



The impact of Covid-19 on the 'European Dream' of Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon

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Background and aim of the project:

Lebanon is known worldwide because of the high concentration of refugees in its territory. However, this country is considered by most refugees as a temporary stop to either move to Europe or go back to their country of origin.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made it harder, and for some categories impossible, to travel. Asylum-seekers, not classified as essential travellers, have faced difficulties reaching European territory and the overall numbers has fallen by around 30% (European Commission 2021).

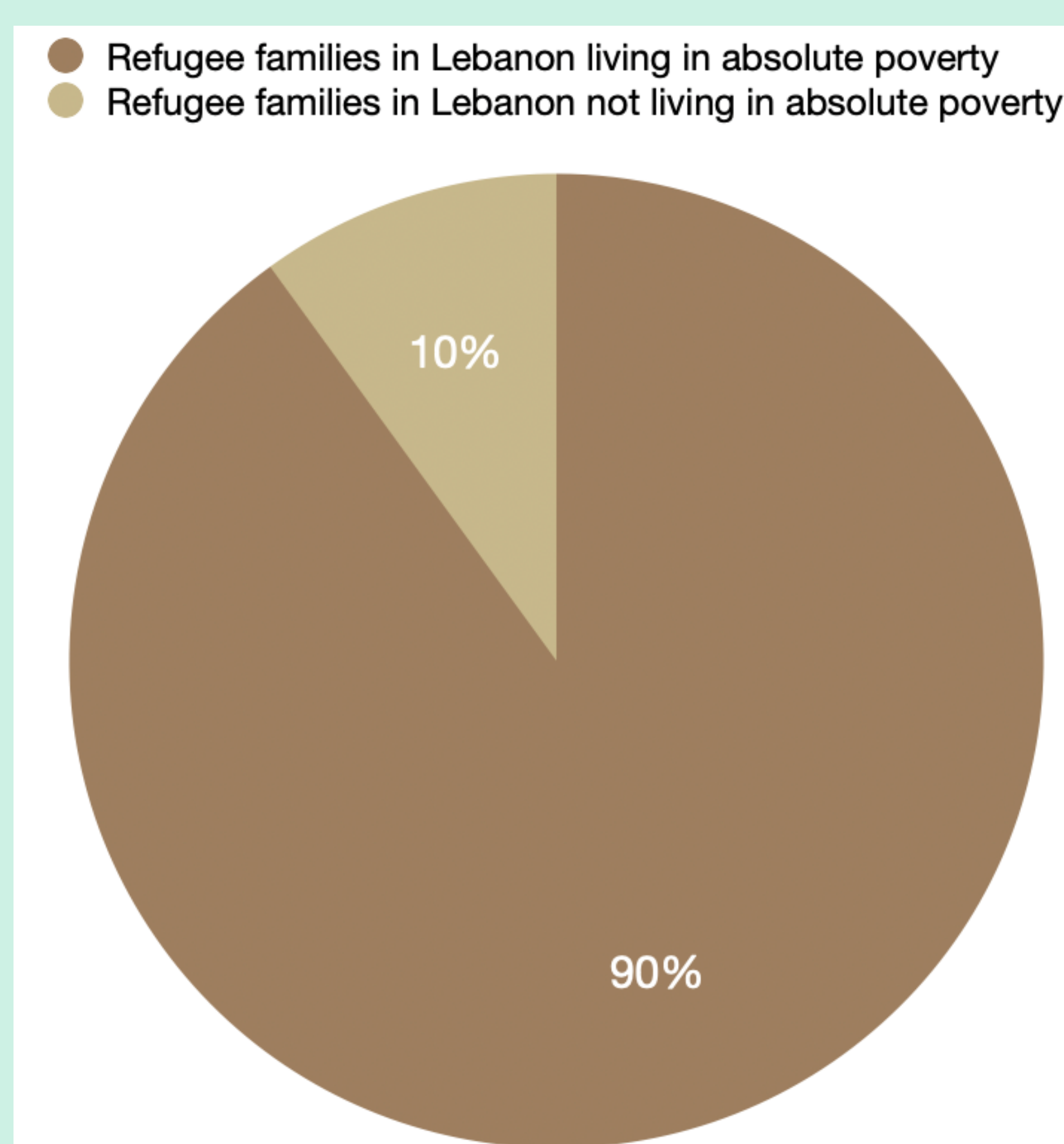
The aim of the project was to shed light on the unequal distribution of refugees throughout the world, on the way the Covid-19 pandemic was used as an excuse to reinforce the EU's external borders and on how the countries of the Global South are forced to take the burden of the majority of the refugee population worldwide. To do so, the project focused on the movement of refugees from Lebanon to Italy, Cyprus and Ireland throughout the pandemic.



Image 1- Syrian refugees in a Refugee camp in Lebanon (Pekka Tiainen 2013)

Reasons for fleeing Lebanon

- Refugees are seen as a threat because with their Sunni religious background they could alter Lebanon's sectarian government's current equilibrium.
- Palestinian refugees are not allowed to own property on Lebanese territory.
- Syrian refugees cannot register with the UNHCR and this makes it very hard for them to get a legal residency permit.
- In order to be ensured in Lebanon, refugees need to be in possession of a residency permit. Since this has become really hard to get, it is not safe for them to live in Lebanon during a health crisis.
- The socio-economic situation in Lebanon has made it impossible for refugees to stay in the country, seeing 9 out of 10 refugee families living in extreme poverty.
- In Lebanon, although borders were closed, Syrian refugees were encouraged to go back to their country. Lebanese authorities told Syrian and Palestinian refugees that the situation in their country had gotten better and as they did not have access to media outlets, they went back home and have no way out.



Reception of refugees in Europe

In Italy asylum-seeking applications never closed and humanitarian flights were carried out throughout the pandemic. Asylum seekers had to go through additional procedures, such as PCR tests on arrival, and the ones arriving by sea had to quarantine for 14 days in the same boat they arrived with. This generated a lot of criticism.

Asylum seeking applications were closed from December 2020 until March 2021, when they reopened online. This made it hard for refugees without access to the internet to apply. Moreover, because of the housing crisis, priority was given to refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan and the ones from Lebanon had a hard time getting to Ireland.

Because of the two party agreement with Lebanon, Cyprus was allowed to send boats arriving to their shores back. This pushed many asylum-seekers to access the island from the Turkish-regulated south to then move to the south as it an EU member state. Over the past few years, there has been a general negative sentiment towards refugees and the pandemic was used as an excuse to accept less of them in the territory.

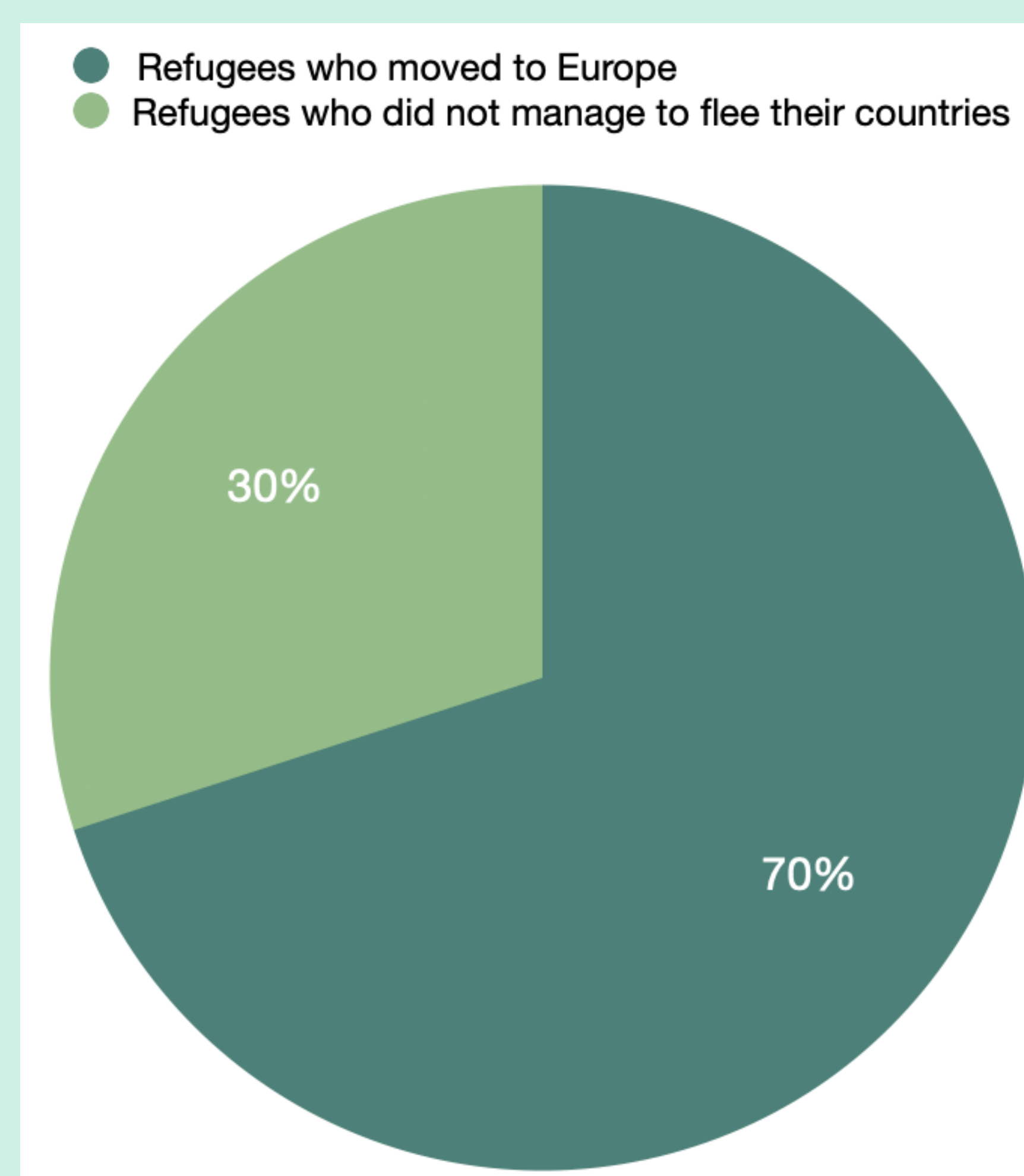
Acknowledgements

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References:

EU/ECHO, Pekka Tiainen, 2013. Syrian refugees in Lebanon. [image] Available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/eu_echo/9069280408> [Accessed 11 September 2022].
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Who is part of the 30%?

- Illegal refugees that could not access European territory because of the increased border control and did not manage to go through government schemes or community services.
- Refugees who could not get vaccinated or undergo additional Covid-19 procedures.
- Asylum-seekers with no access to the internet (online applications were the only option in some countries)