

# Lebanon

## Refugees from Syria in Lebanon

### Numbers:

The number of refugees registered with UNHCR in Lebanon is 1,033,513. Lebanon is believed to host more than 1.5 million refugees from Syria. Lebanon's own population is estimated to be under 4.5 million, so almost 1 in 4 people on Lebanese soil are now refugees from Syria.

### Key facts about the refugee population:

- The majority of refugees living in Lebanon come from the cities of Homs, Hama and Damascus and their surroundings.
- Approximately 0.2% of the refugee population are stateless – mostly stateless Kurds (according to UNHCR).
- An estimated 30,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon.
- Over 40,000 babies have been born to refugees in the country since the start of the conflict in Syria.
- 20% of refugee households in Lebanon are headed by women.

### Where are the refugees:

There is a 'no camp' policy in Lebanon and therefore refugees from Syria live scattered across the country in urban settings or Informal Tented Settlements (ITS). Many, especially Palestinians displaced from Syria, reside in Palestinian neighbourhoods and camps.

### A 'refugee' in the Lebanese legal context:

Lebanon is not a party to the [1951 Refugee Convention](#). It does not officially recognise 'refugees' - there is currently no category in national law for refugees who are fleeing conflict or persecution and seeking safety in Lebanon.

At the beginning of the conflict entrance into Lebanon from Syria was easy. However since January 2015, Syrian nationals wishing to enter Lebanon must disclose their reason for entering and meet the requirements for entry as one of the permitted categories (transit, student, tourism, etc.). For each category, specified documents must be presented at the border.

All foreigners are obliged to obtain a residency permit. To obtain a residency permit, refugees must either show their UNHCR registration certificate and sign a pledge to abide by Lebanese law or be sponsored by a Lebanese national who signs a pledge of responsibility on their behalf (the only option for refugees not registered with UNHCR or otherwise not deemed genuine refugees by the General Security Office). The issuing of a residency permit is not guaranteed in either case. An increasing number of applications for extension of legal stay based on UNHCR registration are being rejected. For some refugees the fees for obtaining a residency permit, which amount to \$200 per year per person aged 15 and above, are prohibitive.

### Nationality law in Lebanon:

Lebanese nationality law (like [Syrian nationality law](#)) is based on paternal jus sanguinis. This means that only Lebanese men can automatically transmit their nationality to their children. Lebanese nationality law contains a safeguard against statelessness at birth, whereby a foundling or a child born in Lebanon who does not acquire another nationality should be considered Lebanese (again similar to Syrian nationality law). However, in practice this safeguard is rarely implemented. Naturalisation is a highly sensitive and politicised issue and remains at the discretion of the Lebanese State.



## Statelessness in Lebanon:

Lebanon has not ratified either of the [Statelessness Conventions](#) and does not have a legal framework to address this issue. Lebanon has an estimated in situ stateless population of [between 80,000 and 200,000](#) (in addition to stateless refugees).

## Birth and marriage registration

This section briefly describes the steps for registering births and marriages among refugees from Syria in Lebanon. The registration procedures mostly mirror those for any person living in Lebanon. The information in this section is by no means exhaustive, but aims to give a brief overview and highlight tools which provide more comprehensive information.

This explains the full procedures, however with refugees we do not encourage any Syrian refugees to register with the Syrian Embassy

### Birth Registration

Any foreigner in Lebanon must complete five steps in order to register the birth of a child – see diagram below. The main obstacles to completing the process are lack of awareness of the steps that need to be taken and inability to fulfil the requirements for registration.

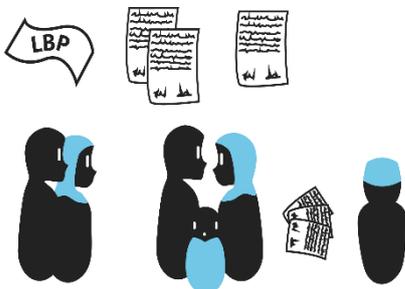


#### Step 1: Birth Notification

Authority: Hospital, certified midwife

Authority: Local *Mukhtar*

Requirements:



#### Step 2: Birth Certificate

- (1) The Birth Notification document;
- (2) Identity documents, one for each parent (i.e. their family booklet or the family extract, or the parents' ID cards/valid passports and their marriage certificate) and copies of these documents;
- (3) Two witnesses and
- (4) A fee of up to LBP 30,000

#### Step 3: Register the Certificate

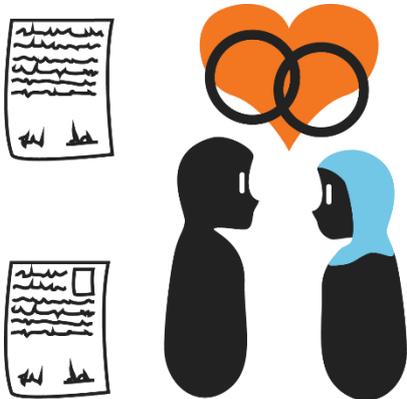
Authority: *Nofous* nearest to the place of birth

Requirements:

Proof of marriage is not officially required but is sometimes requested

Deadlines:

Should be completed within one year of birth, otherwise a civil court case is required to register the certificate.



**Step 4: Registration at the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Authority: Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Requirements: Official birth certificate and parents' ID documents



**Step 5: Registration at the Syrian Embassy**

Authority: Syrian Embassy

Requirements: Official birth certificate and parents' ID documents

**Marriage Registration:**



Any foreigner in Lebanon has to complete a five step procedure to register a marriage – see diagram below. If the parties to the marriage are below 17 (for the women) or 18 (for the man), a special permit is needed from the Sharia court. The fees involved in the registration of a marriage amount to approximately LBP 150,000. The main obstacles to completing the registration process are lack of awareness of the required steps and not being able to fulfil the requirements for registration.

**Step 1: Marriage contract**

Authority: Relevant religious authority (the *Sharia* court, church)

Requirements: family booklet, medical tests and report, two witnesses

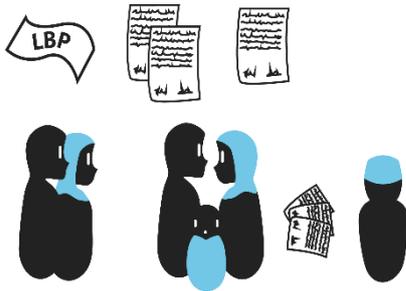


### Step 2: Marriage Certificate

Authority: Local *Mukhtar*

Requirements:

- (1) The marriage contract
- (2) LBP 20,000-30,000 (approximately)



### Step 3: Register the Certificate

Authority: *Nofous* nearest to the place of marriage



### Step 4: Registration at the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Authority: Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Requirements: Official marriage certificate and ID documents

### Step 5: Register at the Syrian Embassy



Authority: Syrian Embassy

Requirements: Certified marriage certificate.

The Embassy sends notification of the marriage to the Syrian Civil Registry to register the marriage in Syria

## Further reading

On marriage registration procedures in Lebanon, obstacles to registration and potential solutions to these problems:



### [NRC-ICLA Update on marriage registration for refugees from Syria \(July 2016\)](#)



Frontiers Ruwad, Marriage Registration in Lebanon – A guide to procedures and practices

## Key issues in accessing civil registration

The birth registration procedure in Lebanon is complex, and therefore not all parents are registering the birth of their babies. Counselling and legal aid can help navigate some of these problems, but there are others where they cannot be used. In these cases advocacy with the relevant bodies is needed find ways to mitigate these obstacles and the consequences of non-registration. See the section on Advocacy talking points for some examples of messaging that could be used in this advocacy.

This section highlights two common issues that refugees face in accessing civil registration procedures in Lebanon and some of the mechanisms that have already been used to resolve these obstacles.

### Challenge 1: Not having the required documents to register births and marriages

One of the most common challenges is that many families do not have the documents required by the registration procedures. This may be because they did not bring essential documents with them when they fled Syria, because they never possessed the documents and / or because they are not able to obtain documents in Lebanon.

Some of the mechanisms that organisations are using to navigate this problems are:

- Sharia courts in Lebanon have some discretion, particularly on what constitutes witness evidence. Mukhtars also operate with some discretion. The discretion of the Mukhtar and religious court is linked

to what they believe constitutes enough evidence to prove the identity of individuals who lack official documents.

- Some Mukhtars and Sharia courts are more flexible than others as to what documents they request.
- Refugees who had been legally married in Syria but have lost their documents may nevertheless be able to be recognised as married if they bring their case to a religious court with witnesses to testify. In general, there has been increasing acceptance of witness testimonials to marriages.

## Challenge 2: Limited awareness of the full process

Refugees routinely express a lack of awareness of civil registration procedures. They often do not know what to do to access these procedures and sometimes take steps that are not in line with Lebanese law and policy (for instance, it is common practice to be married by any religious Sheikh, regardless of whether the Sheikh is authorised by the relevant religious court). However, parents can generally petition for judicial “ratification” (legal recognition) of a customary religious marriage or for late registration of their marriage and so obtain a marriage certificate, which is needed to register the birth of a child.

So far, good practice has focused on producing materials explaining the civil registration system, with the result that there are now many videos, leaflets, booklets and other information materials available. Various organisations based in Lebanon (such as UNHCR, NRC, Oxfam, Lost and Caritas) have also carried out public awareness campaigns on civil registration procedures in Lebanon, some examples of good practice in this area are given in the regional section of the toolkit. What needs to be done next is ensure that this information reaches the refugees.

## Challenge 3: Keeping documents safe

There are many reasons why refugees in Lebanon are not keeping their documents safe. For instance, the Informal Tented Settlements are particularly susceptible to floods and fires, which can destroy documents. If a document is lost in an ITS, it often cannot be reported to either the Lebanese or Syrian authorities due to problems in gaining access to the relevant office and / or fear of approaching the authorities. Therefore some advice or help for refugees on preserving documents can be seen as good practice.

- When a hospital or midwife provides a birth notification to a family (whose priority is the new-born baby and not preserving this notification), it can help to ensure that the document is given in a sealed plastic envelope, which could also later be used to store other documents.
- Important documents could be photocopied or photographed in case the originals are lost.
- Information on the importance of and ways to safeguard documents should be included in public awareness sessions.

## Challenge 4: Not adhering to the statutory deadline for birth registration (1 year)

Article 12 of Lebanon’s Law on Documenting Personal Status states: “If a year passes from the date of birth, the registration would only be possible through a court ruling issued in the deliberations chamber and based on a request from the Public Prosecution or the concerned party.”

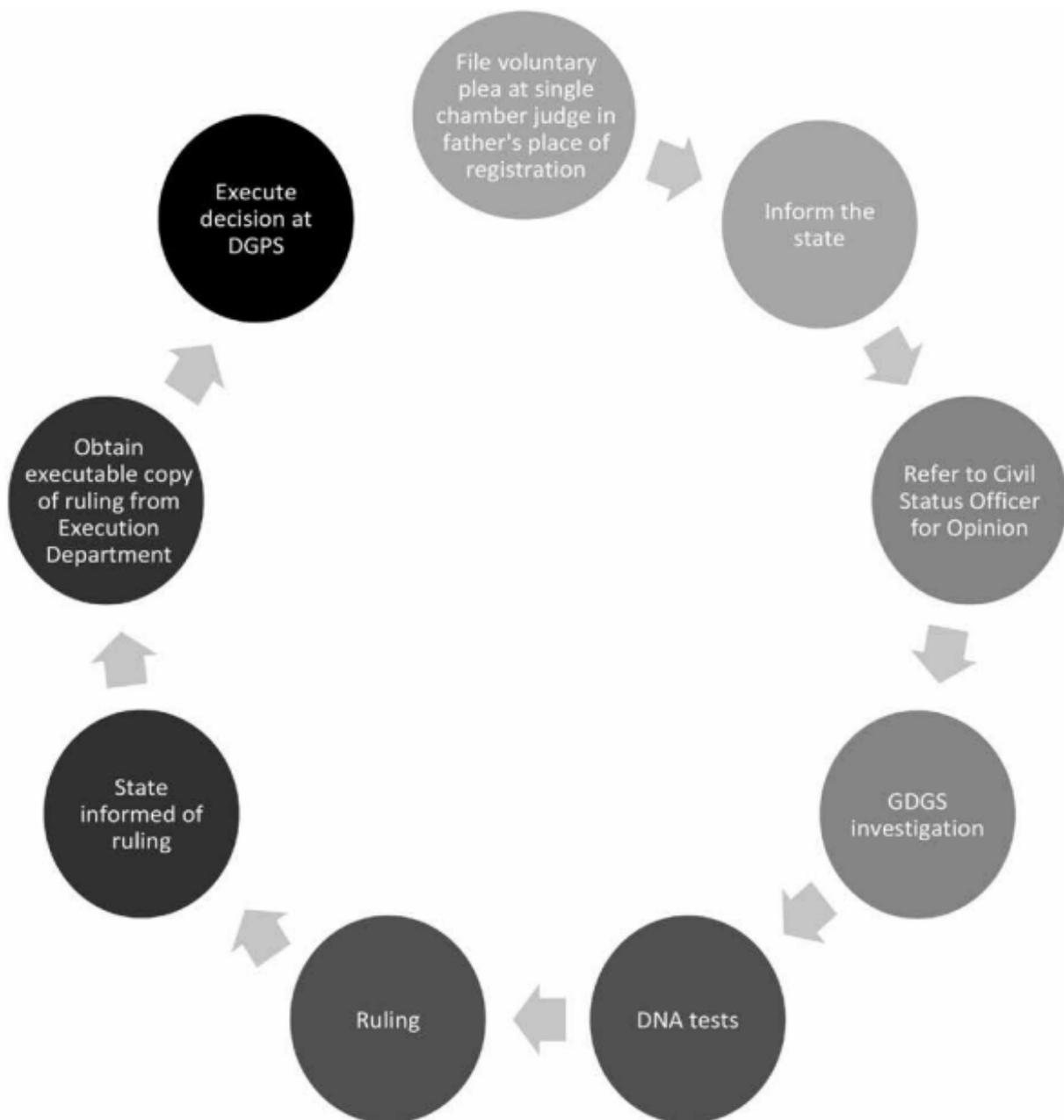
It is important to try and get babies registered before this deadline. When the one year deadline is not met, the family must go through a court proceeding to register the birth. It is not necessary to hire a lawyer to do this, but as it is a complicated

It is clear from this diagram how complicated the procedures is. If families are aware of this before the child is born they are more likely to try and avoid it by registering births before the deadline. process, legal aid or counselling is encouraged. Frontiers Ruwad have developed a diagram to show the stages

of this procedure:

**Figure 9**

**Stages of late birth registration through the courts**



Good practice therefore includes raising awareness about the procedures, identifying and supporting families in registering births before the deadlines and referral to organisations who work on legal aid and counselling of families who have not registered births by the deadline.

NRC's ICLA programme in Lebanon introduced a scheme which provides additional paralegal assistance or legal representation to parents of unregistered children aged 9 months or older in order to register before the deadline. At the same time, ICLA is training humanitarian partners and local communities on identification and referral, which includes sensitisation to deadlines in the birth registration procedure.

## Further reading

On birth registration procedures in Lebanon, obstacles to registration and potential solutions to these problems:



[NRC-ICLA Update on birth registration for refugees from Syria \(January 2015\)](#)



[Frontiers Ruwad, Birth Registration in Lebanon – A practical manual](#)

## Relevant organisations

Organisations that carry out legal aid or counselling to navigate the civil registration procedures:

<i>UNHCR</i>	Provides legal aid, representation and counselling on access to civil registration.	+961 1 849 201	Khater Bldg, Dr. Philippe Hitti Street, Ramlet El Baida, Beirut
<i>Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)</i>	Provides legal aid and counselling on access to civil registration.	+961 1 363200	Ain El Mreisseh, Ayad Building, John F.Kennedy street, Beirut
<i>Caritas</i>	Provides legal aid and counselling on access to civil registration.	+961 1 502550/1/2/3/4	Takla Center– facing futuroscope, Charles Helou Boulevard – Sin el Fil, Beirut
<i>International Rescue Committee (IRC)</i>	Provides legal aid and counselling on access to civil registration.	+961 1 212 551 3000	First Floor Azouri Centre , Naccache Street, Achrafiyeh

Organisations that work on statelessness more generally:

<i>UNHCR</i>	+961 1 849 201	Khater Bldg, Dr. Philippe Hitti Street, Ramlet El Baida
<i>Frontiers Ruwad</i>	+961 1 389 556	Badaro Street, Fawaz Bldg, 7th Floor
<i>LOST</i>	+961 8 377075	Takla Center– facing futuroscope, Charles Helou Boulevard –

In Lebanon, there are also several clusters and inter-organisational systems that seek to share information and work together on issues in the refugee context. Relevant coordination mechanisms include the Child Protection Cluster and the Statelessness Working Group.