

# **The impact of Covid-19 on the 'European dream' of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.**

## **Research question:**

In the last few years, Lebanon has welcomed in his refugee camps many refugees coming from Palestine and Syria. However, for some of these people, Lebanon only represents a stop throughout their journey to Europe. Departing from Lebanon, refugees usually find their ways to southern European countries such as Italy and Cyprus because easier to access by the sea and then spread throughout Europe with Germany being one of the main destinations.

Covid-19 has affected people's travel habits throughout the world, allowing people with only certain travel purposes to move around. Refugees, who often do not manage to undergo legal proceedings to access European countries, have therefore not been considered essential travellers. This Research project is going to explore how Covid-19 has impacted their arrivals to Europe.

## **Detailed explanation:**

In the past few years we have heard many people speak about the 'refugee crisis' in Europe and the different ways in which asylum seekers have been welcomed around the continent. The conditions in which they are forced to live in when arriving in Europe is also widely known, and this brought me to the question: what pushes them to move over here, then? This then led me to the Lebanese situation. Lebanon has the highest per capita population of refugees in the world, most of them being Syrian and Palestinian. The country is also going through their worst socio-economic and health crisis in decades with inflation rates constantly increasing, especially in the food market. The situation made the already concerning conditions of the refugees in Lebanon even worse, with most of them not being able to afford the SMEB (survival minimum expenditure basket). Additionally, anti-refugees sentiment throughout the country is constantly increasing, in most cases also stoked by local politicians. In this situation, for Syrian and Palestinian refugees, trying to get to Cyprus or Sicily (Italy) seems like their only option to survive.

On the other hand, another pressing current concern world-wide is Covid-19. The pandemic has weakened most economies and has made countries such as Lebanon particularly vulnerable. During

such a hard time, the Lebanese government does not have enough resources to sustain the ever increasing refugee population. The travel bans implemented due to the pandemic have made it harder for refugees to find a way to get to Europe and in some cases discouraged them because of the new procedures they have to go through. I therefore thought it would be interesting to conduct a research regarding the impact of the pandemic on these vulnerable categories in order to have a clearer picture of what can be done and how European governments are and should be approaching the situation. The research project also meets Ireland's and Trinity College's current research focus in International Integration.

My two supervisors, Dr. Rachel Hoare and Dr. Tylor Brand, with their expertise, will help me assess and overcome the problems I could encounter as well as point me in the right direction in approaching the interviews and questionnaire. Dr. Rachel Hoare, whose field of study is partly on refugees, will help me with the methodology and ethical questions whereas Dr. Tylor Brand, whose studies focus on Modern Middle Eastern history and politics, will give me a better understanding of current challenges faced in Lebanon and how to take this into account in my research.

### **Methodology:**

I have made a questionnaire of 15 questions which is divided into two parts: the first one concerning the impact of Coronavirus on refugee arrivals to Europe in general, and the second one focusing on Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Some experts on the field such as Maria Hennessy, who works for the UNHCR Ireland, Maria Quinto & Daniela Pompei, directors of the Sant'Egidio Community in Italy, Helin Yildiz, the assistant of a Parliamentary representative for the Italian Democratic Party focusing on migration, David Durnin, the Immigration control manager at the Dublin Airport and Anna Louise Kierans, the founder of HomefromHomeD6, have agreed to answer some of the questions in an interview. The questionnaire will be sent to them before and they will choose which questions to answer depending on their field of expertise. I am in the process of applying for ethical approval with the school of social work and social policy and eventually conduct any required training to receive the necessary clearances.

Not speaking to refugees directly but rather to the people who help them and study their situation was a choice made on the basis that specific training and expertise is needed to do so and it would not be responsible since it could possibly lead to misunderstandings.

**The questionnaire explained:**

The questionnaire I have prepared is divided into two parts: the first one, questions 1-7, titled 'General impact of Covid-19 on refugees coming to Europe', and the second one, questions 8-15, titled 'Impact of Covid-19 on Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon'. The aim is to have an overview of the impact of the pandemic on the refugee situation worldwide in order to then compare it to the one in Lebanon and how it affected arrivals to Europe. The questions cover a various spectrum, from the new legal procedures refugees need to go through when entering European countries to their new alternatives closer to their country of origin.

The questionnaire, being mainly answered from people working directly with Lebanon from Ireland and Italy will give a broader spectrum because Italy welcomes a high number of refugees coming from Lebanon because of its proximity to the country and because of its strategic position on the Mediterranean Sea, whereas what makes Ireland a common destination is the fact that it is an english-speaking country which is still part of the European Union. The fact that the questionnaire is going to be asked to people working in two different countries is going to help with the understanding of the different refugees policies in place and how these changed with the pandemic.