



## How the Syrian War Affected Syrian Children

Looking in Depth at the effect on their Education and the Increase of  
Child Labour in Lebanon

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2022

## Introduction

The Syrian conflict has had a devastating effect on millions of people in more than one way. Thousands have lost their lives and even more have lost their homes. However, an unspoken consequence of war is the creation of the vulnerability to human trafficking and forced labour. This research aims to look in depth into the lives of Syrian minor refugees living in Lebanon and how they are being subjected to child labour. This country has some of the most discriminatory laws which affect refugees accessing basic rights, such as education. Additionally, the U.S Department of Labour<sup>1</sup> has reported that children in Lebanon are being subjected to the worst forms of child labour and there is an alarming rate of Syrian children who are in work instead of being in education.

This report will be separated into two main sections. The first will provide background knowledge on the Syrian conflict and the effects it has had on Syrian children. The second will focus on the situation in Lebanon, where the politics and societal circumstances that are pushing children into working instead of education will be discussed. This section will explain in detail the types of child labour Syrian refugees are being forced into and the damage it can have on them.

This research wants to clearly set out the challenges that Syrian children are facing even after they have escaped conflict. Many Syrian children have been abandoned by governments and have been left to experience more trauma and harm because of the exploitation that is happening. This research aims to trigger awareness about this issue and hopes that more global leaders will realise the damaging effect child labour has. The link between conflict and child labour is not one that is just relevant to the Syrian conflict. It is an outcome that can be observed with any war and displacement, and with the rising tensions of the world, this link is something that needs to be assessed.

## The Syrian Conflict

The war in Syria started on March 15, 2011. That year there was civil unrest sweeping the Arab world. With the Arab Spring revolts in Tunisia and Egypt being a success, Syria was hoping to be next. Syrians began demonstrating across the country after ten school children were arrested and tortured for using a slogan “nizam (Down with the regime)”, borrowed from the Egyptian revolution. Their families seeking to gain the release of their children took to the streets to protest, but several were met with an unfortunate fate as security forces opened fire on them. Although smaller protests were occurring in Syria weeks before, the funeral procession of these parents brought national attention and lit the match for a revolution in Syria to happen. Twenty thousand demonstrators attended the procession, all chanting anti-government slogans and attacking government buildings. It was clear that the Syrian people were not letting these abuses of power go unseen anymore. During that March security forces killed protesters in a mosque complex in Deraa, and then they later opened fire on hundreds of youths who were marching in solidarity<sup>2</sup>. These acts of violence by the Syrian forces only fuelled the anger of the population. Protests soon spread through villages and towns as residents demanded they wanted a Syria where the values of democracy, social justice, the circulation of governmental and presidential

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Labour United States of America. (2021) 2021 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. [Online] Available at: [2021 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor \(dol.gov\)](https://www.dol.gov/eis/2021/2021-Findings-on-the-Worst-Forms-of-Child-Labor.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Suleiman al-Khalidi, “Syrian forces shoot protesters, kill 6 in mosque”, ( *Reuters*, 23 March 2011. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-gunfire-idUSTRE72M04T20110323>

authorities and freedoms are provided<sup>3</sup>. However, the situation in Syria did not play out like other Middle Eastern countries. Although countries such as Tunisia and Egypt tried to combat their protests using violence as well, they were not successful. In Tunisia security forces became overwhelmed by the protests causing President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to step down, and in Egypt President Hosni Mubarak lost the support of the army when they refused to use force against protesters<sup>4</sup>. However, Assad was able to maintain support from his security forces and had access to many resources due to outside forces such as Russia and Iran, who provided money, arms and soldiers<sup>5</sup>. This gave Assad the means to carry on using violence against protesters, which caused this peaceful counter-state protest against an unfair government to turn into a prolonged civil war which would cause thousands of casualties.

An exact estimate of the total lives lost during this war is impossible to know due to issues with recording and access to information. However, as of June 2022, the UN has estimated that there were 306,887 civil deaths from March 2011 to March 2021<sup>6</sup>. This highlights the destruction this war caused; these people did not want a war; they wanted more freedom and an end to government corruption. However, their government refused to give them this and instead caused millions to lose their families and homes and thousands more to lose their lives. The pre-war population of Syria was 21 million, however more than half of this population have been forced to leave their homes<sup>7</sup>. There are 6.9 million people that have been internally displaced within Syria<sup>8</sup>, and nearly 80% have been displaced for at least five years<sup>9</sup>. On top of that there are around 6.8 million Syrians who escaped Syria and became refugees or registered asylum seekers<sup>10</sup>. For the purpose of this report, refugees will be defined as someone who was forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence, and in most cases, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so<sup>11</sup>. Although some refugees travelled to Europe, many remained in the Middle East. There are over 5.7 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt<sup>12</sup>. These countries are struggling with their own political, security and social pressures and

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<sup>3</sup> Nahar, H. (2014), "The discourse and performance of the Syrian opposition since the beginning of the revolution-Statehood and participation", available at: [www.lb.boell.org/en/2014/03/03/discourse-andperformance-syrian-opposition-beginning-revolution-statehood-participation](http://www.lb.boell.org/en/2014/03/03/discourse-andperformance-syrian-opposition-beginning-revolution-statehood-participation)

<sup>4</sup> The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica (2015). Arab Spring. In: Encyclopædia Britannica. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring>.

<sup>5</sup> Ford, R. (2019). The Syrian Civil War a New Stage, but is it the Final One? [online] Available at: [https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2019-04/Ford\\_The\\_Syrian\\_Civil\\_War.pdf](https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2019-04/Ford_The_Syrian_Civil_War.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> OHCHR. (n.d.). Presentation of the report on civilian deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic. [online] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/06/presentation-report-civilian-deaths-syrian-arab-republic>

<sup>7</sup> House of Commons Library. (6 September 2022) The Syrian civil war: Timeline and statistics. [online] Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9381/>

<sup>8</sup> Syrian Arab Republic (February 2022). 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic - ReliefWeb. [online] Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/2022-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic-february-2022>

<sup>9</sup> House of Commons Library. (6 September 2022) The Syrian civil war: Timeline and statistics. [online] Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9381/>

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn Reid (2021). Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help | World Vision. [online] World Vision. Available at: <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>.

<sup>11</sup> [www.unrefugees.org](http://www.unrefugees.org). (n.d). What Is a Refugee? Definition and Meaning | USA for UNHCR. [online] Available at: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>.

<sup>12</sup> Türkiye. (n.d.). Registered Syrian Refugees in Host Countries: March 2022 (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey) - ReliefWeb. [online] Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/registered-syrian-refugees-host-countries-march-2022-egypt-iraq-jordan-lebanon-and>

they do not appear to have adequate resources to support refugees. This has caused Syrian refugees to face new challenges and vulnerabilities; for children this means not having access to education, being at risk of forced labour and in the worse circumstances sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Even after refugees have fled Syria their lives are still filled with hardships, and many have struggled to create new lives in host countries. There are a high number of refugees who are still in need of help, 14.6 million people need humanitarian assistance, and 5.9 million people need help to secure safe accommodation. For many, basic needs such as education and health care are still not being met<sup>13</sup>. Demonstrating that the suffering and challenges are ongoing even when refugees have escaped the war zone.

Another effect of this war is that it has caused people's communities and social networks to break down. Syrian refugees have experienced a vast amount of social isolation, as the conflict has caused a distribution to individual's support systems and many families have been separated. Being cut off from their community and family can exacerbate other risks, due to the lack of economic and psycho-social support. These are both associated with creating a greater vulnerability of becoming a victim of human trafficking<sup>14</sup>, emphasising why it is important for host countries to try and create new communities for these refugees. However, even in countries that have taken a proactive approach in helping Syrian refugees, individuals can still face discrimination whilst living there. In some countries it may just be racist remarks and issues getting jobs. However, other actions against Syrian refugees have been more sinister, such as the burning of refugee camps and violent attacks in Lebanon. This only intensifies a refugees' social isolation and leaves them with no one to depend on. Instead, as refugees do not have their other family members or community to rely on for help, it has caused some families to start relying on their children more. This means that many Syrian refugee children are now being depended on to help with running the family home, such as being a breadwinner. This is causing children's lives and futures to be deeply affected even after they have escaped the violence.

Syrian children have arguably felt the effect of this war the most. They have lost parents, their homes, their friends and so much more. There are nearly 10,000 Syrian refugee children who are either unaccompanied or separated from their parents. This is an alarming number of children who are extremely vulnerable, as with no adult looking after them, they are more likely to be trafficked or forced into labour. This sinister scenario is already a reality, it has been reported that at least ten thousand minor refugees are missing after reaching Europe. It is believed that these children have fallen victim to trafficking and sexual exploitation<sup>15</sup>. This chilling reality provokes a question of how many children fall victim to trafficking before reaching Europe. Countries in Europe are perceived as 'safer' than other host countries due to the laws, regulations and support for refugees in these countries, however they have still managed to lose around ten thousand children. This highlights why human trafficking and the protection given to Syrian refugee children needs to be a prime conversation when organisations and countries talk about the refugee crisis.

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<sup>13</sup> Refugees, U.N.H.C. for (n.d.). Eleven years on, mounting challenges push many displaced Syrians to the brink. [online] UNHCR. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2022/3/623055174/eleven-years-mounting-challenges-push-displaced-syrians-brink.html#:~:text=Syria%20remains%20the%20world>

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, A. (2011). Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Trafficking at the University of Nebraska. [online] Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=humtraffconf3>.

<sup>15</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). Sex Trafficking and the Refugee Crisis: Exploiting the Vulnerable. [online] Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/sex-trafficking-and-refugee-crisis-exploiting-vulnerable>.

## Syrian Children's Education

The Youth of Syria have been referred to as the 'Lost Generation' as throughout the Syrian conflict they did not just lose their homes, family and friends; but years of education too. Prior to the war, education in Syria was undergoing fast improvements with nearly all children being enrolled in school and literacy rates being over 90%<sup>16</sup>. However, the civil war changed all of that and schools were no longer safe for children as they fell victim to airstrikes as well. Over 40% of schools in Syria have been destroyed or damaged<sup>17</sup>; some organisations estimate that there have been around 4000 attacks on schools over the years of conflict<sup>18</sup>. As schools became targets, they were forced to close, which gravely disturbed these children's education. This can already be seen as in 2017 there were 5.8 million children aged 5-17 in Syria who required education assistance. A study conducted by the International Rescue Committee the same year looked at 2,846 children still in Syria and found that 59% of them who were 11-12 years old could not read a simple 7-10 sentence story, which was equivalent to reading skills of a 7-8 years old child<sup>19</sup>. This demonstrates the effect the war had on these children, as their education has been set back years and it will take a lot of effort to reverse these effects. However, this may not be achieved for certain children, especially those who are displaced in the Middle East. This is because many children do not have access to education or are forced to work instead. For example, in 2019, it was estimated that 800,000 displaced refugee children were out of education completely and more than 75% of Syrian refugee children drop out before they reach secondary level<sup>20</sup>. This emphasises how Syrian children are still being left without their educational needs being met, which is leaving them to have a lower level of education than other children their age due to circumstances that are not in their control. Although host countries have tried to put schemes in place to help these children catch up on the years they have lost, there are structural and legal issues that are preventing children from accessing education. One country which appears to have the most flaws in their systems is Lebanon, which is why this report is focusing on this country.

This report wants to highlight the importance of education, especially for these children who have had high levels of educational disruption in these last 11 years. Education appears to be a key tool to lowering the vulnerability of a child being exposed to exploitation. Anti-trafficking charities all around the world appear to put a heavy focus on getting children into education in order to prevent them from

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<sup>16</sup> Digital, S. (n.d.). Futures Under Threat: The impact of the education crisis on Syria's children. [online] Save the Children's Resource Centre. Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/futures-under-threat-impact-education-crisis-syrias-children/#:~:text=Before%20the%20war%20almost%20all>

<sup>17</sup> ReliefWeb. (n.d.). 9 Years Of Schools On The Front Line: The Impact of Airstrikes on Syria's Schools - Syrian Arab Republic. [online] Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/9-years-schools-front-line-impact-airstrikes-syria-s-schools>

<sup>18</sup> Theirworld. (n.d.). Seven ways that seven years of Syrian war has affected children and their education. [online] Available at: <https://theirworld.org/news/seven-years-of-syria-conflict-how-it-affects-children-education-refugees-schools/>

<sup>19</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC). (n.d.). Impact of war on Syrian children's learning: testing shows gaps in literacy and math skills [online] Available at: <https://www.rescue.org/report/impact-war-syrian-childrens-learning-testing-shows-gaps-literacy-and-math-skills>

<sup>20</sup> Fitzgerald, D. (n.d.). Loss of a Generation: The Education of Syria's Refugee Children. [online] Arab Center Washington DC. Available at: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/loss-of-a-generation-the-education-of-syrias-refugee-children/>

being coerced into entering forced labour or sexual exploitation. The importance of education is further highlighted in a UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, as they said that 171 million people could be lifted out of extreme poverty if all children left school with basic reading skills<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, if Syrian children's education was focused on more it could stop a whole generation for living in extreme poverty again and would not only improve their lives but the future of Syria. However, it can be observed that there is a lack of engagement, particularly in the Middle East, to put Syrian children back into education. This has had a devastating effect on Syrian children as it is detrimental for their future and has pushed many into the labour market.

### Child Labour

A devastating effect of war is that it increases the risk of human trafficking and exploitation due to the mass displacement of people; however this risk is usually overlooked when discussing the hardships refugees will face on their journey to safety. This was noted in the 2016 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, as it recognised that labour trafficking is often omitted from evaluations of humanitarian and emergency responses<sup>22</sup>. Many Syrian refugees have faced the threat of exploitation within Syrian and in host countries; however Syrian refugee children are exceptionally vulnerable to this threat. With many Syrian children being unaccompanied, illiterate and in poverty this leaves them vulnerable to being trafficked into forced labour and controlled by employers. These children are being left vulnerable to being subjected to more harm and trauma and there appears to be a lack of support in certain host countries. The exploitation of Syrian children is one that needs to be discussed more in the global conversation on how to support Syrian refugees.

Many terms are used when child labour is discussed, such as human trafficking, modern slavery, forced labour and exploitation. There are academic debates over the definitions of the former terms, however, without any doubt there are clear overlaps. The Palermo UN protocol definition of human trafficking includes prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery like practices and the removal of organs<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, under this definition some Syrian working children are also trafficking victims; as they are being subjected to forced labour or are working in slavery-like conditions. Highlighting the overlap between child labour and human trafficking.

When discussing 'child labour' this report will refer to work that deprives a child of their childhood, potential and their dignity<sup>24</sup>. If the child has reached the minimum working age under the national law but is still under 18, the work will still be classed as 'child labour', if it is harmful to their emotional

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<sup>21</sup> GLOBAL RENEWAL. (n.d.). Why Education is the Greatest Weapon in Fighting Human Trafficking. [online] Available at: <https://www.globalrenewal.org/our-blog/why-education-is-the-greatest-weapon-in-fighting-human-trafficking>

<sup>22</sup> Department of State, USA. (June 2016). Trafficking in Persons Report. [online] Available at: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/258876.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> SweDev. (2021). What is the relation between child labour and human trafficking? [online] Available at: <https://www.swedev.dev/what-is-the-relation-between-child-labour-and-human-trafficking/>

<sup>24</sup> International Labour Organization (2022). What is child labour (IPEC). [online] Ilo.org. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>

development and physical well-being<sup>25</sup>. There is a difference between ‘child labour’ and ‘children in employment’. Child labour implies that a child is out of school, however the latter does not<sup>26</sup>. Across the globe children can work, even in the UK a child can work once they reach 13. However, their working hours are restricted to not interfere with their education<sup>27</sup>. For Syrian children who are still living in Syria or in most of the Middle East countries this is not the case. Many refugee boys and girls will start working before they turn 12, and this work infringes on their education<sup>28</sup>.

A large amount of Syrian working children are employed in sectors such as agriculture, factory work, street-based activities, and hospitality. However, some children have been found working in the ‘worst forms of child labour’ (WFCH), which includes bonded labour, using children in armed conflict, trafficking for exploitation, sexual exploitation, and illicit work. These forms of work harm a child’s health, safety and morals, and Save the Children have argued that the elimination of these forms is a matter of urgency<sup>29</sup>. From the literature review it also appears that a large amount of Syrian working children are in forced labour, which refers to work performed against a person’s will and under the threat of punishment<sup>30</sup>. These threats are not always physical; they can appear in forms such as threats to evict the child’s family from their home<sup>31</sup> or the use of debt bondage. There have been reports that children were working as bonded labourers in exchange for their families to live in informal settlements<sup>32</sup>. This emphasises the role children are now playing in their families. They have a large amount of responsibility put on them even at such a young age. It also demonstrates how controlling employers are as they are leaving these children no way to escape child labour. As Syrian working children are being subjected to forced labour and the WFCL this highlights that Syrian children in these circumstances should be viewed as human trafficking victims. Therefore, more support should be given to them by international bodies and the host countries they are living in. They are having their rights and childhoods ripped away from them, however the work done by governments to combat this issue appears to be insufficient.

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<sup>25</sup> Digital, S. (n.d.). Child Labour within the Syrian Refugee Response: A regional strategic framework for action. [online] Save the Children’s Resource Centre. Available at:

[https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/child\\_labour\\_in\\_syria\\_response.pdf/](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/child_labour_in_syria_response.pdf/)

<sup>26</sup> The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. (n.d.). [online] Available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> www.childrensociety.org.uk. (n.d.). Finding a job: advice for young people | The Children’s Society. [online]

Available at: <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/information/young-people/advice/employment#:~:text=How%20old%20do%20you%20have,school%20day%20or%20a%20Sunday.>

<sup>28</sup> Digital, S. (n.d.). Child Labour within the Syrian Refugee Response: A regional strategic framework for action. [online] Save the Children’s Resource Centre. Available at:

[https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/child\\_labour\\_in\\_syria\\_response.pdf/](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/child_labour_in_syria_response.pdf/)

<sup>29</sup> Digital, S. (n.d.). Child Labour within the Syrian Refugee Response: A regional strategic framework for action. [online] Save the Children’s Resource Centre. Available at:

[https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/child\\_labour\\_in\\_syria\\_response.pdf/](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/child_labour_in_syria_response.pdf/)

<sup>30</sup> www.ituc-csi.org. (n.d.). International Trade Union Confederation. [online] Available at: <https://www.ituc-csi.org/forcedlabour#:~:text=Child%20labour%2FForced%20labour,-Forced%20labour%20is&text=Child%20labour%20refers%20to%20work,child%20labour%20are%20closely%20linked.>

<sup>31</sup> Berz, K.L. (n.d.). No choice but to toil for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://news-decoder.com/no-choice-but-to-toil-for-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon/>

<sup>32</sup> United States Department of State (2018).

Although child labour has been an issue throughout history, Save the Children has commented that the Syrian conflict has been associated with a rise of child labour within and outside Syria<sup>33</sup>. This is because the Syrian war has created circumstances that have caused many people to depend on child labour. The Syrian crisis has dramatically reduced family livelihood opportunities and impoverished millions of households<sup>34</sup>. Poverty is a complex term to define as it covers many factors. When this report talks about refugees being in poverty it is referring to people who are experiencing a lack of food; ill health; limited or no access to education and other basic services; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; social discrimination and exclusion; and lack of participation in the decision-making process<sup>35</sup>. There is an alarming number of Syrian households that are living in poverty throughout the Middle East, and it has been reported that harsh economic circumstances have been linked to cultivate conditions where a child must work to ensure their families survival<sup>36</sup>. This scenario can already be observed in some Middle Eastern countries, for example in Jordan a study reported that in the surveyed households close to half of all Syrian children were joint or sole breadwinners<sup>37</sup>. Syrian children are now having major responsibilities put on them, as even at young ages they are working to pay for food or rent, causing many children to give up their childhood. One major sacrifice is their access to education, one child worker interviewed said 'an education or feeding our family. That is a choice everyone here must make'<sup>38</sup>. Highlighting that these children are now taking on roles in the family that they are not ready for, and it is having a detrimental effect on their futures.

Not only does is child labour affecting the health and education of Syrian working children. It may affect the future of Syria, if Syria becomes safe once again refugees will be able to return. However, Syria's younger generation have not been provided with an education, which may cause issues as they will be the generation who will rebuild Syria. This is a concern of Ghida Ismail, who helped conduct a study on child labour at the American University of Beirut. She also comments on how Syrian working children are more vulnerable to joining extremist groups due to not attending school<sup>39</sup>. This highlights why global leaders need to be concerned about the issue of child labour and the lack of education of Syrian

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<sup>33</sup> Save the Children (2017). *Invisible wounds: the impact of six years of war on the mental health of Syria's children*. [online] Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/invisible-wounds-impact-six-years-war-mental-health-syrias-children/>

<sup>34</sup> www.unicef.org. (n.d.). Urgent action needed to tackle child labour caused by Syrian crisis – Save the Children and UNICEF. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/child-labour-caused-by-syrian-crisis>

<sup>35</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018). An Introduction to Human Trafficking: Vulnerability, Impact and Action BACKGROUND PAPER. [online] Available at: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/An\\_Introduction\\_to\\_Human\\_Trafficking\\_-\\_Background\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/An_Introduction_to_Human_Trafficking_-_Background_Paper.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> World Food Programme, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016. Vulnerability assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon [online]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2HCDuLG>

<sup>37</sup> www.unicef.org. (n.d.). Urgent action needed to tackle child labour caused by Syrian crisis – Save the Children and UNICEF. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/child-labour-caused-by-syrian-crisis>

<sup>38</sup> www.unicef.org. (n.d.). 'Now, I'm the head of the family; I bring home the only money to buy food and pay rent.' [online] Available at: ["Now, I'm the head of the family; I bring home the only money to buy food and pay rent." | UNICEF Lebanon](https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/child-labour-caused-by-syrian-crisis)

<sup>39</sup> Khoury, L. (2017). Special report: 180,000 young Syrian refugees are being forced into child labor in Lebanon. [online] Vox. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/7/24/15991466/syria-refugees-child-labor-lebanon>

children. As it is not only affecting children's lives today, but it may also contribute to creating a future Syria that remains unstable.

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## Lebanon

The rest of this report will focus on the experiences of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The laws and societal views about Syrian refugees are important to understand here, as they are factors that are causing more Syrian minor refugees to work. These will be explained and analysed throughout the remaining parts of this paper and then suggestions on how Lebanon can decrease their issue of child labour will be provided.

### Background

Due to the geographical proximity and the historical and social relationship between the two countries, Lebanon was one of the easiest countries for refugees to escape to. The exact number of Syrians refugees in Lebanon is unknown as the Lebanese government requested the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to stop registering refugees in May 2015<sup>40</sup>. However, it is estimated that there are 1.5 million Syrian refugees living in Lebanon, with only around 950,000 being registered<sup>41</sup>

Lebanon itself is filled with instability and the refugee influx has only caused the situation to get worse. There was a leadership gap from 2014 to 2016 and there has been an absence of parliamentary elections for nine years. This highlights that this country may not be the most suited to dealing with such a high number of refugees, literature has shown that there is a lack of support and policies been put in place to support Syrian refugees. This may have been linked to the political instability Lebanon has experienced in the past years. The country has also suffered from an ongoing economic crisis and the Syrian conflict did not improve Lebanon's economic situation as it affected cross-border trade and damaged the tourism industry<sup>42</sup>. The World Bank has said that Lebanon's economic situation is possibly among the three worst crises the world has seen for 150 years. Every citizen in Lebanon is struggling, as incomes have plummeting by half of what they were in 2018 and the cost of consumer goods doubling<sup>43</sup>. This has caused all households to experience economic hardship no matter their ethnicity, and some families have had to resort to using child labour. However, Syrian households can appear to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in Lebanon. These refugees are struggling to afford to survive, 9 out of 10 refugees are living in extreme poverty and around 49% suffering from food insecurity<sup>44</sup>. This

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<sup>40</sup> Tinas, M (May 2017) Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Economic, Political and Sectarian Challenges in the Absence of a Governmental Strategy [online] Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330134482\\_Syrian\\_Refugees\\_in\\_Lebanon\\_Economic\\_Political\\_and\\_Sectarian\\_Challenges\\_in\\_the\\_Absence\\_of\\_a\\_Governmental\\_Strategy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330134482_Syrian_Refugees_in_Lebanon_Economic_Political_and_Sectarian_Challenges_in_the_Absence_of_a_Governmental_Strategy)

<sup>41</sup> reliefweb.int. (n.d.). Lebanon: Deporting Syrian refugees is inhumane, poses threat to their safety [EN/AR] - Lebanon | ReliefWeb. [online] Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-deporting-syrian-refugees-inhumane-poses-threat-their-safety-enar#:~:text=Approximately%201.5%20million%20Syrian%20refugees,them%20live%20in%20extreme%20poverty.>

<sup>42</sup> Global Conflict Tracker. (n.d.). Political Instability in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/political-instability-lebanon>

<sup>43</sup> Berz, K.L. (n.d.). No choice but to toil for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] <https://news-decoder.com/>. Available at: <https://news-decoder.com/no-choice-but-to-toil-for-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon/>

<sup>44</sup> reliefweb.int. (n.d.). Lebanon: Deporting Syrian refugees is inhumane, poses threat to their safety [EN/AR] - Lebanon | ReliefWeb. [online] Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-deporting-syrian->

economic strain has caused Syrian children to be vulnerable to exploitation due to the desperation of their families.

In order to live through this economic crisis, it appears that employers have turned to the method of using child labour in order to cut business costs. The Freedom Fund found that Syrian or Palestine children were in higher demand from employers due to them being cheaper and more compliant<sup>45</sup>. An interview with Firas Saroufim, who is an owner of a Smart Phones Mobile and Accessories shop in Zgharta, near Beirut, represents a common belief among employers. He said that “You can’t find a Lebanese boy who wants to do this work. It’s hard”<sup>46</sup>. This demonstrates that employers are taking advantage of Syrian children's desperation and they would not be able to find labour so cheap elsewhere. This employer also admits to paying a Syrian child \$19 a week to sell lottery tickets and merchandise, and run errands, however if it was an adult doing the same job, he said he would pay around \$350-\$400<sup>47</sup>. This is a vast difference in wages when the only difference is age, highlighting how much employers take advantage of these children. This also helps to explain why many businesses are opting for using child labour, as lower wages help to cut business costs.

Policies set out by the Lebanese government do not help Syrian refugees’ economic situations. Work permits are a major barrier for Syrian refugees to access work. A common belief among Lebanese citizens is that refugees will take jobs away from them. Therefore, the government has created restrictions meaning Syrians can only work in agriculture, construction and cleaning. These are all low-paying and temporary jobs, which keep Syrians living in poverty. It is virtually impossible for them to receive a work permit outside the previously stated sectors<sup>48</sup>, meaning that well-educated refugees that were once doctors, engineers and lawyers are prevented from entering their field of expertise and finding better jobs. This policy has made Syrian refugees accept jobs which often exploit them, as 92% of economically active refugees are working in informal sectors where they receive less than minimum wage and are deprived of social protection<sup>49</sup>. This highlights why many Syrian refugees cannot improve their livelihood, which has had a causal effect that has forced parents to send their children to work in order to survive.

Not only do the refugees have the economic instability to worry about, but the response they have received from the Lebanese government and citizen is far from welcoming. There have been several attacks, such as on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2022 when 65 tents were burnt in the Aarsal Camp in the Beqaa

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[refugees-inhumane-poses-threat-their-safety-enar#:~:text=Approximately%201.5%20million%20Syrian%20refugees,them%20live%20in%20extreme%20poverty.](#)

<sup>45</sup> The Freedom Fund (n.d.) Struggling to survive: Slavery and exploitation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://d1r4g0yvcc7lx.cloudfront.net/uploads/Lebanon-Report-FINAL-8April16.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Khoury, L. (2017). Special report: 180,000 young Syrian refugees are being forced into child labor in Lebanon. [online] Vox. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/7/24/15991466/syria-refugees-child-labor-lebanon>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Rasha Faek, (February 25, 2017) “Little Hope of Jobs for Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan,” al-fanarmedia.org [online] Available at: <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2017/02/lebanon-jordan-syrians-face-bleak-employment-future/>.

<sup>49</sup> Diana Essex-Lettieri et al., *Refugee Work Rights Report: The Syrian Crisis and Refugee Access to Lawful Work in Greece, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey*. (Oakland: Asylum Access, 2017), <http://asylumaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Middle-East-Refugee-Work-Rights-Syrian-Crisis.pdf>.

Valley<sup>50</sup>, this rightfully instils fear in refugees living in Lebanon. Refugees have lost their lives in these attacks, and what makes it worse is that these attacks were motivated by hate speeches and incitements by political officials<sup>51</sup>. These refugees have fled Syria where they were inadequately protected by their government, only to enter another country where there is a lack of protection.

Literature has shown that there is a contradicting relationship between Lebanon and refugees, seen by the discrepancies between Lebanon's actions. The following actions make it hard to understand whether Lebanon seeks to help the refugee crisis or not. With Lebanon taking in the highest number of refugees in the world, in proportion to their population size, and actively engaging in the establishment of the international refugee regime<sup>52</sup>. Although Lebanon appears to be taking a proactive approach towards the refugee crisis, it does not have the best approach in dealing with Syrian refugees receding in their country. Their actions appear to be causing more harm than good and have caused many Syrian refugees to suffer. In order to understand why Syrian refugees are struggling and why there has been a rise in child labour in Lebanon there are political factors that need to be considered.

Firstly, Lebanon refuses that it is a country of asylum and refuses to become a party to key UN conventions. Including the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, which are the two primary international legal instruments that provide protection for refugees. Lebanon also refuses to identify people fleeing the Syrian conflict as 'refugees', instead they prefer to use the term 'displaced people'. This term means they have a less permanent status in Lebanon, and that international law cannot be applicable to them<sup>53</sup>. This leaves refugees residing in Lebanon in an uncertain state as they are not protected by international or national law. Meaning they receive inadequate support, and they can also be deported out of Lebanon at any point, which is a current issue Syrian refugees are facing.

Furthermore, the Lebanese government has appeared to reject the local integration of refugees. This adverse approach may be understood by looking closer to the Lebanese Constitution of 1926 (amended in 1990), as it appears to prohibit any permanent settlement of foreigners<sup>54</sup>. Highlighting the interesting relationship between Lebanon and refugees, as they appear to want to help people fleeing conflict, which is shown by them accepting so many refugees. However, they don't appear to want to help refugees long term or offer them much support whilst they are receding in Lebanon. A causal effect of

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<sup>50</sup> The New Arab Staff. (05 October 2022). Fire burns scores of tents at Syrian refugee camp on Lebanon. [Online] Available at: <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/fire-burns-scores-tents-syrian-refugee-camp-lebanon>

<sup>51</sup> Reliefweb.int. (n.d.). Lebanon: Deporting Syrian refugees is inhumane, poses threat to their safety [EN/AR] - Lebanon | ReliefWeb. [online] Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-deporting-syrian-refugees-inhumane-poses-threat-their-safety-enar#:~:text=Approximately%201.5%20million%20Syrian%20refugees,them%20live%20in%20extreme%20poverty.>

<sup>52</sup> Janmyr, M. (2017). No Country of Asylum: 'Legitimizing' Lebanon's Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention. [online] Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/ijrl/article/29/3/438/4345649>

<sup>53</sup> Dallal E. Stevens, (2014) Shifting Conceptions of Refugee Identity and Protection: European and Middle Eastern Approaches, Warwick School of Law Research Paper No. 2014/10

<sup>54</sup> Janmyr, M. (2017). No Country of Asylum: 'Legitimizing' Lebanon's Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention. <https://academic.oup.com/ijrl/article/29/3/438/4345649>

the lack of support being offered to Syrian refugees has thrown most Syrian households into poverty and left them without access to basic rights such as access to education, health and work.

In recent history, it is clear Lebanon is not changing their approach. In February 2014, the new government, led by Tammam Salam,, took a less tolerant stance on refugees. It listened to local concern that in previous years had been ignored and acted to close unofficial border crossing points<sup>55</sup>. This action was successful in slowing down the flow of refugees entering the country, but these changes caused more harm than good. The scholar Filippo Dionigi has highlighted that these policies have not improved Lebanon's stability or security<sup>56</sup>. Instead, they have just condemned refugees to a worse fate, as the new entrance and residency requirements are troublesome for Syrians. Therefore, many refugees have now fallen into an illegal status, which has increased the exploitation and alienation of refugees<sup>57</sup>. In 2016, the Norwegian Refugee Council brought the shocking reality to light that 53-70% of Syrian refugees did not have a legal stay permit<sup>58</sup>. Refugees without legal status live in a state of uncertainty, as they are vulnerable to deportation at any time<sup>59</sup>. This fear of deportation has surprisingly influenced the labour market, as many refugee adults are cautious about working as they want to limit their movement and visibility. This has resulted in many families sending their children to work instead. There is heavy policing and constraints enforced for unauthorized work by refugee adults, and it can result in deportation<sup>60</sup>. However, child labour involving refugees receives less attention and is less likely to attract retaliatory penalties from the state. The difficulty finding a job and the fear of deportation has pushed many Syrian families to now rely on their children working in order to sustain even a minimally acceptable livelihood<sup>61</sup>. The issues surrounding refugees obtaining legal status and how it further affects children accessing education will be focused on more in the following section.

The changes this government made also means refugees are not provided with any other status, they are just viewed as foreign nationals, which leads them to live in extremely harsh and marginalised

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<sup>55</sup> Tinas, M (May 2017) Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Economic, Political and Sectarian Challenges in the Absence of a Governmental Strategy [online] Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330134482\\_Syrian\\_Refugees\\_in\\_Lebanon\\_Economic\\_Political\\_and\\_Sectarian\\_Challenges\\_in\\_the\\_Absence\\_of\\_a\\_Governmental\\_Strategy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330134482_Syrian_Refugees_in_Lebanon_Economic_Political_and_Sectarian_Challenges_in_the_Absence_of_a_Governmental_Strategy)

<sup>56</sup> Dionigi, F, (February 2016) The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience, LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series, No: 15, ss.16.

<sup>57</sup> Janmyr, M, (March 2016), The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Working Paper No.33, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, s.4

<sup>58</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (March 2016) Women Refugees in Lebanon and the Consequences of Limited Legal Status on their Housing, Land and Property Rights, s.10

<sup>59</sup> Human Rights Watch (2018), "Lebanon: Events of 2016. [online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/lebanon>.

<sup>60</sup> Ghaddar, S, [April 4, 2017] "Lebanon Treats Refugees as a Security Problem – and It Doesn't Work," [online] Available at: <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/lebanon-treats-refugees-security-problem-doesnt-work/?session=1>.

<sup>61</sup> law.utexas.edu. (n.d.). Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice | Child Labor Among Syrian Refugees: A Closer Look at the Coercive Effects of Lebanon's Refugee Policies. [online] Available at: <https://law.utexas.edu/humanrights/projects/child-labor-among-syrian-refugees-a-closer-look-at-the-coercive-effects-of-lebanons-refugee-policies/>

conditions<sup>62</sup>. There are no adequate laws to protect them, and the government appears to have invited them in and then discarded them. The politics around whether displaced persons are refugees in Lebanon has a devastating effect on the way they will live. There appears to be an effect on children in particular, as the previously discussed actions of the Lebanese government are making Syrian minors continue to live in a state of instability and danger. The policies preventing Syrian adults from working, such as the lack of legal status, also affects Syrian children as they are then made responsible for becoming a breadwinner in their family. The UNICEF Canada president, David Morley, has agreed that poverty and these policies are stopping parents from working and have pushed parents to send their children to work despite not wanting to<sup>63</sup>. This then influences their future, as working prevents them from going to school.

UNICEF's situational analysis (2017) showed that child labour was not as widespread in Lebanon prior to the Syrian crisis<sup>64</sup>, demonstrating the effect the Syrian war has had on its surrounding countries. Although the presence of child labour has been concurrent throughout history in Lebanon, the influx of Syrian refugees has made the issue worse. A study identified that social exclusion and household vulnerability also causes children to work<sup>65</sup>. Considering everything above it is clear that most Syrian refugee households are experiencing this, therefore the reality for most Syrian minor refugees living in this country will be that they will have to work. Not only have these policies explained pushed more children into labour but they have also affected Syrian children's access to education.

#### Education of Syrian Refugee's in Lebanon:

Although Lebanon allows Syrian children to access school for free, the situation surrounding the education provided and enrolment into schools is far from ideal. There are 660,000 school-aged Syrian refugees in Lebanon, however a 2021 UN assessment revealed that 200,000 children have never been to school<sup>66</sup>. This is a ridiculously high number of children to have an absolute lack of education, which will have a damaging effect on these children's future. The situation in Lebanon does not look to be improving as in recent years as 60% of children have not been enrolled in schools<sup>67</sup>. These statistics provoke the question that if these children are not in school then what are they doing and where are they. It is clear there is a lack of action being taken by the Lebanese government to get these children into school despite the negative effect it can have on them. These children are having their right to education took of them by discriminatory requirements that block them from enrolling into schools and it seems that many are entering the labour market instead.

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<sup>62</sup> Janmyr, M (December 2016) Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Refugee Survey Quarterly, Volume 35, Issue 4, [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdw016>

<sup>63</sup> Berz, K.L. (n.d.). No choice but to toil for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://news-decoder.com/no-choice-but-to-toil-for-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon/>

<sup>64</sup> The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. (n.d.). [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> CHILDREN LIVING AND WORKING ON THE STREETS IN LEBANON: PROFILE AND MAGNITUDE The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration US Department of State. (n.d.). [online] Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_344799.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_344799.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2021). Lebanon: Syrian Refugee Children Blocked from School. [online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/03/lebanon-syrian-refugee-children-blocked-school>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

Lebanon does not appear to be moving towards a more inclusive educational system. The Human Rights Watch have called on the education minister to extend the school registration deadline for Syrian children and to end these policies blocking Syrian children from accessing education<sup>68</sup>. In 2021, the Education Ministers' acts meant that many Syrian children would not be able to register into schools by the deadline date, the 4th of December. Syrian children seem to be treated as the last priority in Lebanon. They are not automatically enrolled in school each year and they must wait until Lebanese children are enrolled so they can fill the unfilled spaces. The Lebanon government leaves helping parents enrol their children into schools to humanitarian groups, rather than helping them themselves. The government does not make this job easy for these groups either. These groups must wait until the ministry publishes its official guidance document, which in 2021 was not published until the 29<sup>th</sup> of November. Giving these groups little time to reach out and support the Syrian communities enrol their children. Furthermore, parents cannot enrol their children until a list of schools which will run second-shift classes is released, which similarly did not get published until the 30<sup>th</sup> of November<sup>69</sup>. All these obstacles can explain why the enrolment rate in Lebanon is so low as the government is not making it easy for these children to access education. Furthermore, the above actions of the minister hints that refugees are a last thought in the eyes of the government, and that they are treated with little consideration.

Although this conflict has been ongoing for years, Lebanon has shown no effort in removing policies that make it difficult for Syrian children to go to school. These policies appear to be illogical and unreasonable, and the only explainable reason behind them appears to be that the Lebanese government is actively trying to keep Syrian children out of school. For example, one unfair policy is that certified educational records are required by schools<sup>70</sup>, it is unrealistic to expect families to have remembered this certain certification when they were fleeing a warzone. Many had to leave quickly and only left with a few belongings, so it is unlikely that this certification was one of the top priorities to bring with them. A major barrier some children may face is that some principals require a birth certificate to be provided. However, a 2021 UN assessment found that 70% of Syrian children born in Lebanon lack this certification<sup>71</sup>. This requirement prevents these children from being enrolled in certain schools, which is an issue if this school is the only one in the area. As many refugees live in poverty it may not be feasible for them to travel in order to access a school which is far away.

Another discriminatory requirement the Education Ministry introduced is that Syrian children must have legal residency and show other official documents in order to enrol in secondary school. In both primary and secondary school children are prevented from taking the national examinations unless they have legal residency<sup>72</sup>. This requirement is by far the most detrimental to Syrian children as according to a UN assessment only 16% of Syrians have legal residency in Lebanon<sup>73</sup>, meaning that many children will struggle to access education. Also, obtaining legal residency in Lebanon contains onerous requirements

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> UNHCR Operational Data Portal (ODP). (September 2021.). Lebanon - Preliminary Results of the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees - VASyR 2021. [online] Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88960> .

which are unattainable to Syrian families, such as paying an annual fee of \$200. Throughout the Syrian crisis refugees have been living in poverty. In 2017, reports showed that 58% of Syrian refugees were living in extreme poverty and could not access the basic needs for survival. For example, 75% of refugee households had no access to basic food and shelter<sup>74</sup>. In recent years, the situation has only grown worse, as now nearly 90% of Syrian refugees are living in poverty<sup>75</sup>. Therefore, the requirement for legal residency has damaged many refugees' lives as it is making it difficult for refugees to send their children to school. It is unrealistic to believe Syrian families will have the means to pay this annual fee in order to send their children to school. The human rights watch has agreed that the lack of residency was a key barrier to children getting a formal education<sup>76</sup>. It can be predicted that the Lebanese government knows that this fee is unattainable for Syrian households, which provokes suspicion that discrimination could have come into play when this policy was introduced.

Another factor that also makes it harder for Syrian children to access school is that many of them are now working, which prevents them from accessing education. Rima Habib conducted a study that investigated children working in the Beqaa region. They interviewed 4377 children, and found that 50.5% did not attend school because they started working and a further 10.3% did not have time to go to school<sup>77</sup>. This highlights the relationship between child labour and education, as if children work then they are not able to access education. With the rise in Syrian children being involved in child labour in Lebanon this is going to prevent this generation from accessing education, which only feeds more into the fear of them becoming a 'lost generation'. Their basic rights are being restricted due to factors out of their control, such as lack of documentation and legal residency. However, these factors do not appear to prevent them from working. The remainder of this report will investigate the lives of the many Syrian children who have been forced out of education and are now working in child labour.

### Child Labour

It has been highlighted through this report that child labour is something that is common in Lebanon. This section will explain the experience and sectors Syrian working children have been found in and how it is dangerous for them. Child labour is illegal in Lebanon, Article 22 of the Labour Code sets out the minimum working age as 14 years of age for safe work<sup>78</sup>. Meaning children under 18 are prohibited from working in situations that may harm their physical or psychological well-being<sup>79</sup>. However, the law does

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<sup>74</sup> World Food Programme, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2017). Vulnerability assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon [online]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2qKyw50>

<sup>75</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2021). Lebanon: Syrian Refugee Children Blocked from School. [online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/03/lebanon-syrian-refugee-children-blocked-school>.

<sup>76</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2016). Lebanon: 250,000 Syrian Children Out of School. [online] Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/19/lebanon-250000-syrian-children-out-school>

<sup>77</sup> Habib, R.R. et al. (2019). Displacement, deprivation and hard work among Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/1/e001122.abstract>

<sup>78</sup> Government of Lebanon. Labor Code (as amended). Enacted: September 23, 1946.

<sup>79</sup> ReliefWeb (n.d.). Child Labour in Agriculture: The demand side - Lebanon [online] Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/child-labour-agriculture-demand-side#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Lebanese%20Code,age%20limit%20to%20be%20decreased>

not appear to be being enforced and there is no criminal penalty for using forced labour<sup>80</sup>. UNICEF has estimated the number of Syrians in child labour in Lebanon is around 180,000<sup>81</sup>, and this number does not appear to be decreasing. The economic and political factors previously discussed have created the perfect environment for child labour to rise in Lebanon and in recent years this has become a reality. In 2020 the number of working children doubled<sup>82</sup>, which emphasises that this issue is only getting worse.

It is estimated that 85% of children working in Lebanon, with most of them being Syrian refugees but not all, were employed in dangerous environments<sup>83</sup>. Children can be found working in agriculture, welding, aluminium factories, slaughterhouses, sewage cleaning services and street work such as begging or washing cars<sup>84</sup>. Children face immediate threats, long-term health consequences and psychological harm by doing this work. Injuries are common for these children; they suffer from eyestrain, headache, gastrointestinal problems, musculoskeletal symptoms, and skin diseases, as well as premature death<sup>85</sup>. Children appear to be being mistreated by employers, as even basic employees' rights appear to be being infringed, which increase the risk of injury. For example, they are not provided with the expected protective gear, abused in the workplace, are overworked and underpaid<sup>86</sup>. The environments children are employed in are not suitable for them. Children who are employed in factories are expected to use equipment and machines that are made for adults, which leaves them at risk of physical harm<sup>87</sup>. Children have also reported being exposed to flammable and explosive materials<sup>88</sup>, this is an obvious safety hazard and highlights how the Lebanese government are failing to monitor and check the safety of Lebanese businesses. Working children also face the risk of death in Lebanon. The previously discussed study by Rima Hadid also found that 79% of children reported knowing another child who died following a work accident, emphasising the alarming rate these

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<sup>80</sup> Berz, K.L. (n.d.). No choice but to toil for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://news-decoder.com/no-choice-but-to-toil-for-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon/>

<sup>81</sup> Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. (n.d.). Lebanon: 180,000 Syrian refugees are forced into child labour, suffering precarious conditions and low pay. [online] Available at: <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/lebanon-180000-syrian-refugees-are-forced-into-child-labour-suffering-precarious-conditions-and-low-pay/>

<sup>82</sup> Berz, K.L. (n.d.). No choice but to toil for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://news-decoder.com/no-choice-but-to-toil-for-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon/>

<sup>83</sup> Struggling to survive: Slavery and exploitation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. (n.d.). [online] Available at: <https://d1r4g0yivcc7lx.cloudfront.net/uploads/Lebanon-Report-FINAL-8April16.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> Lebanon Moderate Advancement (2019). FINDINGS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR. (n.d.). [online] Available at: [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labor\\_reports/tda2019/lebanon.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2019/lebanon.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Habib, R.R. et al (2021). Work-related injuries among Syrian refugee child workers in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: A gender-sensitive analysis [online] Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0257330>

<sup>86</sup> ILO, Habib-Khoury. (2012) Rapid Assessment on child labour in North Lebanon (Akkar and Tripoli) and Bekaa Governates. [online] Available at: [https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=41ILO\\_INST:41ILO\\_V1&search\\_scope=ALL\\_ILO&tab=Everything&docid=alma994688883402676&lang=en&context=L](https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=41ILO_INST:41ILO_V1&search_scope=ALL_ILO&tab=Everything&docid=alma994688883402676&lang=en&context=L)

<sup>87</sup> Habib, R.R. et al (2021). Work-related injuries among Syrian refugee child workers in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: A gender-sensitive analysis [online] Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0257330>

<sup>88</sup> ILO and National Steering Committee on Child Labour. (2013) National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016. [online] Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_229103.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_229103.pdf)

accidents happen<sup>89</sup>. Despite escaping the Syrian warzone these children are still facing the risk of death by working and are being subjected to more trauma.

Not only do these jobs contain a lot of danger, but Syrian working children are forced to work incredibly long hours. It is common for Syrian working children to be forced to work 10 hours plus a day, and it has been reported that one in four will work 11-15 hours each day. Children will work these hours nearly every day with no rest in-between, as over two thirds of children work six days a week<sup>90</sup>. This can exacerbate health risks as these children are in a cycle of exhaustion and fatigue. It does not only have a massive effect on their health but their entire lives. These children will have little time to access any form of education, develop friendships with people their own age or have any time to do activities that children should be encouraged to do.

Studies have found that child labour is more prevalent for Syrian boys, as it is common for Syrian families to send their male children to work from the ages of five<sup>91</sup>. However, girls can be found in child labour too, and when they are studies have found that they are given more labour-intensive activities and are paid less than boys<sup>92</sup>. There appears to be little respect from employers when a female Syrian child is working, this is shown by how employers treat girls differently. There have been reports that girls are less likely to receive their salary on time, are given less time off work, work longer in the sun and cold. The risks of child labour appear to be higher for female Syrian working children as a study found that girls were more likely to report having health symptoms at work<sup>93</sup>. Not only are they more likely to have health issues, but girls are also involved in child labour that is usually less visible. Although girls can be found in the agricultural sector, they are mostly involved in the type of more home-based work such as childcare, domestic labour, and chores. As these forms of child labour are largely hidden it increases the risk of abuse from employers, which can seriously affect the child's mental and physical development.

Children in Lebanon are being subjected to the worse forms of child labour according to the US Department of Labour<sup>94</sup>. The situation for Syrian refugee children appears to be getting worse as there have been recent articles reporting how children are now being trafficked into bonded labour and criminal gangs, used for sex work, and even used for organ trading<sup>95</sup>. The issue of sex work is arguably the most horrific form of exploitation as it is not only physically damaging but it is detrimental for the

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<sup>89</sup> Habib, R.R. et al (2019). Displacement, deprivation and hard work among Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/1/e001122.abstract>

<sup>90</sup> International Rescue Committee Europe. (December 16, 2016). "New survey reveals extent of hardship and abuse experienced by Syrian children working on streets of Lebanon," [online] Available at: <https://www.rescue-uk.org/press-release/new-survey-reveals-extent-hardship-and-abuse-experienced-syrian-children-working#Fullsurvey>.

<sup>91</sup> UNICEF (n.d.). The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Habib, R.R. et al (2019). Displacement, deprivation and hard work among Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/1/e001122.abstract>

<sup>93</sup> Habib, R.R et al. (2019) Displacement, deprivation and hard work among Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online] Available at: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/1/e001122.abstract>

<sup>94</sup> Dol.gov. (2018). International Child Labor & Forced Labor Reports | U.S. Department of Labor. [online] Available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor>.

<sup>95</sup> UNICEF (n.d.). The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

child's emotional development, especially considering the young age of many working children. It has been highlighted in literature that Syrian refugee children are vulnerable to being subjected to commercial sexual exploitation. For example, Lebanon's Modern Advancement reported that Syrian girls have been trafficked into Lebanon under the guise of marriage, who will then be exploited for commercial sex. It is not just girls that are vulnerable to this form of exploitation, they also reported that Syrian boys, in particular Kurdish boys and working boys, are used in this form of exploitation as well<sup>96</sup>. The prevalence of WFCL is hard to establish as there is an absence of official statistics, but this is an area of child labour that international organisations need to be looking into. The lack of information on this issue highlights that not enough is being done to research into how many children are being subjected to these forms of exploitation, despite the high risks attached to them. Trafficking from Syria into Lebanon appears to be something governments are not addressing as well. Children, as well as men and women, are being sold into bonded labour in exchange of accommodation, food and transportation into Lebanon. The Beqaa Valley, which will be discussed in more detail below, is a common place that these organise groups traffic labourers to work. This situation may have gotten worse after 2014 when the government closed unofficial crossing points from Syria into Lebanon. As refugees now may be relying on traffickers to get into Lebanon, which then leaves them at risk of being controlled by traffickers and subjected to more harm.

Girls are vulnerable to being trafficked in to Lebanon for the purpose of sexual exploitation and must be highlighted that there is a lack of official statistic of how many Syrian refugees are human trafficking victims due to the lack of research into this. The International Labour Organisation also reports poor families in Syria giving up one or more of their children for them to work in Lebanon. Employers then have full control of these children, they will control where they live and when they work, traffickers will disperse these Syrian children into the streets of the urban areas of Lebanon and will collect money in the evenings<sup>97</sup>. The question arises of how many Syrian working children are also victims of human trafficking. This emphasises that these children need immediate help, and that the Lebanese government needs to stop looking at them as a burden and start introducing policies to help them get out of labour and back into education.

### *The Beqaa Valley*

The agricultural sector appears to be the most common industry where child labour is found, it is estimated that 60% of working children in Lebanon are in this sector<sup>98</sup>. A renowned region for agricultural child labour is the Beqaa Valley, which also hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees<sup>99</sup>. The children living in this region are extremely vulnerable to being exploited and being forced into

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<sup>96</sup> Lebanon Moderate Advancement (n.d.). Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. [online] Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/file/1105191/download>

<sup>97</sup> International Labour Organisation (n.d.) Tackling child labour among Syrian refugees and their host communities in Lebanon. . [online] Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_368225.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/briefingnote/wcms_368225.pdf)

<sup>98</sup> UNICEF (n.d.). The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

<sup>99</sup>*ibid*

labour. Most children will be put into agricultural work, 75% of working children from the region were involved in this sector in 2019<sup>100</sup>.

Sixty-three percent of the working children in the Beqaa region are between 13 and 18 years old<sup>101</sup>, however there have been reports of younger children working in this sector as well. Working at this age has proven to be detrimental to these refugee children. Firstly, there is a shockingly low education rate among these working children in the area, as only 18% of them were enrolled in some form of learning in 2017<sup>102</sup>. This number can be predicted to have dropped in recent years due to Lebanon's economic and social situations getting worse due to COVID 19. Another concern is that the agricultural sector is filled with risks and hazards, and it has even been listed as one of the top three most dangerous sectors of work<sup>103</sup>. The use of pesticides and fertilisers causes many health issues for children<sup>104</sup>, while they are also exposed to the sun for long hours, even when some workers are as young as three<sup>105</sup>.

This region also hosts 75% of the informal tented settlements in Lebanon and these settlements have been known to facilitate the mass recruitment of children into child labour<sup>106</sup>. Across these settlements there are individuals who are known as the 'shawish', they contract out children from the camps to work for nearby farmers, restaurants, auto repair shops and other employers. These individuals operate as the 'gang master', and they are profiting from the supply of child labour. The 'shawish will receive the wages from the employer but only return a portion of it to the child<sup>107</sup>. This is clearly exploitation of children that is happening within these settlements. These settlements were meant to be a safe place to stay when refugees have fled conflict, but children are facing equal danger here. This highlights that the Lebanese government needs to make changes to the structure of these camps in order to ensure that children are at a less risk of exploitation. The government also does not appear to be putting more policies or regulations in place within the whole region to make refugees safer, even when this region appears to be a hotspot for child labour. This is a major fault on the Lebanese government, and it is causing many children to suffer in this region.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

<sup>104</sup> ILO, Habib-Khoury (2012) Rapid Assessment on child labour in North Lebanon (Akkar and Tripoli) and Bekaa Governates [online] Available at:

[https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=41ILO\\_INST:41ILO\\_V1&search\\_scope=ALL\\_ILO&tab=Everything&docid=alma994688883402676&lang=en&context=L](https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=41ILO_INST:41ILO_V1&search_scope=ALL_ILO&tab=Everything&docid=alma994688883402676&lang=en&context=L)

<sup>105</sup> ILO, Habib-Khoury (2012) Rapid Assessment on child labour in North Lebanon (Akkar and Tripoli) and Bekaa Governates [online] Available at:

[https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=41ILO\\_INST:41ILO\\_V1&search\\_scope=ALL\\_ILO&tab=Everything&docid=alma994688883402676&lang=en&context=L](https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=41ILO_INST:41ILO_V1&search_scope=ALL_ILO&tab=Everything&docid=alma994688883402676&lang=en&context=L)

<sup>106</sup> ILO, (n.d). Tackling child labour among Syrian refugees and their host communities in Lebanon. (n.d.). [online]

Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_368225.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/briefingnote/wcms_368225.pdf)

<sup>107</sup> The Freedom Fund (n.d). Struggling to survive: Slavery and exploitation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. [online]

Available at: <https://d1r4g0yivcc7lx.cloudfront.net/uploads/Lebanon-Report-FINAL-8April16.pdf>

### *Street-Based Work*

Another sector that is common with child labour is street work. In 2016, it was estimated by the International Rescue Committee that there are 1,500 Syrian children on the street of Lebanon that can be found selling CD's, tissues or gum on the streets in Beirut and Tripoli<sup>108</sup>. However, this number is predicted to have increased with Lebanon's economic situation worsening and COVID 19. The ILO investigated the work these children did and found that the main activities were begging (43%) and street vending (37%). However, these children have been found to be working in illicit activities, which includes prostitution. This highlights why children in this sector are extremely vulnerable as they may fall into more dangerous sectors of work. Children can earn up to triple the pay doing this work compared to if they were begging, which emphasises why these children may be forced into it either by the adult controlling them or their economic situation.

The ILO investigation also revealed that over half of the children on the streets were between 10-14 years old<sup>109</sup>. However, children have also been reported to be working from as young as 7<sup>110</sup>. These children are too young to be out alone working on the streets, especially considering that some of them are being used in prostitution. This highlights how these children are being abused, and there needs to be serious intervention schemes put in for them by the government.

Syrian children appear to be a prime target for adults looking to exploit children. In 2015, it appeared that there was a decline of Lebanese and Palestinian children being found working on the streets, while at the same time the number of Syrian street-based children have been increasing. Syrian children made up 79% of the total number of surveyed children in on study on street-based children<sup>111</sup>. Similar to agriculture, boys are more likely to be subjected to this, work with over two-thirds of street-based children being male.

UNICEF have said that the number of street children is on a manageable scale, however the issue is highly complex due to the links with trafficking and other illicit activities<sup>112</sup>. It is apparent that Syrian children who are found working in the streets may be trafficking victims, which emphasises the overlap of child labour and human trafficking. Many of these children will be moved regularly to work or engage

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<sup>108</sup> IRC UK (n.d.). New survey reveals extent of hardship and abuse experienced by Syrian children working on streets of Lebanon | International Rescue Committee (IRC). [online] Available at: <https://www.rescue.org/uk/press-release/new-survey-reveals-extent-hardship-and-abuse-experienced-syrian-children-working#Fullsurvey>

<sup>109</sup> ILO, (n.d.). Tackling child labour among Syrian refugees and their host communities in Lebanon. (n.d.). [online] Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_368225.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/briefingnote/wcms_368225.pdf)

<sup>110</sup> The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration US Department of State (n.d.) Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude (n.d.) [online] Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_344799.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_344799.pdf)

<sup>111</sup> UNICEF (n.d.). The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

<sup>112</sup> UNICEF Lebanon. (16 February 2015) UNICEF Lebanon, the Ministry of Labour, the ILO, and Save the Children launch a study on the plight of working children on Lebanon's streets [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/press-releases/unicef-lebanon-ministry-labour-ilo-and-save-children-launch-study-plight-working>

in petty crimes to earn money for their traffickers<sup>113</sup>. This is extremely disruptive for the child as it prevents them from creating long-lasting support systems and can lead them to become trapped in a cycle of exploitation.

This work involves different dangers than agricultural work, as children are working with the public more. This brings new risks, for example many have faced physical violence from passers-by. They are also vulnerable to experiencing sexual harassment, an ILO survey revealed that 6% of surveyed children reporting being victims of sexual assault or rape in the workplace<sup>114</sup>. These children are extremely vulnerable, and in many cases, they do not have anyone to turn to. In the same survey over half of the children said they had no one to report abuse to, which only adds to these children's isolation and having no one to trust or rely on can keep them exposed to abuse. Officials in Lebanon do not appear to be a trusting option for these children to confide in either, with nearly 30% reporting they have been arrested or chased by law enforcement<sup>115</sup>. It appears that Syrian children are also more likely to be arrested than their Lebanese counterparts. This emphasises how these children are looked at as being a burden or a problem rather than victims.

#### *Actions That Have Been Taken by Lebanon and the Improvements They Could Make*

The above has highlighted that child labour is a massive issue in Lebanon, and it is affecting many children. There are clear improvements that need to be made in Lebanon to ensure the safety of Syrian refugee children. It cannot be denied that the Lebanese government have made some actions against this issue of child labour. The Ministry of Labour (MoL) worked with ILO in 2013 to develop a National Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Labour. This set out a road map to end the worst forms of labour by 2016, however this was later extended to 2019<sup>116</sup>. By analysing the literature, it does not appear that this road map was effective in decreasing child labour, while no comment on whether this plan will be further revised and extended can be found. In 2017, Lebanon made more advancements in efforts to eliminate the WFCL. The MoL released a Practitioners' Guide on child labour in agriculture and signed an agreement with the Farmers Union to prevent foreign children under 16 from working in this sector<sup>117</sup>. Although these are steps in the right direction, the MoL's operations budget was unable to cover equipment and the costs of conducting inspections, which caused this intervention to not be as effective as they wanted.

Another issue is that the MoL does not have the authority to access penalties, which means that although regulations are being introduced, they are not being enforced. The policing of this issue

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<sup>113</sup> UNICEF (n.d.). The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

<sup>114</sup> The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration US Department of State (n.d.) Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude (n.d.) [online] Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_344799.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_344799.pdf)

<sup>115</sup> *ibid*

<sup>116</sup> UNICEF (n.d.). The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> UNICEF (2020) The Situation of Children and Young People in Lebanese Crisis. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

appears to be lacking in Lebanon, and the acts of law enforcement have sometimes made the situation worse for Syrian refugees. It appears that the actions of the MoL and other sections of the governments have been counterintuitive. In 2017, when the MoL was taking action to decrease child labour in agriculture, the Lebanese army were sent to evict approximately 10,000 Syrian refugees from their informal dwellings in Beqaa<sup>118</sup>. This had a devastating effect on children, as it disrupted their schooling and made them more vulnerable to child labour. This was not the best course of action in dealing with the refugee crisis and likely made decreasing agricultural child labour in Beqaa more difficult. This highlights that there needs to be more collaboration between the departments of government when deciding how to deal with refugees. Child labour is a complex issue that has many underlying factors, therefore when the Lebanese government want to make changes to refugees housing, education and labour they need consider if the changes increase refugees' vulnerabilities to exploitation.

Another flaw is that laws combating trafficking are not rights-based or protection centred. The current laws do not stop the imprisonment and deportation of victims of trafficking and there is no adequate protection for them<sup>119</sup>. Although there has been an increase in the action to identify the trafficking of children, there is a lack of qualified professionals and support services that can help rehabilitate these children. The lack of adequate support when these situations arise has caused Internal Security Forces to respond in ways that may not actually benefit the child. For example, there are reports that they are reluctant to arrest parents who traffic their child into forced begging due to financial means, as there are no social services or alternative care options to accommodate the child<sup>120</sup>. Therefore, children are left in exploitation because the government does not have the right systems set up to help them. This was also seen in 2011 when law enforcement successfully disbanded a major network that trafficked street-based children into begging. However, these children did not receive appropriate care due to the limited availability of safety houses and institutional care facilities. Even if a child is fortunate enough to get a place in these care facilities the support they receive may not be adequate, as the employees are not trained to handle traffic victims. These failures in providing support will likely force these children to go back to working on the streets as they have no other means to survive. Here they are again vulnerable to meeting adults who are looking to exploit or traffic them, and the cycle will begin again. Although it is a productive step that Lebanon is investigating some child labour cases, they are not doing enough afterwards to care for these children.

For Lebanon to truly eradicate their issue of child labour the government also needs to change their views about Syrian refugees. Currently they view Syrian refugees as a security concern and a problem, but these refugees are human beings with rights, skills, and dignity; and the Lebanese government needs to recognise this. Syrian refugees have a productive potential to booster the Lebanese economy, however, they are being stopped by the discriminatory policies that have been spoken about throughout this paper. If Lebanon allowed adult refugees to participate lawfully and equally in the labour market it would help their economic situations. This would then decrease the need for families to rely on their children to work, as they will have the opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

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<sup>118</sup> Lebanon Moderate Advancement (2017) Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. [online] Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/file/1105191/download>

<sup>119</sup> UNICEF (n.d.). The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/8341/file/Lebanon%20Situational%20Analysis%20report%20EN%20.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> Ibid

Employment opportunities need to be provided for refugees which allow them to earn a living wage, only then will there be a stop in Syrian children being used in child labour and we will see them return education. This formalisation of the economy and refugee integration into the workforce also has the potential to stabilise Lebanon and improve conditions for all workers<sup>121</sup>. This is something that would be beneficial for Lebanon due to their current economic state, therefore this solution should be highly considered by the Lebanese government.

For the children who have been pushed into child labour because of their families' financial situation, an effective intervention method would be social assistance. This is a vital method for ensuring children do not have to return to work as their families will be in a better economic situation. UNICEF have been looking into this solution and have taken steps towards it. They have provided 10,000 families with cash payments to allow them to move their children away from labour and towards school<sup>122</sup>. This method has support from Jackeline Atwi, a UNICEF national child protection coordinator in Lebanon, who stated that this was the most effective program in combating child labour. Therefore, this emphasises that this solution would be effective and has the potential to help thousands of Syrian households. It is recognised that the Lebanese government does not have the funds to provide these families with consistent grants, which emphasises why there needs to be more help from the international community. The Syrian war was aided by the interference of third-party countries. Therefore, the least they can do is now be a part of the solution in combating the issues Syrian refugees face in host countries by offering greater financial support. This method is not a long-term solution, these grants should be given until Syrian refugees are able to find jobs that provide them with a living wage. Therefore, it would be best combined with the above recommendation of Lebanon changing their policies on Syrian refugees working.

## Conclusion

This paper aimed to demonstrate how the Syrian conflict has affected Syrian children in many ways and how they are having their lives destroyed due to things that are out of their control. This is a generation of children who are being ignored by their own government and by the host countries they are living in. They are living in danger of exploitation, abuse and even death throughout the world, but children who are living in Lebanon are extremely vulnerable. Even before they arrived in Lebanon these children had their opportunities and education ripped away from them. As it has been explained, their schools were targeted, which prevented many children from accessing education, which set these children's education years back. Rather than getting adequate help from their host countries, these children have been left to face a worse fortune. Lebanon has not helped these children improve their futures, instead they put in discriminatory policies in place to make it harder for children to access education. This report wants to emphasise that not only does Lebanon need to take effective action against their issue of child

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<sup>121</sup> Diana Essex-Lettieri et al., *Refugee Work Rights Report: The Syrian Crisis and Refugee Access to Lawful Work in Greece, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey*. [online] Available at: <http://asylumaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Middle-East-Refugee-Work-Rights-Syrian-Crisis.pdf>.

<sup>122</sup> Berz, K.L. (n.d.). No choice but to toil for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. [online]: <https://news-decoder.com/no-choice-but-to-toil-for-syrian-refugee-children-in-lebanon/>

labour, but they also need to ensure Syrian refugee children are getting the access to education they deserve. Education is a vital tool to combat child labour and human trafficking, as it gives individuals skills to improve their lives, emphasising why this report focused heavily on it.

In terms of child labour, it can be observed throughout this report that Syrian children are extremely vulnerable in Lebanon. Employers know that Syrian children will be cheap labour, which has caused there to be a demand for Syrian children, emphasising how these children are still vulnerable even after they escaped Syria. It has been explained throughout this report how unfairly these children are treated. They are paid less than adults for doing the same job, forced to work in unsafe environments and they face experiencing many injuries and health problems. The risks and experiences of Syrian working children that have been spoken about throughout this report emphasises why Lebanon urgently needs to assess and change its policies in order to stop the exploitation of these children.

It must be emphasised that this report does respect that Lebanon is living through a harsh economic crisis and that they have made some efforts to combat their issue of child labour. However, as it has been discussed their efforts are clearly not working. Lebanon needs a change of attitude towards refugees and must realise their potential to boost Lebanon's economy, this change in ideology would allow a more inclusive space for Syrian refugees throughout Lebanon. It would allow more adults to access a wider variety of jobs and would allow them to improve their economic status, which would then decrease parents' dependency on their children working. The fight against child labour is urgent and Lebanon needs to take immediate action. The COVID pandemic likely made this issue worse, so an increase of child labour is likely to be observed in recent and upcoming years. This mistreatment of children needs to be stopped, and the ignorance of this issue cannot go on any longer in the global community or in Lebanon itself.