitation, them not having any access to justice.

Moreover, female participants are often financially dependent on their husbands as breadwinners, while they are doing unpaid work at home. Fatima, as some other female participants who are mothers, stays at home to take care of her children and the household. This almost always includes watching the children all day long and having to find ways to keep them busy as they are either waiting for the official documents to be registered for school or have given up due to the long bureaucratic process.

Finally, summing up the current situation on the Lebanese labour market and the role and importance Syrian refugees play in it, the researcher insists that a massive return of Syrians to their home country would lead to big shifts in the Lebanese labour market, especially the agricultural sector depending on the irregular workload of Syrian refugees. If all Syrians were to leave overnight, there would be huge gaps in the labour force who would not be easy to replace. Baroud (2024) concludes that despite the fact that Lebanon is relying and depending on migrant workforce, refugees are pushed into informal employment which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, long working hours and low wages. The experts interviewed find it therefore very surprising that municipalities are building their campaigns on refugee return while all those who are working on the roads and are doing jobs that Lebanese would never do, are Syrian.

## 5.5 Bureaucracy at the cost of education

The level of education of refugee children or young adults that have either arrived in Lebanon just before turning 18 or who fled to Lebanon as minors varies. The fact that a lot of the participants have found themselves on the move a lot deeply affects their children's access to education. Some of them went to school in Syria but either had to stop because of the crisis or as they had to work to financially support their families. Referring to the former, Fatima shares how her children already had to stop going to school in Syria when the political situation changed and it was not safe anymore for them. She has been trying to inform herself how to register for school in Lebanon, but the necessary paperwork acquires bureaucratic steps which are not clear to her as she just arrived recently and feels overwhelmed.

The participants find themselves in precarious situations on several levels, creating interconnected issues. An unstable housing situation as well as the limited access to work leads to families having to count on their children working as well to financially supporting the household instead of trying to

register them for school. This has to be seen in connection with restrictive legislation that has an economic impact on Syrian refugee families, many children dropping out of school and joining the informal labour market to financially support their parents (Kiwan, 2019), which leads to an increase in child labour (Dorai & Amer, 2023, p.174).

The financial pressure is often placed on one person of the family, mostly the father and in some cases the older siblings as well if the father's income is not enough to cover all the costs like food and rent. Adib cannot afford to send his children to school anymore, one of them working in a bakery, the other one helping him out with daily tasks and jobs.

They went to public school at the beginning, one of them is 12, the other 14. I can't send them to school anymore because I need their support, I cannot make it on my own. One helps in a bakery shop, he makes 80\$ a month, the other one comes with me finding tasks to do. (A. Author's interview, 20.05.2025, Beirut)

Almost all the participants have faced difficulties inscribing their children into schools, even though the official policy exists that public schools have afternoon shifts for Syrian refugee children. The Technical Research Manager points to the fact that officially there are afternoon shifts for Lebanese children, but as the numbers are large not everyone has space to attend. Additionally, they are taught by teachers who already worked in the mornings so are exhausted.

And the thing is, the teachers in the afternoon are Lebanese. The culture is different, and they have been teaching all day, and they will teach in the afternoon as well. So, they are tired. (...) We were doing research about the education of Syrians inside Lebanon, and what we have found is that most of them, they attend grade 9 [14 years old], and sometimes they do not know how to read. (Author's interview, 2.05.2025, Beirut)

Often what creates problems is either the fact that without legal documents refugee children are not accepted at schools, the necessary papers missing or that the shifts are already full, the education system not being in place to include such a big number of refugee children even though this is one of the many points established in the deal between the EU and Lebanon (European Commission, 2024c). This marks a difference between official documents and the practical reality on the ground. Mariam shares details about the complex process of registering children for school, her older daughter not being accepted at school despite her having a serial number from the UN.

According to the Technical Research Manager, 90% of the refugees under 15 are illiterate, the prominent issue being financial means to afford schools as she insinuates that "if you have enough money, you are welcome to anything in Lebanon" (author's interview, 2.05.2025, Beirut). The project manager reiterates how education has been almost impossible for Syrian refugees as they should either have a valid ID number or residency papers which is mostly not the case.

Additionally, the EU continuously repeats that humanitarian values are at its core (European Commission, 2024f) and always seems to know what the NGOs should be focusing on without any knowledge from actually working in the field. In this context it is crucial to acknowledge “that the EU promises to provide humanitarian aid to keep its borders closed, it is within this space that humanitarianism functions as a long-standing colonial trap” (Opi, 2021, p. 19). The project manager shares her frustration with the international NGO system: “You’re not on the ground. You don’t know. How can I do detention support for Syrians who are in public schools with the eligibility criteria of entering a public school now?” (author’s interview, 12.05.2025, Beirut)?

Recently, there has been an increase in demand for official documentation, even going beyond UN certificates, causing children a lot of problems in school as well as adults studying at university and interrupting educational pathways, says the project director. The Technical Research Manager adds the concern how in higher education even with official documents, Syrians are only allowed to attend certain majors at university, usually the ones that are not attended a lot by Lebanese, being pushed to fill the places.

## 5.6 Waiting for healthcare

The Gender and Migration expert of a local NGO states that health care access has been increasingly more difficult, the UNHCR not covering the same percentage of expenses as it used to as well as the bureaucratic process getting more complicated. Treatments that are needed on the spot are therefore almost impossible as well as the remaining costs still very much out of reach which leads to a limitation of access to health care. Often the only way to get access to health care is to go to private hospitals which presupposes the financial means to pay for the upcoming costs, predominantly family members who are already in other countries, often in Europe, sending money to cover the health bills. Fatima shares that one of her sons has epilepsy and the other a heart condition, both needing regular follow-ups that she cannot afford right now, a medical NGO she went to seek help stating they do not provide help for these conditions. Mariam needed surgery and shared that she bought the name of someone through a group on social media, using her ID card to have health care access. Still, she could not afford to get surgery yet as the UNHCR only covers parts of the costs and are not collaborating with all hospitals.

The project director voiced that emergency medical services are an immense gap at the moment, no large organisations providing medical services, and therefore a lot of time passing by before someone gets hospitalised as a lot of people struggle to get the funding. In a survey conducted in 2023, 84% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon had stated facing difficulties accessing needed health care and medication (UNHCR, 2024c, p. 77). These realities show that the aspects stated in the Action Document for EU support for health care in Lebanon (European Commission, 2024d) do not translate to the actual capacities or will to implement important measures.

This pattern repeats itself throughout the interviews, the UNHCR either not covering enough of the costs and therefore making it nevertheless impossible for the participants to access healthcare or not providing financial aid for specific health conditions. A lot of the participants are dependent on small clinics that provide access to health care through a symbolic payment, not having to pay the full costs. There are participants though who voiced their concern and mistrust towards these places.

Additionally, the surge in food prices in Lebanon have increased food insecurity (Doraï& Amer, 2023, p.174) which has detrimental impacts on refugees' health. The project director talks about how maternal health and infant health are at great risk, formula requests are enormous since women cannot breastfeed as they themselves do not have the means for sufficient nutrition.

### 5.7 Mental load

Having to stay alert in case of a control at work or a raid of their homes creates continuous stress and feelings of anxiety for a lot of participants, not feeling safe in their environments at the same time not having another choice than going to work as they need the money to pay rent, food and other necessities. The scholar working on forced displacement issues insists that a fact that is often overlooked is that forcibly displaced people give up their social structure and support system, ending up particularly vulnerable as there is no legal protection for refugees in Lebanon. Nour shares how she cannot tell her children why they had to leave and how they do not understand what happened and miss their homes. On top of that, they have to spend most of their time inside the house as they are afraid of being caught outside without the official paperwork, only getting in touch with the neighbours and not being able to explore their surroundings. While being very restricted in her possibility to move around and living with the constant fear of being deported back to Syria, Nour still feels less anxiety and fear than in Syria.

The scholar criticises the conditions under which Syrian refugees have to live:

So, if you want to be really sick and twisted in your head, talk about policy dynamics of the Lebanese state. They're doing a great job by creating an environment so inhospitable that I haven't really met an awful lot of refugees who want to stay. (Author's interview, 6.05.2025, Beirut)

One has to consider the impact on mental health linked to the migratory experiences refugees are facing. Mental illnesses such as PTSD will not simply disappear once the person has resettled somewhere safe but that the demand for treatment of mental health issues linked to war- or conflict linked traumas will go up, some refugees suffering from chronic stress disorders. From a humanitarian perspective taking care of mental health should be included in the care of people suffering from this (Bustamante et al., 2018).

### 5.8 Living in constant fear

As most of the participants do not have the official UNHCR refugee status, when asked about how this affects them in their daily lives, they shared that it forces them to stay alert at any point in case of official controls or raids. Cooper& Nimer (2022) describe the EU's strategy in making deals with countries of

the Mena region as creating downstream risks for Syrian refugees, finding themselves in a refugee hosting system that lacks political legitimacy as well as forces them to live under conditions of political tensions, not only but also directed at them. Hussein shares how a year ago, in 2024, tensions rose and more raids happened, official authorities entering peoples' houses and asking everyone for their official papers, threatening to deport or actually deporting Syrians. He lives with the constant fear of being found and deported back to Syria, his region not being safe for him to return to, otherwise he would return by himself. Further, Wissam shares:

I got caught once and put in custody. At the beginning it was to deport me because I had no papers. I was released after an hour because a Lebanese guy came to tell the security that we were working with him. (...) We hide in the bush, too, not sleeping in the tent, so afraid of getting caught. Most of the raids are at the break of dawn. (...) After the fall of the regime, things got calmer. (W. author's interview, 23.05.2025, Beirut)

This fear of getting caught and being deported constantly stays with the majority of the participants, a fear that is underlyingly produced by dynamics of externalising migration policy and the relations and deals between Lebanon and the EU. Blaming Lebanon only for these conditions and not guaranteeing the protection and safety of Syrian refugees fails to uncover the bigger colonialist picture behind them. The EU is consciously forming agreements with a country that does neither have the capacities to care for this high number of refugees nor provide the legal modalities that would be necessary as a precondition. The fact that it has been either impossible or increasingly difficult to obtain the official refugee status as the Lebanese government halted procedures of the UNHCR in this concern in 2015, visibly points to the failure of the international community and in this context specifically the EU to respect and comply with international human rights law. Making a migration deal with a country that does not respect or even acknowledge basic refugee protection rights mirrors that the EU does not either (Opi, 2021; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2015; Pijnenburg, 2024).

The international human rights lawyer shares that mass deportations were conducted in 2023, not caring whether people could present official UNHCR documentation or not, this continuing sporadically in 2024 with especially highly vulnerable people like journalists and former opposition members who were at high risk on return. There are documented cases about them being arrested after being handed over to Syrian forces.

I think it was getting worse and now after the war and the election of a new government, it's kind of a wait and see moment. The main issues right now are the banking reform and banking secrecy laws, that's the main thing that local international stakeholders are pressuring Lebanon to do. There's also pressure on improving the independence of the judiciary but I'm not sure that there's been much pressure on refugees especially where you have all these countries that haven't decided themselves what they're going to do about Syrian refugees. Lebanon has so many so many things to tackle right now and also has its own displaced people within the country. (Author's interview, 13.05.2025)

Measures that lead to the increased undocumented status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon enforce precarious conditions linked to arrests as well as deportations (Janmyr, 2016). Kheshen (2024) describes the rejection of residency permits and authorities deporting or threatening to deport Syrian refugees even with fulfilled criteria, meaning either being registered with UNHCR before 2015 or possessing a residency permit. While some authors Borrelli et al. (2025) even refer to the EU's migration strategy as "deportation diplomacy", the responses to my inquiries about forced deportations were mixed, some experts and refugees referring to this phenomenon as an issue in the past but not so much currently, while others do stress the recurring forms of pressure on refugees in this context. It is clear though, that

[t]he European Union and its Member States such as Germany have also financially supported the Lebanese army and security authorities, which have been shown to deport Syrians in violation of Lebanon's obligations under the Torture Convention and hand them over at the border to trafficking networks, which bring them back into the country. A lucrative business, also for members of the army, whose salary has shrunk to around 100 US dollars a month since the economic crisis. (Stachelhaus, 2024, para. 9)

## 5.9 Human smuggling as an expression of migration policies

Some of the participants still hope to continue their journey to Europe. According to the Technical Research Manager, young people still aspire going to Europe, even with the routes getting more and more dangerous, families and people above 40 mostly having lost this hope. Partly, these aspirations do not transform into concrete efforts or plans, some are waiting and have been waiting for their documentation papers, others took it a step further and have tried to contact or eventually made contact with smugglers. Routes are mostly from Lebanon to Libya, there are small boats that go from Tripoli to Cyprus but less as there used to, normally having to pay off the Lebanese army. Still, according to UNHCR numbers, the number of people attempting to cross the Mediterranean from Lebanon to peak destinations like Cyprus or Italy more than doubled in 2022 (Diab& Jouhari, 2023: 6).

The Gender and Migration expert remembers stories that were circling a couple of years back about people even willing to sell their organs just to be able to get on a boat and leave. Even though this does not seem to be the case anymore, planning irregular journeys towards Europe is more often than not connected to dangerous situations or life-threatening events. Hussein found himself in a life-threatening situation when he paid smugglers for the journey to Turkey and instead ended up being kidnapped, beaten and part of the group of abducted people tortured. His family was threatened that he would be killed if they did not pay 1000\$ and he was only released after the money had been received, left beaten up in an unknown surrounding. Hussein's initial fear was that his abductors had brought him back to Syria as they had left him in the middle of nowhere and he did not have any way to orient himself. Him and others who had been abducted were later found by the Lebanese police who interrogated them, got

them on a bus to Beirut and told the bus driver to let them get on for free. They did not look further into the incident but did also not ask for documentation papers or proceeded to deportation.

The Technical Research Manager warns that the externalisation policy of the EU negatively affects Syrian refugees because they are aware that they will not be able to travel in a formal way to the EU, sidestepping to increasingly more dangerous ways of travel as they still believe that even if they arrive in an irregular way to Europe their situation will improve compared to Lebanon or Syria. Like Moreno-Lax & Lemberg-Pedersen (2019) describe it, “smuggling and trafficking is the consequence, rather than the cause, of suffering” (p. 32). The authors insist that these dynamics are deeply engrained in the systemic externalisation of migration which has to effect that basic international law is disrespected and hence, that dynamics that foster a wanted separation between the Global North and the Global South are being reinforced. Europe is accepting the dangerous side effects of their own externalisation policies as long as they happen far away from its borders, reinscribing colonial dynamics.

Many people are counting on smugglers to make their way to Europe, either through Libya, Serbia or Albania, some also try to marry a European foreigner to then bring their family over to Europe as well. The Technical Research Manager elaborates on a personal anecdote:

One day, my colleague, she's Syrian, she works with us, and she was at work, and she got a phone call from her son, he was 18 years old, and he managed to travel to Libya. And then she lost contact with him. It's been one year, he didn't arrive to Italy, and now she's trying to call the International Red Cross, NGOs inside Libya, to know anything about him. Unfortunately, she's not getting anything. (Author's interview, 2.05.2025, Beirut)

Her daughter is in Sweden as she married a Swedish, her other son in the Netherlands who does not know yet whether he will be granted asylum or not. This story raises questions about the terrifying normalcy of hearing similar narrations and media reports of missing people on their journey to Europe. Taking into consideration that 34 000 people died or disappeared in the Mediterranean during the last ten years (UNHCR, 2025b) one cannot help but wonder what the outrage would be if this was happening to white Europeans and not refugees from the Global South. It is racist and colonialist dynamics and mentalities still deeply engrained in the Western order and system, who often remain invisible, attributing more value to white lives than to lives of the Global South (see Pyke, 2010; DiAngelo, 2011).

### 5.10 Living in precarity

Schmelter (2020) refers to the fact that refugees' daily lives and struggles in Lebanon are shaped by the EU's externalised border strategies. They are forced into a state where they are not allowed to complain in any way about the poor conditions in refugee camps, other provided housing or living conditions as doing so would insinuate that they are not in real need of help (Vianelli, 2022, p. 49). As there are no formal refugee camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, they have to pay for their housing themselves (Stel, 2020, p. 66). If you do not have a UNHCR paper, which according to some of the interviewed

experts is almost impossible to get at the moment, you are legally not allowed to rent a house. This forces refugees into illegality. Unsure and unsafe living conditions shape the participants lives, most times they find themselves in circumstances where they either do not know whether they can stay for the coming month, were the whole family has to share a very small space or even where parts of the family, most often the sons, stay with other relatives or acquaintances.

Four out of five refugees in Lebanon struggle to pay their electricity bills (UNHCR, 2024c, p. 73). This describes how the absence of migration policy led to an unsystematic and informal emergence of refugee settlements as well as self-paid housing (Yassin et al., 2015). Mariam is mad at how Lebanon in her eyes is not fulfilling their responsibilities as a hosting country and explains that

[a]t least in Europe, or other countries, they give them salaries, they give them houses, residency and then they ask them to work. Here, we are working, we are paying rent, we are paying everything, and in the end, you want to kick us out. We died already, and more, we have to pay for you. (M. author's interview, 23.05.2025, Beirut)

Fatima, who came to Lebanon during the last months as the situation in Syria was impossible to hold out and endure, shares how she is happy in whatever conditions as long as she feels safe:

I do not need furniture, all I care about is now and just being safe now. All I brought from home was blankets and things to sit on the floor with and I will do that for the rest of my life, at least I have a safe place to live. (F. author's interview, 13.05.2025, Beirut)

### 5.11 At home?

Approximately 90% of Syrian refugees live in poverty and 80% do not hold the Lebanese residency (UNHCR, 2024a), 73% of them over 15 years old (Government of Lebanon and UN, 2019), and therefore are at continuous risk of exploitation, especially regarding their working conditions, and deportation due to the lack of legal documentation (UNHCR, 2024a).

For most of the participants, getting a residency permit is a long and pricy process that often does not work out in the end. From 2015 on, Syrians residing in Lebanon were obliged to pay 200\$ annually to the Lebanese state to prolong their residency and those without registration for the UNHCR had to have a Lebanese national as a "sponsor" creating dependencies and often leading to exploitation (Tsourapas, 2019, p. 472). Adib is one of the few participants with a residency permit. He had to pay 1000\$ to his guarantor in order to get his residency, his family though was not able to get it as it costs a lot of money. Wissam and many others tried to get the Lebanese residency but could not find a guarantor. The Technical Research Manager explains that residency has gotten a lot more expensive over the years, making it inaccessible for most of refugees. Lebanon is aiming for only 1000 residencies per year, even before the crisis there were around 500 000 migrant workers from Syria in the country. Obtaining a residency permit through a rental agreement or a guarantor, which was unaffordable for most Syrian

refugees or left them vulnerable to extreme exploitation from their sponsor in the first place, was suspended in 2024, Syrians forced to remain illegal (Stachelhaus, 2024).

### 5.12 Dream of a place far far away

The resettlement system is seen as broken by all experts, only single-digit numbers of refugees getting resettled annually. The project director shares that “[t]he lack of access to the resettlement structure is a failure on the part of the global system to take care of refugees in the ways that we promised to assist them. And people continue to pin their hopes on that” (author’s interview, 28.04.2025, Beirut). He goes on to clarify that in the end it is not the UN office who decides about resettlement, it is individual countries which are determining their criteria for resettlement, so when refugees think that they are dealing with stonewalling of UN bureaucracy and engaging with one system, they are actually engaging with a 100. The project director continues:

And they all value human beings in different ways. And there are some people who will never rise to the top of that system. They don't have the qualifications that a country wants, or they don't fit the security clearances that a country or nation wants, or they don't. (Author’s interview, 28.04.2025, Beirut)

This is heavily related not only to resettlement mechanisms but furthermore to the general migration strategy of the international community and the EU, not guaranteeing the same support to every refugee but distinguishing between wanted and unwanted ones, the unwanted ones not allowed to pass the borders or even go near them as is enforced through deals like the one made with Lebanon. The researcher adds that people are mostly here with the hopes of leaving, being stuck in a community that cannot easily access education, has no legal status in the country, Lebanon often seen as a transit country, even when people spend years and years waiting for their cases to be processed. This once again shows how the externalisation strategy of the EU risks creating a refugee community without future perspectives, living under inhumane conditions, criminalisation and radicalisation as potential side effects (Binder et al., 2018: 4f.).

### 5.13 Struggles of identity

Ahmed (2000) writes about the feeling of not being completely at home, a “failure to inhabit fully the present or present space” (p. 92). Syrian refugees might have lived in Lebanon for a long time, but through various dynamics they are in many respects not allowed to discard their role as a stranger and become an inhabitant of their surroundings. Additionally, both the researcher and the project manager speak about the fact that often Syrian children were born and grew up in Lebanon, not having seen Syria once in their life, this creating an identity issue with the country being an intangible far away and non-accessible home. The project manager states: “Because your country is truly something not poetic, it’s

something real, it's something very tangible. Where you live is your country" (author's interview, 12.05.2025, Beirut).

The project director voices the concern that "[m]aybe the terms refugee and migrant worker are not enough to explain exactly the stories and the narratives" (author's interview, 28.04.2025, Beirut). He shares that in his direct work with people having experienced forced displacement, often the distinction between refugee and migrant worker is hard to make, the line between the two not necessarily being evident. He mostly works with Sudanese refugees and migrant workers and states that in the end leaving your country because you cannot make enough money to survive equates to being forcefully displaced. This links back to the reflections on the different terms regarding migration and the specific definitions that are connected to certain rights (Diab, 2021).

#### 5.14 Between hospitality and scapegoatism

Responses to how they would describe the contact with the local population and whether they are feeling safe in their environment took on different forms. Fatima describes how helpful and friendly the Lebanese community have been acting towards her, everyone being very kind and making her feel safe in her surroundings. This is not true for all participants, some being harassed at their homes, others facing racist and violent incidents on a regular basis. Hussein tells us a story about him getting robbed: "Sometimes it happens to many people. If you don't give them money, they harm you. It happened to me once. (...) A man came to me and said we are intelligence. Please come out. They were all armed" (A. author's interview, 21.05.2025, Beirut). He shares stories about people introducing themselves as Secret Service, beating people and taking money from them. When police came to investigate, they were sure that it was not a governmental organisation as "they do not hit people in the street. In secret, in their offices they hit people, but not in the street" (H. author's interview, 21.05.2025, Beirut), is what they told Hussein.

The scholar thematises that scapegoating dynamics exist as much in Lebanon as they do in Europe, the EU's migration strategy not taking into consideration that it is creating tensions within Lebanon, politicians making refugees responsible for all the problems instead of looking at the elite political class that has been systematically destroying a system to their own abuse, own purposes and malfeasance. In addition, a populist media discourse that resembles the one in Europe dominates certain influential news portals, framing refugees and immigrants as disposable populations (Davis, 2016: 114) or propagating dehumanising discourses (Diab, 2025b).

The project coordinator mentions that what is further creating tensions is Lebanese people in need seeing Syrians still going to cash machines and getting their financial aids, while they do not get any financial assistance. The researcher nevertheless states that "the perception is that the international community has been supporting the Syrians and not supporting the Lebanese who are suffering just as much" (author's interview, 26.05.2025, Beirut). The project manager explained how projects directed

at Syrians even get rejected by the local population in certain neighbourhoods, sometimes communicating very clearly that they will not accept a school or community center for Syrians, while a project directed at Sudanese refugees is accepted. There are even municipalities exclaiming being “Syrian-free”.

Often, the term refugee immediately is associated with Syrian, feeding into sentiments of rejection and increased scapegoating. The project manager raises the concern that a lot of organisations are seeking to cater for Syrian refugees instead of also providing aid and services for Lebanese in need as they want to receive international funding that is often programmed only for the specific group of Syrian refugees, creating jealousies against Syrians. The outsourcing of migration towards third countries that often struggle with their own national issues and to take care of their own population needs to be understood in relation to colonial relations between Europe and these regions. This perfectly symbolises the European apparatus of securitisation whose main goal is to keep refugees from entering European territory, enacted through a humanitarianism that reproduces colonial conditionalities (Opi, 2021). This has to be seen in regard to refugees but also for the local population in Lebanon and the Lebanese state.

The project manager picked up on this aspect of a humanitarianism that often fails to include the marginalised Lebanese population, sharing that it is not easy for her to advocate for her role within her family, as the NGO she is working for is specifically working with refugees and not with locals. The tensions in the population are rising and Syrians are being instrumentalised as responsible for all the arising issues in Lebanon, especially after the economic crisis in 2019. The lawyer states that often Lebanese tend to conflate refugees with the Assad regime, surprised at the fact that so many have been joyful of the fall of the regime, realising that they indeed had a legitimate reason for staying in Lebanon. In this regard, the project manager says conflict sensitivity assessments help to show that no one is a threat, with everyone, Lebanese or Syrian saying

they are all bad, but my neighbour is a good person because we drink coffee, she helps me with my kid. (...) It's always the proximity that shows you, ah, it's just another human. We are all from the same food, we speak the same language, we dress the same. We are the same. (Author's interview, 12.05.2025, Beirut)

After the fall of the Assad regime, the narration of the cause of displacement being resolved not only becomes more prominent and more popular in the EU, supported with the first deportation in the past 15 years executed recently (Giordano, 2025) but also in Lebanon. President Aoun voiced soon after the fall of the regime that now the problem that caused their displacement is gone so nothing stands in the way of them returning (L'Orient Today, 2025). The researcher expresses worry that

their presence in the country, particularly when Europe most likely is going to start reducing its funding full stop and then shifting this funding to Syria or just elsewhere is creating an added burden on a state that doesn't have a lot of capacity anyway. (Author's interview, 26.05.2025, Beirut)

### 5.15 Double Marginalisation

LGBTIQ+ refugees face double discrimination in Lebanon, not only through their role as being a refugee but moreover due to their sexual orientation and gender identity as this is criminalised by law and is something that will be used against them. They are sometimes targeted by extremist groups that know that they will not face any consequences as the refugees do not have any access to justice and could never file an official complaint. Moreover, they often get discriminated both by the host as well as by their own communities, not feeling safe in refugee shelters or experiencing physical and verbal abuse. The Gender and Migration expert of an NGO that is primarily working with the LGBTIQ+ community shares:

Sometimes they take their legal documentation, they force them into trafficking, sometimes if they don't pay them through blackmail, through extortion, through any means, they even threaten them to, what's the word, to deport them back by telling authorities about them. (Author's interview, 15.05.2025, Beirut)

Even with the regime change, LGBTIQ+ refugees are still in danger in Syria, and they still need to be able to trust and rely on their right to seek asylum and to find a safe host community. The intersectionality of identities and the factors that render an individual more vulnerable, more fragile and more prone to protection risks include sexual orientation and gender identity. This intersecting with the identity characteristic of being a refugee makes this group of people even more vulnerable. Even though Lebanon is somewhat considered a safe haven for the LGBTIQ+ community in the Mena region, in the last 6 years there has been a decline in their safety, the Minister of Interior banning all pride-related activities as well as attacks on spaces that the community frequents conducted by fundamentalist religious groups, says the human rights defender.

Besides, he is concerned that Europe remains a dream in the heads of LGBTIQ+ refugees, often awareness lacking the reality that they are actually going to face there, preserving a self-proclaimed colonialist image of the EU as the developed superior Global North accepting the queer community when in fact their rights have been overtly contested by several member states (Romito& Szczerba, 2023). He stresses that no one talks about the struggles of these individuals and the perception of them and how these practices are actually reinforcing colonial practices and colonial strategies.

### 5.16 Policy of no policy

“We don't have any migration management, it's not difficult” (author's interview, 2.05.2025, Beirut), is how the Technical Research Manager immediately gets to the heart of describing Lebanon's migration policy. The project coordinator sees it similarly: “We cannot talk about migration management when it comes to Lebanon. This is a pure political decision” (author's interview, 12.05.2025, Beirut). She elaborates that this in fact is one of the first issues to mention, that there is no actual national refugee

policy in the first place and no national consensus, the researcher calling this a policy of no policy and a lack of policymaking.

Nassar& Stel (2019) describe this “policy of no policy” that many of the interviewed experts refer to as part of the notion of institutional ambiguity, a strategic way of governing displaced persons through a combination of inaction, informality, exceptionalism and ambiguous actions. Stel (2020) describes this “institutionally ambiguous refugee governance” (p.219) that dominates the Lebanese policy-making in regard to migration and especially in dealing with the refugees that it is hosting on its territory. She sees both an absence of policy-making as well as an incomplete or inconsistent implementation of policies that create legal confusion and result in the illegality of Syrian refugees. “It relates to shelter, producing ambiguous refugee spaces that fall outside state responsibility but under state control, and it has to do with mandates and responsibilities, with emerging refugee representation structures simultaneously being co-opted and disowned” (Stel, 2020, p.193).

As Lebanon never signed the Refugee Convention, the refugees do fall under the category and the term “nazeh” and not “lajea”, these different terms also being essential in terms of providing people in need with rights. Under nazeh your status is very temporary, and you do not have access to education, legal rights, under lajea a person has to be provided with basic rights. This has to effect that Lebanon does not want to receive Syrian refugees because they might not leave after and is treating them as “temporary, unwelcome and in transit” (Diab, 2023, p. 1). Similarities can be detected between Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon, their status of being under temporary protection creating complex issues linked to access to education, the health system and the work market (Sert, 2016, pp. 282).

Stel (2020) deems it crucial to argue though that while this very limited enthusiasm to attend to questions of migration management within Lebanon is deliberate,

this should not be taken to mean that Lebanon – or any other host country where institutional ambiguity is particularly significant – is entirely or even primarily responsible for the ‘mess’ it finds itself in. The parameters that incentivize these modes of governance have geopolitical and (neo-)colonial drivers (p. 19).

The migration agenda for countries of the Global South is determined by countries of the Global North through their superior position in the reproducing colonial hierarchy of the current international system (De Waal, 2014), pushing Lebanon in the position of a refugee hosting country. The project director criticises the main idea of the EU to make Lebanon into an externalised border and even considering it as a fitting hosting state.

Lebanon is not a good place to host refugees. Lebanon is suffering its own problems. And, you know, when the state system is buckling under the weight of the country itself, how are you going to support 50% of the population? Or a population of refugees that's 50% the size of the national population? (Author's interview, 28.04.2025, Beirut)

The project manager, herself Lebanese, agrees with him, adding that Lebanon does not in any way have the capacity to take care of this big number of refugees additionally to its own population in need.

It's difficult to go and just bluntly advocate, because we have 1.5 million Syrians in need and 1.5 million Lebanese in need. We have a huge gap, and we need something thoughtful for everyone, and there's no funding for anyone. So, it is difficult. (Author's interview, 12.05.2025, Beirut)

There are no clearly defined criteria for defining the necessary capabilities and responsibilities a state hosting refugees carries and what duties it has towards them in international refugee law (Phuong, 2005). The 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 2010a) marks two core points, the commitment to guaranteeing refugees a spectrum of legal rights (see article 2 to 32) and the principle of non-refoulement (article 33). While one could assume that these articles are sufficient, they do not include the specific responsibilities of a state, internationally creating issues of allocating shared burden between states. In this context, it is nevertheless important to refer back to the fact that the EU is arguably only taking advantage of an insufficient legal framework of the UNHCR Refugee Convention (Phuong, 2005) when designating Lebanon the role of refugee host.

Additionally, even more issues regarding Lebanon as a refugee hosting country arise, as it is a non-signatory state of the Convention and therefore these principles do not even apply with the exception of the principle of non-refoulement which is binding for all states through international law (UNHCR, 2025c). So far, the Lebanese government has neglected its responsibilities towards its own citizens as well as refugee communities on its territory (Diab& Jouhari, 2023, p. 5). The country has a lot to tackle itself with a high number of internally displaced persons and a lot of reconstruction to do after what Israel destroyed. The project coordinator knows that "Lebanon has many concerns. I think that's also a thing of a country that cannot even guarantee stability and protection for its own citizens" (author's interview, 12.05.2025, Beirut). In addition to the sheer problematic of Lebanon struggling to take care of its own marginalised population, Lebanese politicians were threatening the EU even before they signed the migration deal from 2024, saying they should better pay Lebanon too like they are doing with Turkey (Diab, 2023, pp. 2). This is assumingly not creating the best preconditions for an equitable agreement in the first place, with one partner already blackmailing the other beforehand. Kohlenberger (2022) describes the case of Turkey and the migration deal with the EU, leading to Erdoğan successfully pressuring and blackmailing the EU, threatening to let Syrian refugees pass over to Europe. Instead of integrating the refugees into society, systems of exclusion are replicated. Turkey momentarily hosts 3.2 million Syrian refugees as well as approximately 222 000 refugees with other nationalities (UNHCR, 2025d), simultaneously not having a system that takes care of integration measures and services, limited access to health care and a precarious access to the local labour market, fostering tensions with the Turkish population and creating domestic political challenges (Kohlenberger, 2022, pp. 62). Similar exclusionary dynamics are true for Lebanon.

Another issue that has been arising is the fact that refugees of other nationalities than Syrian get rejected by shelters and are widely categorised as migrant workers and not refugees, this creating a minority community of refugees that face double discrimination, not even being recognised as being a vulnerable group in need of support. The project director, who is working a lot with Sudanese, says that race plays a big factor in this, “people see someone who’s black and they say you’re a migrant worker, right” (author’s interview, 28.04.2025, Beirut)? This creates further problems related to fields like the access to education as often African refugee families will neither be given a spot in the morning shift for Lebanese nor the afternoon shift that is for refugees. This is linked to issues discussed in the first part of the dissertation concerning the different usage of terms linked to migration and the different rights that come with the specific status of being a migrant or a refugee, in the case of Sudanese communities often being hard to distinguish, a growing vulnerability to state immigration authorities present.

### 5.17 Humanitarianism as continuing coloniality

Even though more research on alternative approaches in the field of development has been done in the past years, the mainstream academia as well as mainstream practices still follow a top-down approach, neglecting to include affected groups that are in the focus of the research. The top-down approach rules the Lebanese NGO field, international organisations or donors telling local NGOs what they need, not caring for an assessment on the ground. Instead of talking with and cooperating with local experts in the field, instead of better understanding the needs of vulnerable groups in different complex settings, research agendas are decided from the top which mirrors dynamics that are deeply engrained in the work conduct of international NGOs. Established programs whose goals and backgrounds were already defined before evaluating the situation on the ground without including the affected communities often dominate research agendas and settings. These peacebuilding practices of international institutions, which mostly receive funding from the Global North, neglect their responsibility to help in a practical way or change conditions in the designated community. Instead, they reproduce colonialist power dynamics that fail to take into account the actual needs of communities, only refeeding the NGO business. Through the prioritisation of intervention from a perspective that focuses on a top-down approach instead of directly addressing the affected groups, a colonial hierarchical distance is kept alive (Jabri, 2013).

A question that cannot be ignored in that matter and that was raised by the project manager is whether NGOs are not fully committed to actually finding and working on long-term solutions because they would lose the justification of their existence. She observes in the context of her work that organisations do not focus on an exit strategy as they would not have a reason to exist anymore. This translates to the embedding of migration into capitalist dynamics, the management of refugees turning into a profitable business for different actors, seeing the logistical aspect of migration dynamics today.

Established reception structures represent a transformation of asylum seekers into “passive” receptors that are moved and directed by others, being deprived of their agency in the process and seen as objects or commodities, restricting their mobility (Vianelli, 2022, p. 46).

Additionally, the project manager raises the concern that no international organisation or donor wants to provide anything or offer programs to young men, their focus being the support of young women which is indeed a very important task and need but as a trend completely leaves out teenage boys who find themselves without any support.

### 5.18 Externalising racialist colonialist practices

According to the Implementing Decision of the deal (European Commission, 2024e), the defined actions should be implemented by what is referred to as “indirect management” (p. 4). So far, NGOs are not seeing any money from the deal between the EU and Lebanon and none of the interviewees directly working at one or any other expert interviewed could answer where the money is going to. They repeatedly insisted their hope that it is not going to the Lebanese government as there is absolutely no trust in it and the corrupt political system, even though some of them do place new hope on President Aoun and his chosen cabinet. No one that was interviewed knew exactly where the money of the deal between the EU and Lebanon is being invested, only referring to Van der Leyen’s press statement from her visit to Lebanon stating that one part is going to general security to help with border and migration management (von der Leyen, 2024). The Gender and Migration expert of an NGO shared that the government is working on a new procurement which is purchasing new scanners that are going to be installed at borders, scanners for trucks, cars and for cargo that is going across borders.

Stel & Nimer (2024) observe that the EU’s financial support to Lebanon for the implementation of enhanced border management is first and foremost directed towards the prevention of refugees moving onward towards Europe. The authors state that the EU is attempting to somehow legally uphold the principle of non-refoulement through clandestinely shifting its border towards Lebanon, away from official EU territory and its human rights legal obligations. That this jeopardises the safety and protection of residing Syrian refugees in Lebanon is not a concern of a racialised colonialist externalisation strategy. The undermining of fundamental human rights is inherent in the dynamics concerning the EU’s outer border management and strategy (Kohlenberger, 2022, p. 9). This is very well mirrored in von der Leyen’s press statement in May 2024 in Beirut when she announced the deal between the EU and Lebanon. She emphasised Lebanon’s responsibilities to prevent refugees from crossing the Mediterranean in order to receive financial support, very well aware of the conditions that refugees are facing in the country:

To help you in managing migration, we are committed to maintain legal pathways open to Europe and resettle refugees from Lebanon to the European Union. At the same time, we count on your good

cooperation to prevent illegal migration and combat migrant smuggling. (European Commission, 2024b)

The mentioning of maintaining legal pathways towards Europe and the resettlement of refugees to the EU is paradoxical. First, Syrian refugees do not have access to legal pathways if they cannot officially register as a refugee in Lebanon in the first place and second, projected needed resettlement numbers reaching 161 400 refugees in 2026 (UNHCR, 2025a, p.90), while only 6 246 have been resettled in 2024, and this not even solely to member states of the EU (UNHCR, 2025e , p. 8).

As already discussed, but important in light of the deal as well are the restrictions from Lebanese authorities which create difficulties for the UNHCR to exercise its mandate for refugee protection (Janmyr, 2018). These circumstances are in no way mentioned nor demands for change made in the documents concretising the deal between the EU and Lebanon. The documents do address protection needs of asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons (European Commission, 2024g, p. 5), but fail to address the missing legal framework and existence of an official refugee status for Syrian refugees after 2015 in Lebanon. This insinuates that the EU does not see it as a relevant point to assure a correct registration of refugees in Lebanon and instead prioritises its own aims of border externalisation and migration management.

It is through these unclear and blurry circumstances about the legal protection of refugees in Lebanon that they face a system full of uncertainties (Janmyr, 2018). It is necessary to understand the interconnection between the restricted work of the UNHCR which renders Syrian refugees more vulnerable to exploitation on many levels as well as perilous life circumstances and the EU nevertheless engaging in a migration deal with Lebanon.

Moreover, the lawyer criticises the intransparency of the deal and the ways in which the money is spent and insists that it is purposeful opaqueness, so that no one can be held accountable. The Technical Research Manager has been working in the field and together with refugees for a long time and describes how she notices that there is no trust left in the Global North and the EU in particular, also referring to the deal made in 2024.

If I want to be honest, refugees here, they have been left by the EU and all the Western world. They think that all the talks are talks and there's no real work, and that they are paying money for the Lebanese government just to make them stay here, no matter how, no matter in what way. Even if they are not well treated, if they are exploited, the EU doesn't care about them, they just want them to stay here. (Author's interview, 13.05.2025, Beirut)

The project director, who has been living and working in Lebanon for a couple of years, shares how he feels like he lives on a boarder.

Even though the EU border is geographically quite far away, this feels like a border because it's a place where people have come from all over the world and are pushing up against the EU or against the rest of the international community and are stuck here. (Author's interview, 28.04.2025, Beirut)

Lemberg-Pedersen (2019) constitutes how the European strategy of externalisation exhibits rebuilding colonial visions of mobilities resulting in

a schewed (sic!) vision of displacement and its management aligned with colonial matrices of power. The vision is based on assumptions of European and Western exceptionality, itself exempt from the social and political-economic contexts it reinforces, is implemented in, and originates from. (p. 37)

Meanwhile, all the interviewees working at local NGOs providing services to refugees agree that while funding has always been a rather complicated issue, it has been increasingly difficult to receive long-term funding, the situation becoming more drastic and programs having to be cut. This is very concerning as the EU policy documents regarding the deal between the EU and Lebanon clearly state the aim to improve the situation on the ground for minority and marginalised groups, both Syrian refugees and Lebanese (European Commission, 2024). The scholar reiterates that

[t]heir main priority is keep them from leaving to our borders, keep them from washing up on our beaches. And however, you know, whatever kind of happens in between that, I've spoken to different embassy staff, European and non-EU European, who has expressly said, you know, there's almost no oversight in terms of how these materials are managed. (Author's interview, 6.05.2025, Beirut)

What is further not taken into consideration in the EU action plans is the change of governments after elections and how this could deeply impact their willingness to implement the agreed-on actions or the general motivation to work with the EU.

### 5.19 Neglected responsibilities

The scholar interviewed sees a clear pattern of the EU migration strategy since 2015 to shift the borders of the EU to third countries. Lebanon represents an interesting case insofar as it was not regarded as a departure country and as a priority initially but that shifted over time since October 2023. The EU is still not considering Lebanon as a country with a significant maritime migration route but is very much recognising its importance as a hosting state that functions as their externalised border to prevent the "unwanted migrant" from reaching Europe. Here once again, the EU's racialised policy strategy becomes apparent, constructing hierarchies between different groups and classifying Syrian refugees as threats for the Global North (Corcodel & Fragkou, 2024). The opposing differentiation and classification of people into "EU citizen" and "refugee/migrant" as well as the distinction between EU member states and third countries that serve as an externalised border by current externalisation policies is reinstating a new form of coloniality (Afailal & Fernandez, 2018). This view of Lebanon as an external border meant

to keep refugees from continuing their journeys towards Europe is extremely problematic as the Gender and Migration expert voices:

[I]f you want to lead, you need to lead by example. So, you cannot just say, we're closing our borders, but we want you to handle this situation or this issue. Because by then, the message that you're really delivering or sending is, this is a problem for us, we don't want it, so it's up to you to have this problem at your hand. (Author's interview, 15.05.2025, Beirut)

It would be ignorant to see the whole responsibility of taking care of refugees on the Lebanese state. The scholar insists on the aspect that

European states who have contributed to this don't really want to answer your question, because everyone knows the very big, dirty secret is that Lebanon treats refugees [very badly], and they're contributing towards that. They're contributing to the more efficient malpractice and maltreatment of refugees. (Author's interview, 6.05.2025, Beirut)

This includes human rights violations that are very well known and not just happening in Lebanon but across the other states that the EU has externalised its relationships with (see Lemberg-Pedersen, 2015; Santos & Matellán, 2021; Pijnenburg, 2024). The project director agrees that it is an issue of the international community, and the Lebanese government is not the one who should fully be blamed for its difficulties in handling the load of refugees. He has refugees every day asking him for help in navigating resettlement and every time he has to tell them that there is nothing he can do. Resettlement almost feels like a myth for him, even though it is a clear goal mentioned in the EU deal documents (European Commission, 2024g). The Gender and Migration expert is upset about how long the same circumstances have been shaping the situation on the ground:

10 years, and now we are still in the same place we were before, and this really addresses or poses the question: What is the issue? I mean, if all this money is being spent, why are we still where we started before? Why isn't the situation implemented? Why hasn't it improved? So, what are the issues? (Author's interview, 15.05.2025, Beirut)

The researcher states that the big focus is to keep refugees from coming to Europe, making conditions somehow barely liveable in Lebanon, and the shouts for pushing out Syrians back to Syria getting louder after the fall of the regime. Unfortunately, she sees the EU following and facilitating this dynamic, turning a blind eye to different violations of human rights on the part of the Lebanese as the main directive is "we don't want them in Europe". She explains that people in Lebanon feel a certain kind of hypocrisy concerning the push to keep so many refugees in the country, when they see the EU or the US do not have to deal with that number per capita. They ask themselves "you wouldn't be okay with this. Why are you saying that we should be okay with this?" (author's interview, 26.05.2025, Beirut)? There is a nuanced understanding of looking for guidance from the EU in human rights principles and then getting the short end of the stick in being forced to keep all refugees in Lebanon. Dynamics of Europe

simply paying Lebanon off are fostering a colonialist vision of imposing itself and simply leaving these unwanted subjects (refugees) in an “underdeveloped”, unequal country, not caring about their life conditions there.

While a human-rights based approach is continuously referred to in one of the Annexes of the EU Lebanon deal (European Commission, 2024f), the international human rights lawyer speaks about how Europe is shoving any human rights issues into the Global South, which is already dealing with shortcomings on this behalf, struggling to improve its own human rights records. This has the effect that already vulnerable people are pushed into an even more precarious situation. While the Refugee Convention foresees a burden sharing and cooperation around refugee crises, Europe and the Global North in general have decided that this can be simply translated to throwing money at hosting countries, not taking into account that Lebanon has a population of around 4 million people and with a refugee population of over 1 million this changes the whole socio-political makeup of the country.

In addition to this, the EU and other Western actors are not focusing enough on making sure that the funds are not going to groups that are already violating human rights which would be very hypocrite as the lawyer states that

with each passing year and the way that things are developing and the pushbacks at European borders, the mass killings of refugees and migrants seeking asylum, it's very hard to do these actions and then come and tell Lebanon, hey, you guys need to respect refugee rights. (Author's interview, 13.05.2025, Beirut)

The intensified conflict between Israel and Hezbollah since the outbreak of war in Gaza in October 2023 renders their situation even worse and more unsafe as they are affected by Israeli bombings. Resources are not enough for displaced Lebanese affected by the war and Syrians on top of that. The project manager says this means that Syrian refugees are being turned away from shelters as capacities and resources are limited. The lawyer states

[i]t's for me very ridiculous that Europe has continued with keeping the pressure on Lebanon to keep refugees here instead of for instance when the war with Israel happened immediately taking up actions to get refugees out of Lebanon and to a safer location. (Author's interview, 13.05.2025, Beirut)

Refugees were facing two options: stay in Lebanon to relive war and encounter anti-refugee sentiments or return to Syria and possibly go back to threats and dangers that they were trying to escape from in the first place. There were refugees dying because of Israeli bombs (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2024) as well as over 100 000 people, mostly Syrian but also Lebanese, crossing from Lebanon into Syria after the escalation of the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in September 2023 (UNHCR, 2024d). The Technical Research Manager's remarks illustrate the failure of the responsibility of a

refugee hosting country to protect refugees on their territory (UNHCR, 2010a) as laid down in the 1951 Refugee Convention.

When the Israeli aggression in Lebanon happened, they were not accepted even in the shelters that the government provided for the internally displaced persons. They were on the roads. We met with many families that had to stay on the roads for weeks before they were able to go back to the region where most of their houses were in a very bad situation. (Author's interview, 2.05.2025, Beirut)

Still, the human rights lawyer insists, the EU remained focused on the improvements of human rights in Lebanon instead of putting sanctions on Israel or trying in any credible way to stop the aggressions.

It's a fake concern, it's a symbolic concern "this is us, we're still upholding human rights" but nobody's buying it anymore. That's obviously impacting human rights in general whether it's refugee rights or anyone else's rights, we're all now at much greater risk of facing violations because basically the world has turned its back on rules on the international rule-based order. (Author's interview, 13.05.2025, Beirut)

The discourse and actions towards Syria within the international community in the upcoming time will determine the public sentiment around the refugee question in Lebanon, especially questioning why Syrian refugees are not returning to their home country. All this happens in light of the already mentioned first deportation to Syria in the past 15 years from Austria, the deported Syrian stripped of his refugee status after being convicted to 7 years of prison. He went missing a couple of days after his deportation, the Austrian Ministry of Interior confirming he had been successfully handed over to Syrian authorities (ORF, 2025). The lawyer says these dynamics have started in Lebanon as well directly after the fall of the regime, politicians mouthing that now it would be safe for the refugees to finally leave. The pressure concerning a possible return for Syrian refugees was there even before the fall of the Assad regime but has certainly amplified after December 2024 (Borelli et al., 2025, p. 3).

Like Davis (2016), the lawyer believes that only when Europeans, who right now still believe they are not concerned, eventually realise that these conventions and standards exist for a reason, and that disrespecting them affects not only the intangible situation far away but drives down rights in general. In this regard, the researcher critically concludes that "[t]aking away rights from some doesn't give more rights to others" (author's interview, 26.05.2025, Beirut).

## 6 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I argued that the current EU migration strategy of externalisation comprises a racialising ideology and a framework that leads to the reproduction of colonialist practices. Whereas what happens directly at the EU's outer borders is rendered visible to a certain extent, what happens in countries like Lebanon which have made migration deals with the EU and are hosting high numbers of refugees, remains invisible to the eyes of most people. It is an invisibility hiding legal failure. Hiding political failure. Hiding humanitarian failure and injustice and human rights violations. Hiding the colonial continuity inherent in the EU's strategy of externalising migration. And, most importantly for this work, it is an invisibility hiding the implications of these racialised and colonialist practices for Syrian refugees' lived realities in Lebanon.

The aim of this dissertation is to fill the gap in the current literature by complementing migration studies with a decolonial feminist intersectional framework which provides the capacity to shed a light on the more invisible dynamics of the EU's migration strategy of externalisation. Approaching this research through the perspective of a decolonial feminist people-centred approach allowed the work to expand more traditional views of migration scholarship and analyse the racialised and colonial continuity of the EU's policies and their implications for Syrian refugees' social realities in Lebanon.

In order to answer the main research question "In what ways do the EU's racialised and colonialist practices regarding their strategy of externalising migration impact Syrian refugees' social realities in Lebanon?" as well as the three secondary questions "How does colonial continuity manifest itself in the EU's strategy of externalising migration?", "In what concrete ways do Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon experience discrimination and marginalisation?" and "Why is a decolonial feminist intersectional framework crucial for understanding the EU's migration strategy towards countries of the Global South?", I conducted qualitative fieldwork in Beirut from March till June 2025. I followed a decolonial and participatory trauma-informed methodology and conducted 19 semi-structured interviews, 10 with Syrian refugees currently residing in Lebanon and 9 with experts in the field. The analysis of the interviews was aimed to provide a rich and faceted understanding of the intricacies of Syrian refugees' lives. The combination of the chosen theoretical and methodological framework rendered possible an empirical analysis of the interviews that uncovers systemic discriminatory structures and power dynamics concerning the social realities of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and connects them with the EU's racialised and colonialist migration practices. As became clear through the analysis of the conducted interviews, refugees experience marginalisation and discrimination in almost every aspect of their life, from a social, cultural, legal as well as socio-economic perspective. It is essential for this research to understand that these systemic discriminations do not exist separately from each other but are interconnected, often one discrimination on a specific level leading to another one on a different scale. Further, these complex dynamics that shape Syrian refugees' daily lives in Lebanon,

the challenges and obstacles they face and the ways in which they get discriminated and marginalised are expressions of a racialised colonialist EU migration policy.

I am aware of the limitations of this research that was conducted with a relatively small number of participants. The focus on the Syrian refugee community represents a conscious choice and helped guard the specificity and particularity of this research but it is nevertheless important to state that in doing so it shifted the centre of attention away from other refugee communities in Lebanon, namely South Sudanese and Palestinian.

There are many subjects not yet aborded by academic research on the impacts of externalisation of migration from the Global North to the Global South, future research needs to shift its focus away from top-down approaches and instead aim to render visible the continuing coloniality hidden in the EU's migration policies, placing voices of the marginalised in the centre of research.

Refugee protection needs to be regarded as a European issue, the rights around forced displacement needing to be reconfirmed. Putting preconditions on how Lebanon needs to treat refugees without questioning the implications of racialising and colonialist European migration policies fails to address the responsibility and accountability of the Global North for disrespecting the international rule of law, international human rights and the Refugee Convention.

Only through a deeper understanding of the dynamics and conditions of the current migration externalisation policies today can future ones be imagined and aimed at. In this regard, this dissertation makes an original contribution to expanding current scholarship with an innovative and underexplored framework, advancing decolonial migration studies. The combined usage of a decolonial feminist intersectional framework with a participatory trauma-informed methodology allows to address a research gap in migration studies, which are predominantly focused on visible aspects of the externalisation of migration, and to comprehend continuing systemic colonialist structures.

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## Memorandum of Understanding

Between  
BASMEH AND ZEITONEH

And  
Ms. Lea Pacher

This memorandum of understanding (MoU) is entered into on 11.05.2025 between:

**Party A:** Basmeh and Zeitoneh, an independent, non-profit, non-governmental Lebanese-registered organization by Decree #145/2014, with its HQ office based in Lebanon, Beirut, Furn El Chebbak, Rizkallah Semaan Street, Al Sabbah Building, 4th floor, represented by, Chief Executive Director Mr. Fadi Hallisso (hereinafter referred to as B&Z)

**And Party B:** Ms. Lea Pacher, ISCTE, 1649-026 Lisbon, Portugal, Avenida das Forças Armadas hereinafter referred to as Ms. Lea Pacher

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this MoU is to set forth the commitments, responsibilities, and rights for each party in the execution of the Field research under the research project entitled “The EU as a (re)producer of humanitarian injustice? The outsourcing of migration to Lebanon and its implications for refugees’ social realities”, under University of ISCTE.

Both Parties, Basmeh & Zeitoneh and Ms. Lea Pacher agree that the partnership is built on the common core values that the two organizations share in their mandate and objectives.

The two parties agree that the conditions to be fulfilled for the strengthening and consolidation of the partnership are the following:

- Transparency and accountability.
- Clear identification of the specific responsibilities of each of the two parties.
- High level of communication along with the established communication mechanism and in full respect of the agreed roles.

### Implementation aspects:

Ms. Lea Pacher master research aims to shed a light on the circumstances that shape refugees’ social realities here in Lebanon. In recent years, the EU has deepened the externalisation of migration and border control through close cooperation, agreements and deals with countries from the Mena region including Lebanon. The root causes of migration are not addressed through these deals as well as human rights challenges not taken into consideration by the EU. The focus of the research is the one billion euro deal between the EU and Lebanon made in May 2024, with the aim to further understand the implications of the EU’s strategy of outsourcing migration for refugees’ social realities in Lebanon. Through doing field research in Beirut, I will connect the EU’s migration strategy to its actual effects and implications for the social reality of refugees. Ms. Lea Pacher conducts expert interviews with people working in the field here in Lebanon and is extending this gained knowledge in the context of this

cooperation with Basmeh & Zeitooneh through interviews with an expected number of 10-15 Syrian refugees, aiming for gender parity, diversity in age (18-60 years) and people who have arrived here in Lebanon from 2015 till now. By connecting the EU's migration agenda and the narrations of experiences and understandings of those people who are affected the most directly through measures deriving from migration deals, the implications of the EU's migration deal with Lebanon on migrants' social realities can be uncovered. The interviews follow a participatory and trauma-informed approach, prioritizing the agency and dignity of participants, which allows the shift of the research from extractive to collaborative, highlighting complex narratives instead of reducing them to victims or generic statistics.

Basmeh & Zeitooneh has well-established community centers, access, and strong relations with the communities in Tripoli in Lebanon. Therefore, Ms. Lea Pacher, is requesting Basmeh & Zeitooneh assistance to provide a list of participants who will be interviewed under this research.

This agreement subsequently outlines the broader partnership aspects of both parties under this agreement for the implementation of the research entitled "Exploring the role(s), functioning and importance of community-led support in urban protracted displacement: the case of displaced Syrians in Tripoli, Lebanon" and will be implemented by Ms. Lea Pacher, in Nabaa, Lebanon.

## **AREAS OF COOPERATION**

Based on the annexed activity concept proposal, Ms. Lea Pacher will implement the research entitled "The EU as a (re)producer of humanitarian injustice? The outsourcing of migration to Lebanon and its implications for refugees' social realities", which include the qualitative research methods whereas Basmeh & Zeitooneh will support in providing a list of participants in Nabaa area who match the research scope.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

### **Basmeh and Zeitooneh's Responsibilities:**

- 1- Provide a list of participants from the Nabaa area who align with the research criteria. The final number of participants will be determined as the research advances, with a maximum of 20 individuals, each to be interviewed through one-on-one sessions. Interviewees will be adult displaced members of the community living in urban Nabaa to learn more about their social realities here in Lebanon as a refugee, especially regarding difficulties, discrimination and marginalisation they are facing in their daily lives.
- 2- Provide access to the community center in Nabaa, Lebanon, with a dedicated space and necessary facilities during the agreed-upon activity periods.
- 3- Coordinate closely with the research team to fulfill the project activities at its community center.

### **B. Part B. (Ms. Lea Pacher )'s Responsibilities:**

- 1- Share with the final selected participants with Basmeh & Zeitooneh;
- 2- Ensure the activities are aligned with the objectives of B&Z and are carried out in a professional manner
- 3- To keep updating Basmeh & Zeitooneh with any changes on the project and/or updating B&Z centers coordinator with any changes on the schedule in a timely

- manner.
- 4- Party B. confirms to adhere to B&Z safeguarding policies (including policies related to Child Protection, PSEA Policy, Anti-Fraud Policy, Code of Conduct, Visitor Code of Conduct, and Data Sharing Agreement) while working with referred participants and during working at B&Z community center. Annexed to this MoU to be signed.
  - 5- Respect participant data confidentiality and privacy as per the data sharing agreement signed by both parties.
  - 6- Party B is committed to reimburse the research participants, referred by B&Z, for the transportation cost. Each participant will be reimbursed with 10\$ for each visit related to the research project.
  - 7- Party B. will share the research finding with B&Z for discussion before including in the study.
  - 8- Party B. will sign a consent form with the research participants.

Both parties have the right to terminate this agreement by a written notice (15 working days prior to the date of actual termination) if the other party is in breach of any obligation of the agreement.

### **DURATION AND VALIDITY**

This MoU is considered in force commencing from 11.05.2025 till 30.6. 2025. In case of desired renewal of this MoU, and after approval from both parties and based on their interests; both parties can sign a renewal and add it to this MoU.

### **Confidentiality**

Both parties agree to maintain the confidentiality of any sensitive information shared during the collaboration and to use it solely for the purposes outlined in this MOU.

### **Termination:**

Both parties have the right to terminate this MoU by a written notice (15 working days prior to the date of actual termination) if the other party is in breach of any obligation of the agreement.

### **APPLICABLE LAWS**

This MoU is subject to the application and interpretation of the provision of Lebanon laws and regulations in Lebanon.

### **Code of Conduct, Child Protection, PSEA, and Anti-Fraud policies**

B&Z is committed to providing a dignified and safe environment and services for all. Both parties agree to abide by each parties already established safeguarding policy, PSEA policy, child protection policy and code of conduct. In the case Party B did not have the mentioned policies in place, both parties (A and B) and their representatives will adhere to B&Z safeguarding policies under this agreement.,

- As an organization that is committed to safeguarding the well-being of children and upholding the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Basmeh & Zeitooneh maintains a zero-tolerance policy on child abuse.

- B&Z has a zero-tolerance policy toward sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Basmeh & Zeitooneh have a zero-tolerance position on Fraud, bribery, and corrupt activities.
- Basmeh and Zeitooneh recognize that gender relations and inequalities are fundamental causes of poverty. Principles of equity and social justice require us to work to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity for expressing and using their potential, irrespective of sex, age, race, color, class, caste, religion, ethnic background, sexual orientation, HIV status, or disability.
- Given that Basmeh & Zeitooneh (B&Z) is committed to maintaining participants' personal information's security, confidentiality, and privacy, it is required for both parties to sign a data sharing agreement in the event participant's data was required to be handled.

Accordingly, the list of annexes including the data sharing agreement and policies, must be signed by both parties (or their representatives) stating their acceptance and full commitment.

## II. Annexes to this MoU:

- Annex 1. B&Z Visitor Code of Conduct.
- Annex 2. B&Z's PSEA Policy.
- Annex 3: Data Protection
- Annex 4: Conflict of Interest Policy

## III. SIGNATORIES:

On behalf of Part A: Basmeh and Zeitooneh	On behalf of Party B: Lea Pacher
(I hereby confirm my valid legal representation of the aforementioned Party A)	(I hereby confirm my valid legal representation of the aforementioned Party B)
Name: Omar Trad Title: Lebanon Country Director Date:	Name: Lea Pacher Title: Visiting fellow at LAU, BA, BA Date: 11.05.2025
Signature 	Signature: 

## Annex B

### Preliminary set of question for Syrian refugee interviews

The following represents a preliminary, non-exhaustive set of questions that will be reviewed, evaluated and potentially expanded prior to the conduction of the interviews. This also applies to the order of the questions.

Can you share your personal journey? Where exactly (which region, city or village) are you from? Have you come to Lebanon alone or with family/friends?

When did you decide to leave your home and for what reasons?

For how long have you been in Lebanon?

What were your expectations when you left your home?

Are you planning to stay here in Lebanon or do you want to continue to another country or continent?

If so, what do you hope to find there?

What do you know about the EU and how it deals with migration and refugees?

Do you plan on applying for asylum in the EU?

Could you describe your experience of when you arrived in Lebanon?

Do you have an official refugee status by the UNHCR?

What kind of support have you been given and by whom?

Can you tell me about your living conditions and what your daily life looks like?

What do you think are the main challenges and problems you are facing as a refugee in Lebanon? (potentially give them key points to describe their situation regarding education, health services, labour market, housing, residency)

What do you think it would need to change this situation?

Do you feel welcome here in Lebanon?

Do you feel safe as a refugee in Lebanon, and could you elaborate on your answer?

What has your contact with official authorities been like, could you tell me about your experience?

Have you come across information about situations where people had to leave Lebanon even though they didn't want to? If you're comfortable sharing, has anyone you know been affected by such circumstances? If so, would you mind explaining?

Have you experienced violence based on your status as a refugee yourself and if so could you tell me about your experience?

Do you think violence against refugees in Lebanon has risen lately?

Do you think it is now safe for you to return to your home country?

If you could speak to an official responsible for migration to the EU, what would you like to tell them?

## Annex C

### Preliminary set of questions for expert interviews

In your opinion, how has the EU's migration strategy evolved over the past years and how do you evaluate it, especially regarding the agreements and deals the EU is making with non-member states like Lebanon?

What role does Lebanon play in the EU's externalization strategy? How has this shaped the country's policies towards refugees regarding their access to protection and asylum in Lebanon?

How are official authorities treating refugees?

How do refugees in Lebanon experience discrimination or marginalization in light of the EU's externalization efforts? What are the main critical issues that emerge as a result?

What do you think are the main challenges refugees are facing in Lebanon?

Did you see a change in the last years?

Have you heard about forced deportations, and have they become more prominent lately?

How has violence against refugees by official authorities but also within the civil population changed? Do you think the attitude towards refugees has changed in Lebanon and if so in what ways? Local population

What is the situation on the ground, do many refugees still want to continue to Europe or are they looking to stay in Lebanon?

What do you think is the main challenge for Lebanese authorities when it comes to migration management?

The migration deal between the EU and Lebanon includes 1 billion Euros for Lebanon to improve border and migration control, in what ways has the money been used so far? Do you see it being used for the right purposes?

Looking ahead, how do you think the EU's approach to border externalization might evolve, and what do you foresee as potential improvements or risks for refugees in Lebanon in the future?

According to you, does the EU/international community neglect or fail to uphold its humanitarian responsibilities towards refugees in Lebanon and if so in what ways?

In your opinion, in what ways would the international migration regime as well as efforts in Lebanon need to change in order to guarantee the protection of refugees' rights?