



MEDITERRANEAN CITY-TO-CITY MIGRATION

CITY CASE STUDY

BEIRUT

THE AMEL HOUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS (AHRH):
A SPACE OF SOLIDARITY IN BEIRUT

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

HUMAN RIGHTS

SOCIAL COHESION

REFUGEE RIGHTS

HUMANITARIAN LAW

RESEARCH

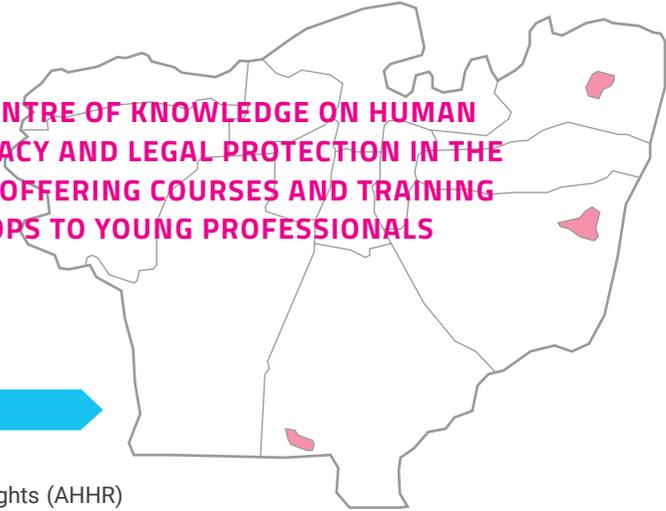


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This case study was developed in the framework of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC2CM), a project coordinated by ICMPD and funded by the European Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The MC2CM project has been working since 2015 with Amman, Beirut, Lisbon, Lyon, Madrid, Tangiers, Tunis, Turin and Vienna to increase the knowledge base on urban migration. Additionally the

project has sought to nurture a peer-to-peer dialogue and mutual learning on specific urban challenges such as socio-spatial cohesion, intercultural dialogue, employment and provision of shelter and basic services for refugees and economic migrants, among others. The case study was selected by the Municipality of Beirut in order to showcase a practice that contributes to socio-spatial inclusion of migrants at the local level.



AHHR IS A CENTRE OF KNOWLEDGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY AND LEGAL PROTECTION IN THE ARAB REGION OFFERING COURSES AND TRAINING WORKSHOPS TO YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

ABSTRACT

The Amel House of Human Rights (AHHR) was founded in 2009 to fill knowledge and educational gaps surrounding human rights advocacy and legal protection in Lebanon and the Arab world. The project offers various human rights courses targeted mostly at young professionals. One of its most popular programmes is the annual Summer School on Law and Armed Conflict which attracts students from across the Middle East, some of whom are refugees themselves. This programme creates a space of solidarity where attendees can discuss some of the most pressing issues affecting the region.

Aiming to become a leading centre of knowledge in the field of human rights, the AHHR also offers its alumni research opportunities and partners with organisations to run rights-based projects. One such project is 'Sanctuary in the City', a programme which organised workshops with Beirut Municipality and the city's refugee community, creating a platform of discussion for issues relating to refugee protection. The project oversaw the collective development of a draft local charter on human rights.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Beirut is the capital and largest city of Lebanon with a population of over 2.2 million living in the Greater Beirut region. It is also the political, economic and cultural centre of Lebanon, hosting the country's seat of government, largest port and only international airport. Over the last century, the city has attracted successive "waves" of migrants including Armenian and Christian refugees from Ottoman Turkey in the early 20th Century; Palestinian and Arab refugees from the mid 20th Century; and Asian and Arab migrant workers since the 1990s.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Lebanon has witnessed a huge influx of refugees. Today, with an estimated 1.5 million refugees now residing in Lebanon, the nation contains the largest number of refugees relative to its own population (1:4). However, as Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, refugees are not granted legal protection and must obtain valid residency permits, a costly and challenging process. Aside from the 1962 law regarding the entry, stay and exit of foreigners in Lebanon, no clear national policy on migration exists.

Additionally, Lebanon's "no camp" policy has led many refugees to move to cities like Beirut where there are now over 300,000 refugees. This has increased the strain on already-stretched infrastructure and public services, constituting a huge challenge for municipalities with limited resources. As part of the 2015 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan – established by the Lebanese Gov-

ernment and UN agencies – municipalities are now directly involved in implementing local refugee response projects, with Beirut being a particular focus due to its many vulnerable refugees.

As both a governorate and a municipality, Beirut has a state-appointed governor with a range of executive powers and reporting responsibilities extending directly to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, as well as an elected mayor and municipal council with limited decision-making powers. While the municipality promotes Beirut as a "culturally diverse" city, access to basic rights for migrants can be a challenge given Lebanon's complex sectarian political regime.

The AHHR was set up in 2009 to promote human rights from the perspective of international humanitarian law. The project has a double strategy of providing education and training on human rights and legal protection issues in Lebanon and the Arab region, and becoming a leading source of knowledge in this field. As the only local NGO that can provide tailored training on refugee law, the AHHR has attracted many Syrian activists seeking training from 2011.

IMPLEMENTATION

The AHHR was founded in 2009 by Dr Kamel Mohanna (President of Amel Association), Dr Karim Mufti and Mr Wissam Al-Saliby in collaboration with the Human Rights Legal Clinic of La Sagesse University. All the support, material and expertise required to

develop the AHHR has been provided via this academic partnership. Moreover, the association with La Sagesse University has also imbued the project with the credibility needed to access funding from the Open Society Institute. The Summer School on Law and Armed Conflict was the first programme to be launched in 2011, followed by the Palestinian Refugee Law Course in 2013. Both of these courses have been running every year since inception.

The overarching goal for all of the Amel Association's work is to reinforce a culture of rights and citizenship in which universal civil rights can be promoted. The AHHR was established as the missing "legal" segment of this agenda. Through its double strategy of education and knowledge production, the AHHR endeavours to expand its expertise in legal approaches to rights-based advocacy and create programmes to educate the next generation of refugee rights activists. Most of the participants in AHHR's courses are young professionals in line with Amel Association's belief that young people are the true drivers of change.

One of the AHHR's most popular programmes is the Summer School on Law and Armed Conflict. This two-week course is extremely popular, drawing 35-50 participants from across the Middle East every year (some of whom are refugees themselves). During the summer school, students are taught about basic human rights principles, international humanitarian law, international criminal law and the mechanisms through which violations can be prosecuted. No formal education or professional experience is required for this course, however the AHHR

does offer more advanced programmes for graduates and junior professionals.

Other programmes offered by the AHHR include Palestinian Refugee Law, Community Organising for Human Rights and Video Advocacy Action. These courses attract students from very diverse professional and cultural backgrounds, ensuring interesting exchange opportunities. In this way, the AHHR not only provides students with exceptional human rights education from leading academic experts, lawyers and aid workers, it also directly contributes to building social cohesion and solidarity between communities by providing a platform for different people to meet and debate some of the most pressing issues affecting the Arab region.

In its additional aim of becoming a centre of knowledge on human rights and legal protection in the Middle East, the AHHR annually offers up to four alumni the opportunity to research topics relating to the law of armed conflict. This research feeds back into the content of AHHR's courses and some alumni have even returned to lead their own workshops and lectures. The AHHR hopes that its research and experience will continue to act as an important reference point for institutions working on human rights and legal protection issues in Lebanon and the Arab world.

The AHHR also occasionally partners with organisations to run rights-based projects. The 'Sanctuary in the City' project, run in collaboration with Habitat International Coalition and the Housing and Land Rights Network is one example. The aim of this

project was to bring together the two largest stakeholders of the refugee crisis, the Beirut Municipality and refugees themselves, to discuss issues relating to refugee rights in Beirut. Through four structured workshop sessions, refugees were able to participate in developing refugee protection programmes and creating a draft local charter on rights.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES

The AHHR's partnership with La Sagesse University gave the programme the necessary expertise and support required to initiate the project and also helped to acquire initial funding from the Open Society Institute (OSI). Since the AHHR is housed within Amel Associations's headquarters in Beirut, no resources were needed to secure a venue.

The AHHR's programmes are individually funded by different sponsors. For example, in recent years the OSI, the Swiss Embassy and Diakonia have sponsored the Summer School initiative.

RESULTS AND IMPACTS

The education and training provided to young professionals by the AHHR provides them with a grounded understanding of human rights and legal protection issues in Lebanon and the Arab world and equips them with the tools required to tackle violations from a legal perspective in their future

careers. While some of the programmes are targeted at university graduates and experienced professionals, other courses, like the Summer School, are open to anyone with an interest, providing an inclusive opportunity for anyone interested in learning more about human rights.

The AHHR's programmes foster social cohesion by attracting students from many different backgrounds and by providing them with a platform to learn and discuss topical human rights issues together. Whether a course lasts for one day or several months, the AHHR offers a space of solidarity as diverse students study together as engaged, informed citizens with the aim of helping foreigners and refugees access basic human rights. In this space, the legality and illegality of people's presence in a country is not important, rather their ability to fairly and equally access rights is the focus of attention.

The AHHR's yearly internal evaluations ensure that its work is adapted to the current context with research and programmes that are relevant and demand-led. As the AHHR also functions as a source of knowledge on human rights issues in Lebanon and the Middle East, the research conducted and experience gained through the project have a direct influence on the rights-based programmes implemented by Amel Association and other organisations. So far, four booklets have been published by the AHHR in Arabic on the law of armed conflict, using research carried out by its own alumni, and a fifth one is now in line.

With AHHR's experience in refugee rights and Amel Association's connection to the local refugee community, AHHR have been able to act as the implementing partner of the 'Sanctuary in the City' project. This project directly contributed to the inclusion of refugees in the decision-making processes surrounding their rights and protection by providing a platform for them to meet and discuss with members of the Beirut Municipality. Through the workshops, refugees were able to participate in the development of refugee protection programmes and could agree on the principles laid out in the draft Beirut Charter on Human Rights.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

An ongoing challenge which affects all human rights organisations and which AHHR seeks to tackle through its research and education, is the lack of enforcement of international humanitarian laws; lack of political will to respect human rights; and lack of prosecution or use of transitional justice mechanisms against violations in Lebanon.

In some years there have been issues with securing funding for programmes such as the Summer School in Law and Armed Conflicts. While AHHR's courses do not usually require participants to pay a fee, in instances of scarce resources, students have been charged US\$100 in order to sustain the programme and avoid dependency on donors to keep it running. Students from Palestine and Syria are however always exempted from paying the fee.

As the local implementing partner of the 'Sanctuary in the City' project, initiated by Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), the AHHR experienced some challenges in facilitating the meeting of various stakeholders. In particular, the Beirut Municipality was extremely busy and already had its own approach towards the refugee crisis, making it difficult to gain its support for the project. Nevertheless, due to the strength of Amel's network with its stakeholders, AHHR was able to secure some basic participation from the municipality, although they have not re-engaged with the project since the Beirut Charter on Human Rights was drafted.

LESSONS LEARNED

The important role that AHHR has played as an educational centre for refugee rights and legal protections, particularly since the Syrian conflict started in 2011, is a testament to its importance as a hub of human rights knowledge in Lebanon and across the Middle East.

Alumni of the AHHR are not only provided with education from leading experts in the field which they can carry into their future careers, but are given the chance to meet with people from diverse backgrounds, some of whom are refugees themselves, and to discuss human rights issues from different perspectives. The Summer School alone now has over 200 alumni who have come from across the Arab region.

By utilising Amel Association's connection to the local refugee population and collaborating with other organisations, the AHHR has helped to implement the city-wide 'Sanctuary in the City' project, facilitating meetings between Beirut's refugees and the municipality to draft a local charter on human rights. This was in many ways a great achievement, however the Beirut Municipality only participated minimally. While the capacities and resources of Lebanese municipalities are indeed overstretched by the refugee crisis, cooperating with civil society to implement rights-based projects is a key way in which this workload could be constructively shared.

The AHHR's latest idea is to develop a series of 'social justice' indicators to monitor the changing socio-economic conditions of refugees and 'host' communities in Lebanon while also helping Amel to measure the effectiveness of its programmes. If this project proves viable, local Lebanese NGOs would be responsible for gathering local statistics; municipalities would, meanwhile, be a valuable source of information regarding local governance issues, such as the constraints under which they operate. So far it has been extremely challenging to find the necessary resources and economic experts to lead this project, but AHHR will launch a new call for applications and continue working on this in 2018.

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