

Voices of Refugees:

Syrian Refugees' Right to Peaceful Assembly in Lebanon

| Case Studies





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The right to the freedom of peaceful assembly (FoPA) is a fundamental human right that forms the basis of democratic civil societies. FoPA enables individuals to form and partake in organized collectives and peacefully engage in issues that directly affect them, serving as both an outlet and mechanism for political expression and activism. As one of the few tools used to communicate their challenges and needs, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are often denied this fundamental right and often face consequences as a result.

In collaboration with CIVICUS' WeRise initiative, the Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) Voices of Refugees project examines a series of case studies of Syrian refugees who have engaged in peaceful assembly in different forms in Lebanon. The methodology consists of eight interviews with organizers and/or participants of peaceful assemblies. The comprehensive studies analytically assess and highlight the experiences of refugees, documenting and analysing patterns of motives and challenges observed among assembly participants.

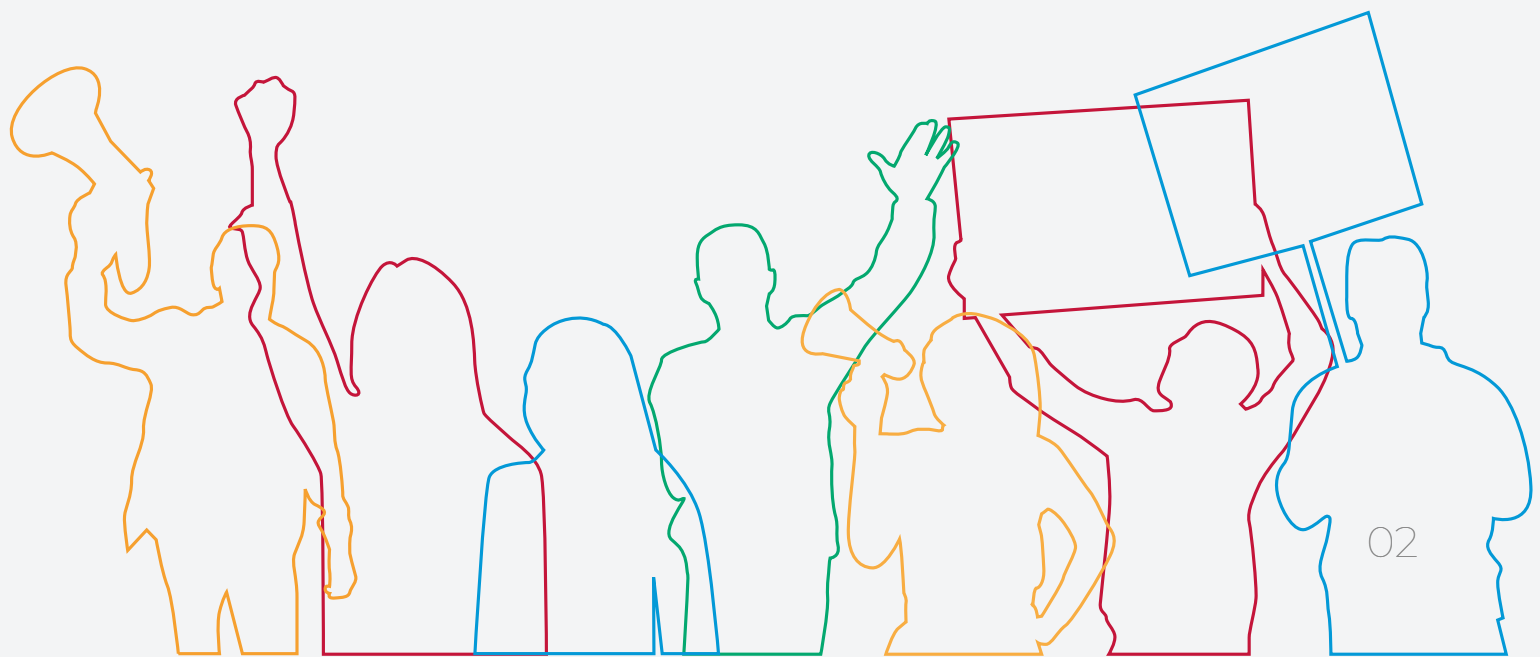


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INTRODUCTION

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)¹, the right to peaceful assembly includes taking part in meetings (offline and online), sit-ins, strikes, rallies, events, or protests. The right to freedom of association involves the right of individuals to interact and organize among themselves to collectively express, promote, pursue, and defend common interests. This right is legally enshrined in Lebanon under the constitution and is protected under international law. Lebanese citizens have long engaged and participated in collective action for several issues including most recently mass assemblies during the 2019 October Revolution where more than a third of the country took to the streets to protest government corruption, new fiscal measures, currency devaluation, and deteriorating economic conditions. While participants were diverse in their political demands, many voiced the need for social justice, and change in the political system away from sectarianism, corruption and clientelism.

Syrian refugees in Lebanon have both taken part in widespread protests and have expressed similar grievances but have remained disproportionately vulnerable to being targeted for their political activism. Indeed, Lebanese security personnel have used excessive force when engaging with and dispersing assembly participants and specifically with regards to refugees, with cases of those who participate in collective activism subjected to various human rights violations, such as physical or verbal abuse, arbitrary arrest and detention, and even torture. Refugees are often considered to be silent passive victims without agency and political demands, this report and the case studies it focuses on, firmly challenges these assumptions and sheds light on the issues that shape Syrian refugees' motivations in Lebanon to participate in political action.

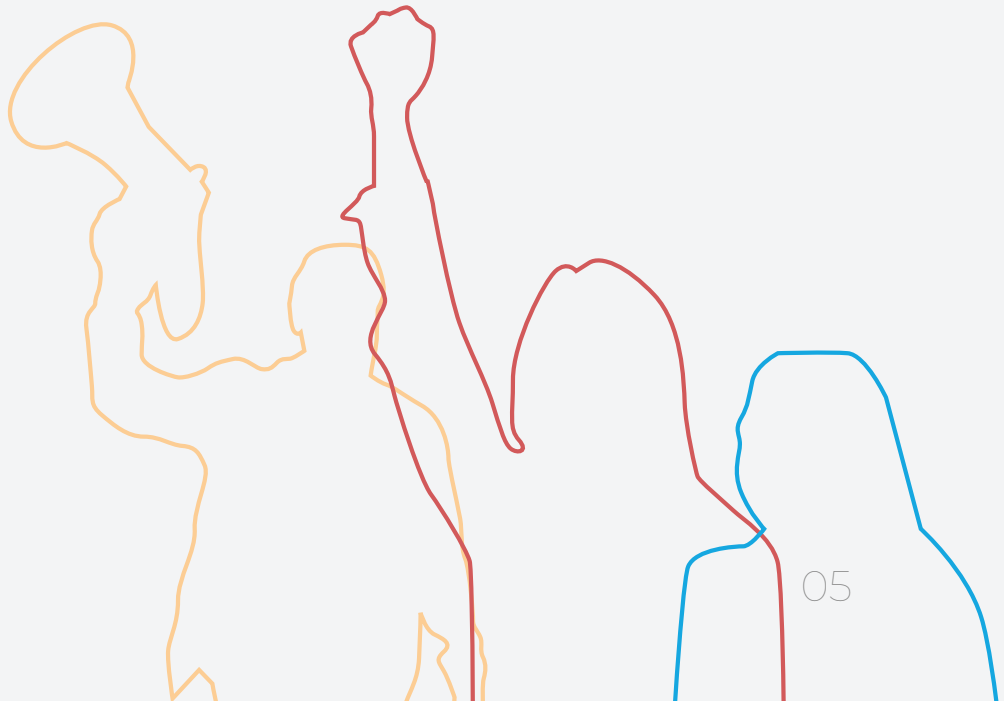
¹The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). 2025. "Freedom of Assembly and of Association." January 31, 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/freedom-assembly-and-association>.





METHODOLOGY

The studies' methodology includes eight in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees who have organized and/or participated in peaceful assemblies in Lebanon. Employing a qualitative approach, the studies rely on firsthand testimonies. The transcribed data then undergoes an analysis process through NVivo, a software program that enables identifying recurring patterns among assembly participants. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and over the phone to accommodate linguistic preferences, logistical constraints and ensure security of those interviewed. This approach ensured the interviewees' comfort and assisted in facilitating open communication while preserving the integrity of the collected data. Each case study examines a different pattern; however, they all follow the same structure and analysis design for consistency and ease of comparison. All interviewees' names are pseudonyms to ensure their safety and protect their identities. The following case studies are situated within an appropriate contextual background and subsequently analysed to deepen understanding and analysis of the research question.



Case Study 1 | Refugee Rights

Syrian refugees in Lebanon face significant structural barriers accessing their basic rights and the Lebanese state has enacted various draconian measures – including using coercive force and violence - that has fostered an increasingly insecure environment for refugees. This is supported and often sponsored by the Lebanese State through carefully orchestrated anti-refugee policies and rhetoric, including calling for the mass expulsion of Syrian refugees. This agenda and institutional discrimination toward Syrian refugees exacerbate their vulnerability, leaving over 1.5 million refugees in a deeply precarious position; With an overwhelming majority of over 80 percent² of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon without legal status, they are left with two options: return to an unsafe Syria or stay in Lebanon and accept the violations and structural barriers perpetrated against them. Barriers are multiple and include the inability to obtain or renew residency permits, increasing their vulnerability to arbitrary arrest, detention, and deportation. With no legal status, they face further barriers, such as exclusion from formal employment, education, healthcare, and social services. This legal limbo undermines the ability of refugees to feel safe and prevents them from being able to secure the basic standards of living and instead fosters cycles of poverty and insecurity. As of 2024, approximately 90 percent of Syrian households in Lebanon lived under the poverty line.³



² Forced Migration Review. 2025. "When Is Return Voluntary? Conditions of Asylum in Lebanon - Forced Migration Review." March 17, 2025. <https://www.fmreview.org/syria2018/keith-shawaf/>.

³ Tello, Anan. 2024. "Why Displaced Syrians in Lebanon Face an Agonizing Dilemma Amid Mounting Hostility." Arab News, April 19, 2024. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2494941/middle-east>.

Anwar, 07/03/25

Anwar is a 35-year-old Syrian refugee from Damascus. He explains that the economic challenges Syrian refugees are confronted with and how this creates a vicious cycle that perpetuates inequality. When asked about some of the most pressing issues among Syrian refugees, he said: ***“(The) challenges related to the right to work and the obstruction of (accessing) residencies. Regardless of a person’s ability to hire a lawyer, access the judiciary, or pay for their residency permits, the doors have always been closed in our faces. (We are unable) to settle our residencies and become safe, unsusceptible to deportation, and not fear existing. (We formed assemblies) to demand the right to live, work, and access justice, education, health, and all fundamental human rights.”*** Anwar’s participation in peaceful sit-ins was influenced by a desire to voice these demands and basic human rights and to amplify other refugee voices and challenges. He stated that he was driven by the urgency to advocate for marginalized groups that lack the means to be heard in other ways, claiming that: ***“The sit-ins were our only means to raise our voices and demand not just our rights but the rights of other refugees who cannot access these spaces.”***

Wissam, 05/03/25

Wissam is a Syrian refugee from Homs who has lived in Lebanon for over a decade. The 35-year-old spends his time volunteering with community initiatives and humanitarian organizations focused on child protection. When asked about the daily challenges he faces as a refugee in Lebanon, he said: ***“The most crucial challenge is the inability to obtain a valid residency permit, the General Security has imposed impossible conditions. (Another challenge is) the deteriorating economic situation and high rents, especially after the strict imposition of work permits, which were impossible to obtain.”*** Wissam’s motives to be a part of the assemblies were driven by his belief that peaceful civic action is the only way for Lebanon’s refugee community to achieve positive change. He claims: ***“(I joined the sit-ins) based on my belief that the peaceful voice is the only way to obtain an acceptable percentage of positive results. It is known in Lebanon that Syrians must (only) listen, obey, and remain silent about any violations they are exposed to. Demonstrations and sit-ins are tools of peaceful expression that are our right (to exercise), we should not be afraid of arrest during (assemblies).”***

Nadia, West Beqaa, 04/03/25

Nadia is a Syrian human rights defender and journalist who actively advocates for refugee rights in Lebanon. As a Syrian activist, she's subject to various security risks due to both the nature of her work and her nationality. Nonetheless, she continues to engage in peaceful civic activities and advocate for marginalized groups. As an assembly organizer and participant, she explains that peaceful sit-ins are not merely experiences for her but a significant part of her life. She says: ***"(I do not participate) in sit-ins and protests solely to demand my rights but the rights of refugees and other marginalized groups in Lebanon; I consider (advocacy) to be a duty."***

Both Anwar and Wissam's accounts of their motivations to participate in peaceful activism is rooted in their lived experiences as refugees and is a response to the dire conditions, basic needs, and human rights violations Syrian refugees are subject to in Lebanon. They highlight a recurring theme articulated by most Syrians – a lack of security and stability stemming from their inability to obtain and renew basic legal documentation like residency permits. Without access to these documents, both Wisam and Anwar cite multiple other barriers they face including the inability to become active and contributing members of society. Both also cite this fundamental issue of legal paperwork as being a necessary prerequisite to accessing other basic rights such as the right to education and work opportunities. Anwar's testimony highlights this inequality cycle, where refugees face numerous structural barriers which placed him and other refugees in an indefinite state of legal paralysis and insecurity. In the absence of more conventional communication channels, Nadia, Anwar and Wisam consider sit-ins to be the sole mechanism at their disposal to voice their needs and assert their rights and both clearly state that they felt compelled to participate in sit-ins by the lack of alternative platforms to voice grievances. This shared sentiment that participating in sit-ins is their right and reflects their sense of political agency, is meaningful and powerful, given that refugees are expected to remain silent, passive victims of violations. As such, they situate themselves and their rights in a broader refugee movement in Lebanon where their individual rights are connected to others like them, which pushes them to articulate these shared challenges as a collective.

Case Study 2 | Palestine and Transnational Solidarity

The ongoing Israeli offensive, genocide and ethnic cleansing campaign in Gaza has had a significant regional impact on the Levant writ large. Historically Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese have had shared experiences of occupation, conflict, and displacement and due to these interconnected struggles and identities, a shared sense of solidarity around the issue of Palestine has long defined the region. The impact of these wars and ongoing illegal Israeli occupations - in Palestine but also the Golan Heights in Syria and the Shebaa Farms in Lebanon since 1981 – has had profound implications in the region, impacting both the political landscapes of the occupied states and the lives experiences of their populations. Due to the interconnected struggles of Syrians and Palestinians an organized march in solidarity with Gaza garnered a strong and vocal Syrian refugee presence. Many Syrian refugees participated in the peaceful sit-in in solidarity with their Palestinian counterparts, underscoring how their shared experiences unified different communities to come together in their advocacy for peace and justice.



Rula, 05/02/25

Rula is a 32-year-old Syrian refugee from Homs who participated in the Gaza solidarity sit-ins. She explained to ACHR that as an avid supporter of the Palestinian cause, she immediately decided to join the sit-ins upon learning about them. She says: ***“The sit-in was motivated by support to the Palestinian cause and to make (Palestinians) feel that there are those who stand by and support them, they are not alone.”*** Along with her brother, Adam, Rula was a part of two Gaza solidarity sit-ins that were organized by several local women’s organizations. While the first sit-in took place without any significant challenges, during the second sit-in, Adam was arbitrarily arrested by officers affiliated to Lebanese Army’s Intelligence Service. According to witnesses, armed men in civilian clothes but wearing jackets with the logo of the Army Intelligence forcibly abducted him into a grey pickup truck. Adam was then detained for 10 hours of detention at unknown location and later transferred to the General Directorate of Intelligence. According to a forensic report, Adam was tortured under detention and later released. When asked if she had any concerns going into the sit-ins, Rula said: ***“Yes, we were just thinking about retaliation by officers of the Lebanese Army and that the sit-in may be stopped. I do not know how, but we were afraid (that arrests and violations) would happen.”***



Reem, 27/01/25

Reem is a 29-year-old Syrian refugee who is originally from the Qalamun region. Reem is the founder of two humanitarian initiatives in Lebanon. The first initiative is on gender-based violence and women’s empowerment, and the second is on children’s rights, specifically special needs of children and orphans. She was one of the main organizers of the pro-Palestine sit-in that both Rula and Adam took part in. When asked about her motives for organizing the sit-ins, Reem said: ***“When I was 13 years old, my father and I would participate in demonstrations in Syria. (A part of my participation) is motivated by my desire to retrieve my memories with my father.”*** As a founder of nonprofit organizations, Reem is deeply committed to advocating and working with marginalized communities. Her decision to organize and lead the sit-ins reflects Reem’s dedication to social justice and activism and her willingness to actively stand in solidarity with other groups. She states: ***“The sit-ins aimed to advocate for Palestinian women and raise awareness of the violence they are subject to. As Syrians in Lebanon, we have no voice, are forbidden to speak, and do not have refugee rights. (During) the demonstrations, people would say to us, “You’re Syrians, aren’t you afraid of (participating) in sit-ins?”***



Commenting on Adam's incident, Reem said: ***"I was told that a young man (who was protesting with us) was taken away. We started asking questions about his incident and were given many different answers. Some people told us that he was arrested because he was wearing a black keffiyeh, some because he raised the Syrian Revolution's flag, and others explained that he was arrested solely because he is Syrian. (His arrest) was difficult for me as an organizer of the assembly, especially in front of his family. It is not acceptable for participants to join us and for us to return without them."***

Given the long history of the Palestinian cause, for many in the Middle East, their first memories and first experiences of peaceful activism is related in some way to Palestine. Rula highlights this and her testimony also sheds light on how participating in activism creates or revives emotional bonds, for her specifically - a memory of her father. Specifically for Syrian refugees, their participation in sit-ins in solidarity with Palestinians is a symbol of shared understanding - of suffering and immense loss under conditions of violence, displacement, and political oppression – and shared resistance to systematic violence or displacement. By engaging in peaceful sit-ins in support of Palestinians in Gaza, Syrian refugees not only advocate for Palestinian rights but simultaneously assert their own rights and agency in a context where they too are largely silenced. This crosscutting theme of rejecting being silenced is reiterated throughout this research by a number of interviewees, and sheds light on the role of activism in reasserting political agency. Reem also specifically mentions Palestinian women and the violence they are subjected to, suggesting that her motivation is related to her intersectional identities including her identity as a woman.

Adam's arrest and torture reveals the broader nature of systematic oppression and violence against refugees in Lebanon and the significant risks associated with peaceful civic activities, especially for refugees. Unfortunately, his case is one of thousands of Syrian refugees in Lebanon who have faced arbitrary arrest and violence, and refugees are often more vulnerable to this violence and are often unable to take legal action or recourse due to structural barriers that make access to justice and accountability difficult. Rula expresses the fear of retaliation by security forces, a specific fear that Syrians face daily, not just when engaging in peaceful assembly but in other aspects of their lives. Syrian refugees live in constant fear of harassment, arrest, and violence both directly and indirectly by systematic policies and structures that work against them and create a climate of constant instability and fear, and individual experiences of racism and discrimination on a personal level.

Case Study 3 | International Protection

Despite hosting over 1.5 million⁴ Syrian refugees, Lebanon strongly rejects being labeled as a country of asylum and has continuously rejected ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention. Under pressure from the Lebanese Government, UNHCR suspended the registration of Syrian refugees in 2015, which has resulted in a majority of refugees in Lebanon without formal refugee status. This has shaped the way in which the humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been managed and has undermined the ability of Syrian refugees to be protected under international law and instruments. For instance, The Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) states, "Lebanon is neither a country of asylum nor a final destination for refugees, let alone a country of resettlement."⁵ Further, the lack of formal domestic refugee legislation has meant that refugees without refugee status and without access to other forms of documentation remain unprotected by national legislation and refugees are provided with no other status than that of "foreign nationals", which results in many refugees residing in Lebanon being deemed "illegal" and facing extreme vulnerability as a result.



⁴BBC News. 2024. "Lebanon's Shift From Safe Haven to Hostile Country for Syrian Refugees." May 27, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-69059929>.

⁵ReliefWeb. "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-16 - Year Two - Lebanon." 2016. ReliefWeb. January 12, 2016. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2015-16-year-two>.

Anwar, 07/03/25



Anwar shared profound feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, a common feeling amongst refugees who often find themselves unable to rely on any entity for support and protection. This deeply underscored the circumstances that compelled them to resort to sit-ins as a means of voicing their need for safety amid a precarious and insecure environment and highlights the risks, including security risks, they are willing to take in order to voice these demands. He said: ***“We always found ourselves without a political body to support or protect us. We had no choice but to demonstrate and organize sit-ins to pressure the Lebanese government, the United Nations, and refugee-supporting international organizations. (We protested) to demand our protection and to request protection from deportation, imprisonment, and arrest. We lack residency permits due to the obstacles and our inability to achieve them. We also demanded the facilitation of our legal presence to obtain residencies and ensure our access to the judiciary, education, health, and other basic services.”***

For Anwar and Deem (below), feelings of insecurity stem from multiple areas including a lack of representation from “a political body” suggesting a need for political representation and agency. He also reiterates an early theme of legal insecurity related to lack of documentation that creates barriers to other access to services and basic needs. Lastly, he mentions physical insecurity and risks of being physically removed from Lebanon. As such, Anwar reiterates the complexity and multiple layers related to insecurity (political, legal and physical) that motivated him to take part in sit ins. Reaffirming that fear, Deema shared that during one of the sit-ins, they were asked by organizers about their nationality.

Deema, 24/02/25



Deema is a Syrian refugee who works with several international human rights institutions and research centers. Given the nature of her work, Deema deeply understands the value and importance of peaceful sit-ins as a means to advocate for human rights. Speaking on some of the risks refugees face, she said: ***“(The organizers) asked if any of the (participants) were Syrians. This intensified (our) fears that by being Syrian, (we were at a heightened risk), especially in light of the (intensified) forced deportation security campaigns against Syrian refugees due to purely political reasons and our lack of (legal) documentation.”***

Anwar and Deema’s testimonies highlight the significant risks and vulnerabilities that Syrian refugees face when participating in peaceful assemblies in Lebanon. They both expressed a deep sense of fear and helplessness, on multiple levels and place the responsibility of protection in the international system and international protection for refugees including on international bodies or institutions to advocate for and protect them. These narratives illustrate a systematic failure in Lebanon to address the needs of refugees, compelling them to voice their needs through sit-ins despite the significant risk it carries feeling that no support will be provided from any humanitarian or state institutions. Deema’s testimony reveals how she feels that her own identity is seen to be risky and a point of insecurity. This highlights how the very act and existence of being Syrian is a source of danger, and how their activism comes at a very high personal cost, exposing them to dangers, such as arbitrary arrest and deportation.

Case Study 4 | Gender Justice

Women and girls face distinct lived experiences as refugees, and this shapes their specific political demands and the way in which they partake in activism. Their lived realities of being a refugee are often different from male counterparts and the violations they are subjected to are shaped by their gender identity. For instance, women and girls are at increased threat of arbitrary eviction which exposes them to further risks, such as heightened sexual exploitation by landlords. Gender-based violence (GBV) is also a particular risk to women and girls with 98 percent of the cases reported in the gender-based violence information management system (GBVIMS) reported by women.⁶ It is important to note that male refugees also face specific gendered threats and risks (for instance males are at increased risk of arrest and detention and are perceived to be security threats in Lebanon) and male survivors of GBV often do not report the violence due to the stigma surrounding the topic. In 2023, the primary form of GBV reported was physical violence at 37 percent, followed by psychological violence at 35 percent and sexual violence at 20 percent.⁷ Among children, the most prevalent type of GBV was child marriage at 69 percent.⁸

The specific experiences of women and girl refugees and how they experience violations also shapes how they articulate their grievances and how they are motivated and partake in political activism. In Lebanon, both men and women refugees feel they have limited legal avenues to pursue justice which makes them disproportionately vulnerable to physical security risks such as arbitrary arrest, secondary violence, and deportation. Women and girl refugees are also perceived to be more vulnerable and societies in both Syria and Lebanon are patriarchal, especially in rural communities where women's roles are often limited to their family duties at home. However, due to various circumstances, many Syrian women have become the head of their households and sometimes the sole breadwinner in the family and their duties have expanded to fulfil traditionally "male" duties. For instance, 83 percent of Syrian women expressed that their roles in their households and in society have expanded, with a larger acceptance of women's involvement in public life.⁹ Between 2020 to 2022, 17 to 19 percent of Syrian women reported that they had become the head of their households.¹⁰ A lack of documentation is also a significant barrier accessing avenues to pursue justice as refugees fear that raising concerns to relevant authorities may backfire and further expose them to insecurity.

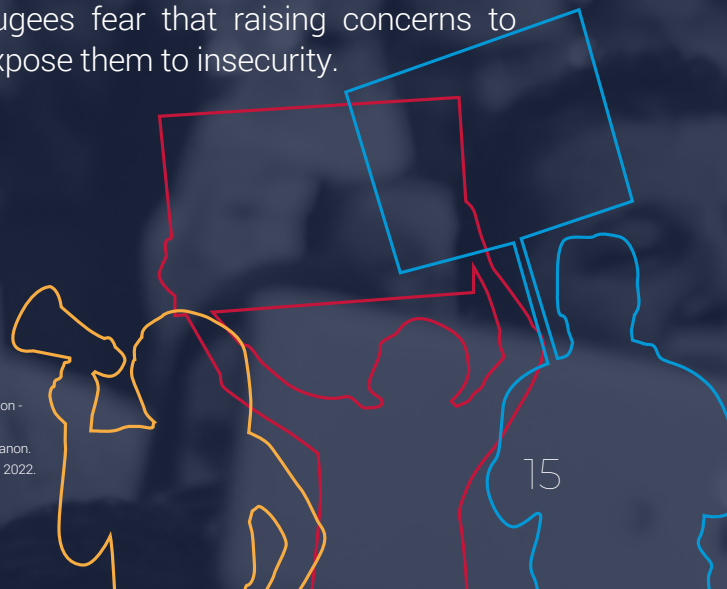
⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 2023. "Annual Results Report - Lebanon." 2023. https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/MENA%20-%20Lebanon%20ARR%202023_0.pdf.

⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2023

⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2023

⁹ ReliefWeb. 2019. "Unpacking Gendered Realities in Displacement: The Status of Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon - Lebanon." November 8, 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unpacking-gendered-realities-displacement-status-syrian-refugee-women-lebanon>.

¹⁰ VASYR 2021 - Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon - Lebanon. 2022. ReliefWeb. January 25, 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/vasyr-2021-vulnerability-assessment-syrian-refugees-lebanon>.



Deema, 24/02/25

When asked about her key motives for joining the sit-ins, Deema explained that her participation was driven by various reasons, including issues related to her gender identity as a woman. Some of her demands included justice for workers and women, to amend cruel and unfair laws that impact women, and to stop violations and discriminatory practices against them. She reflected on her sit-in experience and said: ***“The first initiative I was a part of in Lebanon was a demonstration on International Women’s Day, organized by several women’s institutions. (I joined) to draw attention to the feminist movement, (which was particularly) vital after Syrian women were required to possess residency permits. At that point, women who were subject to any form of harassment or violence could not report it due to their legal status. This prevented women from filing complaints (accessing) protection. (During the sit-in) I held up a banner with a slogan on it that referred to Syrian women in general. Unfortunately, one of my fellow participants did not like the sign and claimed that I was raising an issue that had nothing to do with our stance. She argued that our demonstration was about feminist issues, not the rights of Syrian women. This was ludicrous to me; the feminist issue aims to improve the (general) situation of women in Lebanon, which includes the rights of refugee women.”***

Deema’s testimony highlights the intersection between her multiple identities: as a woman, a refugee and a Syrian. This is also reiterated by Reem (above) where she links her motivation for taking part in Gaza sit-ins to the need to ***“advocate for Palestinian women and raise awareness of the violence they are subject to”***. In Deema’s case, her particular identity and demands as a Syrian woman was challenged by other women in the march. By holding up a banner that emphasized advocacy for women Syrian refugees within the context of a feminist march, Deema understood the feminist movement to encompass her demands and identity in an interconnected broader gender justice framework. However, the encounter with the fellow participant who dismissed her demands as being outside the scope of the protest, reveals how specific identities – in this case her identity as a Syrian refugee - was seen to be separate to and “other” and therefore rejected as legitimate demands. While gender equality will never be fully realized if the unique needs of marginalized communities are not seen to be inclusive of this goal, the incident shows the multiple barriers Syrian refugee women face when attempting to partake in peaceful assemblies. From those interviewed, 6 out of 8 interviewees were women, highlighting the increasingly significant role women are playing in the civic action space in Lebanon and how refugee women – often seen to be especially vulnerable and silent – are active participants of peaceful assemblies with political agency. Active participation in such sit-ins, being organized, led, and dominantly participated in by women, serves as a powerful reminder that women are taking up leadership roles in the fight for rights.

Legal Analysis



Lebanon is a signatory of numerous international treaties that protect the right to freedom of assembly including the Universal Declaration of Human rights (1948), Article 20 (1),²⁷ The International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in Articles 21 and 22,²⁸ and the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Article 5.²⁹ The Lebanese Constitution (1926) explicitly states that Lebanon is a “founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR). The Government shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception.”³⁰ As such, the UDHR and the rights it outlines are constitutionally protected. On a national level Lebanon has not clearly stated the right to peaceful assembly in its laws although it is generally understood to be associated with – but not directly articulated under - the right of freedom of expression (Article 13) of the Lebanese Constitution and under the ICCPR to which Lebanon is a signatory and which obliges States to respect and promote the right to freedom of expression.

International customary international law also recognizes the right to freedom of assembly as a fundamental human right and it is understood to be legally obligatory for States to ensure that this right is protected. The ICCPR General comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21) specifically outlines these obligations including that this right extends to “foreign nationals, migrants (documented or undocumented), asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons”.³¹ Guaranteeing the right to peaceful assembly also involves ensuring that conditions for the right to be acted upon are upheld by a State, outlining that both negative and positive duties have to be met for a right to be realized. As such, a State is obligated not just to refrain from imposing restrictive measures (e.g. unwarranted interference or disrupt or prevent peaceful assemblies without compelling justification, nor to sanction participants or organizers without legitimate cause), but also positive duties. These positive duties include, ensuring a peaceful environment without discrimination” and to “protect participants from all forms of discriminatory abuse and attacks”.

Syrian refugees living in Lebanon have numerous rights protected by and enshrined in law both nationally and internationally, protecting the right to peaceful assembly. However, the reality of the situation is that many of these rights are curtailed either directly or indirectly by an environment of fear as well as coercive measures enacted by the Lebanese authorities against refugees writ large. The right to peaceful assembly is highly reliant on and linked to the recognition of other rights, and Syrian refugees who have other personal freedoms curtailed may also be limited in exercising the right to peaceful protest. For instance, a broader environment of racism and discrimination within Lebanon as well as an attempt by the Lebanese state and security forces to create a legal environment that undermines and even contradicts their duties under international law leads to a chilling effect on the ability of Syrian refugees to voice and articulate grievances and feel safe in doing so.

Syrian refugees that do actively realize and act on this right, have often face arbitrary arrest and detention and/or face reprisals. The case of Adam in this report is indicative of the violent response that refugees often face during their participation in peaceful assemblies and the testimonies of Anwar and Deema also underscore the importance of the demand of international protection needed by refugees. In Adam's case, not only was his right to peaceful assembly denied, but he also faced a serious of significant human rights abuses including torture as a direct result of his participation. As such, while Syrian refugees are legally protected to participate in peaceful assembly and express grievances, The Lebanese State has directly and indirectly obstructed and violated its obligations to ensure that this right is protected.



Recommendations



To the Government of Lebanon:



- Ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention, allow for the registration of refugees in Lebanon and enact basic protection rights for refugees in line with international law.
- Conduct thorough investigations to hold perpetrators of violations accountable to ensure accountability and justice for victims and abide by national law regarding the use of force during peaceful assembly.
- Preserve the assembly participants' right to FoPA and association and develop and enforce effective protective measures to ensure their safety while they are participating in peaceful assemblies.

To the International Community:



- Support and strengthen the efforts of civil society groups and organizations that work to promote freedom of assembly rights.
- Promote and protect the right to freedom of assembly and association in line with international law and ensure that the Government of Lebanon abides by its obligations to uphold the necessary conditions (both positive and negative) that allow the right to freedom of assembly to be realized.

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