



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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ANALYSIS

CONFLICT, CRISIS, AND MIGRATION:

MARITIME IRREGULAR MIGRATION FROM LEBANON SINCE 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Current unrest in the Middle East and around the world has led to an increase in global irregular immigration, which reached 200,000 in 2021, the highest since 2017. The ongoing crisis in Lebanon and its neighboring countries has led to an alarming increase in irregular migration to Europe. This increase in mobility has triggered a rise in xenophobia, allowing for the politicization of migration in destination and transit countries for migrants. Hence, there is an urgent need for accurate and reliable data about this phenomenon to find the proper solutions that can translate into adequate policies. In order to help in this regard, this paper has surveyed and tracked all irregular maritime migration attempts that start from Lebanon toward Europe by collecting accurate official data and presenting it in a transparent, easily accessible, and publicly publishable format. This research paper has also compared this data set with other information from international sources such as UNHCR, IOM, and Frontex to confidentially analyze, draw the necessary conclusions, and confirm changing trends in an effort to provide international NGOs, public institutions, the media, think tanks, and the public at large with reliable information. This will be critical in reaching sensible and rational conclusions and finding the proper solutions to a growing international problem that constantly threatens the upkeep of human rights.

LEBANON'S CRISIS

Since 2019, Lebanon has been in the midst of a “deliberate depression,” suffering from a severe multifaceted economic meltdown. Indeed, the World Bank pointedly warned that “Lebanon’s financial and economic crisis is likely to rank in the top three, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century.” This has happened on top of a worldwide pandemic with catastrophic consequences for the country and a devastating port explosion that destroyed several districts of Beirut. The Lebanese currency has lost more than 90% of its value, dropping from 1,500 to 80,000 LBP to the US Dollar, while inflation hit a 240% high in 2022. This has made people’s wages essentially worthless throughout this still ongoing crisis. According to the World Bank, Lebanon’s economy shrunk by 10.5% in 2021, added to -25.9% in 2020 and -6.9% in 2019. The protracted economic crisis has led to a marked decline in disposable income. GDP per capita dropped by 36.5% between 2019 and 2021, and Lebanon was reclassified by the World Bank as a lower-middle-income country, down from upper-middle-income status in July 2022.

Meanwhile, more than 45% of the Lebanese population has fallen under the poverty line, that is, receiving less than 3.1 USD per day. In addition, 22% of the population in Lebanon is now below the extreme poverty line, as unemployment soars. Tripoli and North Lebanon have been hit harder by the crisis: in Tripoli, 74% of households live below the poverty line. Consequently, emigration has significantly increased due to the worsening situation, lack of job opportunities and economic prospects. According to World Bank statistics, Lebanon has witnessed a negative net migration since 2015, losing more than 200,000 residents annually.

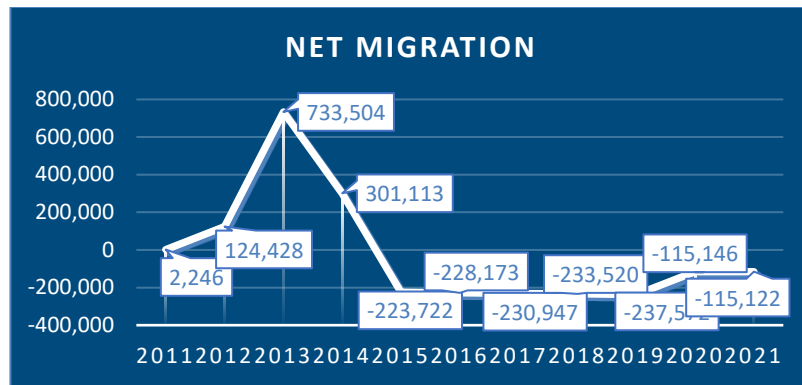


Fig 1. Net Migration 2011-2021

Additionally, this protracted crisis has also affected the population growth rate, which has become negative since 2015 ranging from -2% per year to a significant -2.8% in 2019 with the start of the crisis.

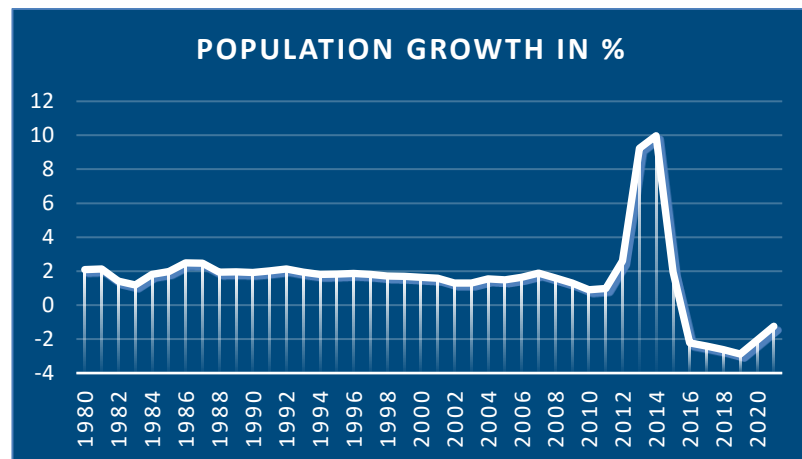


Fig 2. Population growth in percentage 1980-2020

In a recent survey organized by ELKA Lebanon, 94% of Lebanese viewed the country as going in the wrong direction.¹ As such, 61% of the representative sample consider emigrating in the next three years.

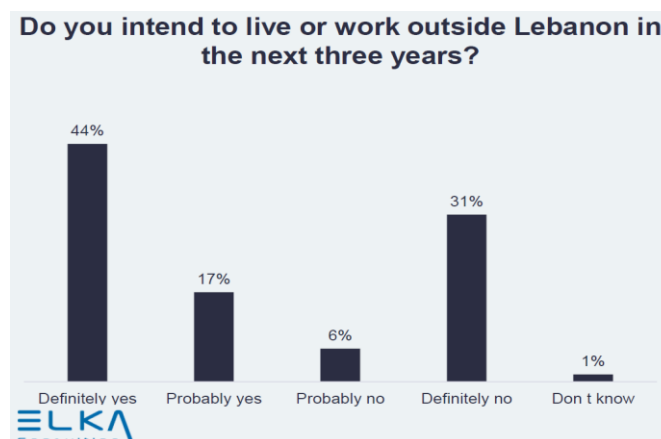


Fig 3. Source: Elka Consulting.²

¹ ELKA Lebanon is a new statistics company that made this survey in September 2022, based on a national representative sample of 800 individuals. For more information: <http://elka-lebanon.com/>.

² Retrieved from ELKA Consulting; part of a private research project.

The situation is further complicated due to Lebanon's historical role as a land of refuge for threatened minorities in the Middle East. It is a point of origin also for Syrian and Palestinian migration, and finally, a transit country for the neighboring populations to traverse it in their migration attempts. Indeed, Lebanon has hosted hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees since 1948. More recently, 1.5 million Syrian refugees migrated to Lebanon, of whom about 814,000 are registered with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). With a population estimated at around 6 million, Lebanon is host to the world's largest number of refugees per capita.

These factors have created a worrisome situation and a potential for a significant increase in irregular migration out of Lebanon. Thus, to ascertain such a trend and build a reliable database for future research, this study was launched in cooperation with the Madrid office of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation to track and measure irregular maritime migration from Lebanese shores between 2019 and 2022.

LEBANON, A LAND OF MIGRATION

Early Migration from Lebanon

Across its complex political, social, and economic history, Lebanon has and continues to experience waves of migration for many reasons. For over a century, the small country in the Middle East has not only pushed its citizens to look for a better future but has also heavily relied on remittance. Historically, this has been due to the persisting intersectional challenges associated with poor governance, socioeconomic instability, sectarian conflicts, and years of foreign intervention and occupation. Alongside the aforementioned, Lebanon's strategic geographic location in a region not void of conflict itself has continued to place it at the epicenter of turmoil – a factor that has largely contributed to people's will to leave throughout its history. Factors such as the autonomy of Mount Lebanon between 1840 and 1860, coupled with the increasing integration of Mount Lebanon's economy into the expanding British and French capitalist market, constituted two important factors that triggered migration in its early stages – a factor that historians insist is the driver that made migration from Lebanon what it is today. As a result of this expanding market, a small number of mostly Maronite Christians reportedly migrated from Mount Lebanon prior to the 1870s to Rome, parts of Europe, Egypt, and even to regions such as Marseille and Manchester, according to the literature.

The emancipation of the peasants in 1860 and the integration of the local economy into the European capitalist market, also contributed to another wave of migration during this period. Integration into the European capitalist market brought forth a pivotal shift to Lebanon's economy and a significant form of economic stability in the form of the ever-so-popular remittances. This phenomenon continues to shoulder Lebanon's painfully declining economy to this day. Economic prosperity, driven by the development of the silk industry and relative political stability throughout this period, was short-lived, as, by the late-nineteenth century, the collapse of the silk industry had once again forced many Lebanese people to seek improved economic opportunities abroad.

Conflict-induced Migration: Post-WWII and the Lebanese Civil War

Due to the global economic depression of 1929, Lebanese emigration decreased. It resumed post-1945, increased considerably in the 1960s, and then witnessed an increase after the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. Between 1945 and 1960, the number of emigrants averaged 3,000 annually. This was followed by 8,000 people leaving Lebanon between 1960 and 1970 and 10,000 between 1970 and 1975. According to scholar Boutros Labaki, “[...] the demand for manpower in different sectors of their economies, coupled with the increase in oil prices after 1973, gave the decisive boost to Lebanese emigration.” According to the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) estimates, by 1982, there were 127,000 Lebanese migrants in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. Simultaneously, at the domestic level, the Lebanese economy was significantly impacted by the outbreak of the 1967 war with Israel and its repercussions on the political stability in the country. As political divisions among the Lebanese people became more acute around political and economic sensitivities, people felt the need to rapidly evacuate the country in large numbers.

Between 1975 and 1989, during Lebanon’s Civil War, it is estimated that close to 1 million people had left the country, accounting for 40% of the total population at the time. As the war led to the large-scale destruction of the economy, hundreds of thousands of people lost their resources and became homeless without income or health, social, housing, and educational services. Across the 1980s, the country continued to witness renewed strife involving local, regional, and international actors. These included: (1) the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon followed by partial withdrawal in 1983, (2) clashes between the Syrian army and Palestinian forces (1984-5), (3) the Shiite and Palestinian conflicts (1986), and (4) inter- and intra- communal clashes between 1986 and 1989. According to a 1992 study, it is estimated that the clashes in 1989 brought the rate of emigration “back to its 1975 rates.” Throughout this period, Australia and Canada reportedly witnessed an “unprecedented increase” in Lebanese migrants. It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned events not only pushed people to emigrate, but also triggered a nationwide crisis of internal displacement that ultimately led Lebanese from diverse economic, educational, and social backgrounds to leave for countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, France, Germany, and the Gulf States. In the post-war convergence period, Lebanon’s diaspora served as a primary source of revenue for the country’s recovering economy – as it does to this day. Most Lebanese migrants are men, especially to the Gulf, whereas, to Western countries, it is mostly families that emigrate.

MIGRATION FROM LEBANON IN RECENT HISTORY AMID LIMITED AND CONFLICTING DATA

The 1990s-2000s

Since 1967, Lebanon has been unable to stop the rising numbers of emigrants seeking better futures for themselves and their families. Migration in Lebanon has been and still is a significant social, economic, and political phenomenon. However, it has a double effect: on the one hand, the emigration flow leads to a significant loss in human capital, and on the other, it has created

a vast Lebanese diasporic community that provides a main source of foreign currency and makes a global network available to the local community, allowing Lebanese citizens to be particularly mobile in the global market. Migration from (and to) Lebanon across the country's recent history remained tainted by a lack of data, statistics, and accurate numbers. Amid sectarian, political, and demographic sensitivities, Lebanon has not had an official census of the Lebanese population since 1943 – a matter that has largely left conversations on the country's demographic composition to broad/conflicting estimates and speculation. Along these lines, migration experts and scholars alike have relied on various sources, including stand-alone studies, population growth calculations, and census data in the countries of destination. Throughout the 1990s, Lebanon experienced several of confrontations with Israel, eventually culminating in the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, in addition to experiencing a period of political turmoil and political assassinations – once again, finding itself at the center of mass brain drain across a number of pivotal sectors. Reportedly, between 1991 and 2009, 220,000 and 400,000 people respectively left the country.

Post 2019

Lebanon continues to endure an exacerbating economic, financial, political, health, and humanitarian crisis. As previously mentioned, more than half of the country's population (55%) currently lives at or below the poverty line, and unemployment rates continue to increase (now above 30%) amid an economic crisis that has seen the Lebanese Pound (LBP) lose more than 90% of its market value. The ongoing crisis is additionally severe on the country's refugee population. Lebanon continues to host the world's largest concentration of refugees per capita (more than 40% of the country's population). The explosion in August 2020 at the country's principal port, when the crises mentioned above had already begun taking over the country, has led to a more immediate emergency. Over 300,000 people have been left homeless, over 5,000 people were injured, and hundreds lost their lives as a result, with many continuing to lose their lives one year later from injuries sustained during the blast. The blast and the COVID-19 pandemic have placed unimaginable strains on the country's already-ill-equipped medical and healthcare resources. The World Bank describes the country as “sinking into one of the most severe global crises episodes” and “prolonged economic depression” of the twenty-first century. To date, justice and accountability for the explosion are yet to be attained, with little or no compensation for the fatalities, livelihoods, and people affected by physical and psychological injuries.

With food and basic needs becoming increasingly unaffordable, half of the Lebanese population lives in very severe conditions. The most vulnerable, such as refugees, migrant workers, children, and the elderly, continue to endure the situation at higher levels of intensity and vulnerability. According to a recent UNICEF assessment, 77% of households in Lebanon (and 99% of Syrian refugee households) do not have enough money for food, medication, and other basic needs. The situation is similarly dire for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, where levels of stress, anxiety, violence, and child labor continue to increase in Lebanon's twelve registered refugee camps. With many of the country's leading hospitals and health facilities either damaged or at full capacity and essential medical supplies in short supply or entirely unavailable, the people of Lebanon are not merely facing a health, political, and economic crisis, but they also face severe obstacles in access to education, fuel, electricity, and connectivity in many areas. International NGOs, UN Agencies, and international relief and humanitarian organizations have been heavily present on the ground to assist some of the country's most vulnerable. The Lebanese government has, to date, done little to protect its citizens and the refugee communities within its borders.

While conversations on the impact of the intersectional and layered crisis in Lebanon on brain drain form a significant part of the narrative, estimates of how many people left the country vary according to different sources. A report from 2021 insists that 230,000 Lebanese left Lebanon between July and August of that year, citing a “local NGO” as their source. According to a report published in 2022 by the Middle East Monitor, the number of Lebanese citizens who migrated from the country in 2021 increased by a staggering 346% compared to the previous year. The report based its estimates on a study conducted by Information International that found that as many as 79,134 Lebanese citizens left the country in 2021 compared with just 17,721 in 2020. Information International reportedly based the study on official figures from the Directorate of General Security in Beirut. A report from Beirut today insisted that migration from Lebanon jumped 446% between 2020 and 2021. According to the report, the number of migrants leaving Lebanon increased 4.5 times between 2020 and 2021, with 215,653 travelers leaving the country between 2017 and 2021. Lebanon is currently the most remittance-dependent country in the world, according to a 2022 report published by Mercy Corps’ Crisis and Analytics Hub.

The UNHCR reported that the number of “would-be migrants” undertaking treacherous journeys from Lebanon across the Mediterranean into Europe more than doubled in 2022 for the second year in a row – with 2021 witnessing a peak to destinations such as Cyprus and Italy. After having nearly doubled in 2021 from 2020, this trend further escalated the following year, (the UNHCR insists that this trend persisted well into 2022) with a 135% increase in the number of passengers intending to undertake such movements. While public attention has focused on the Syrians attempting this perilous journey, the number of Lebanese citizens attempting irregular migration continues to increase. According to the UNHCR, there remains a steady increase in Lebanese people attempting to leave by boat, constituting 24% of those attempting to leave in 2022, 12% in 2021, and 18% in 2020.

METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

This project relied on direct data collection from open media and official sources documenting irregular immigration attempts. The majority of collected data is derived from official sources published by public institutions, such as the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and Lebanon’s National News Agency, as well as some of NGOs, think tanks, and research centers. It is important to note that most reported attempts are ‘failed.’ In other words, in these attempts, the boats attempting to leave Lebanon’s shores were intercepted before or just after leaving by the LAF or saved at sea. A smaller number of cases are individuals or boats caught by other countries’ navies or coast guards farther away from Lebanese shores.

Consequently, the irregular migrants that ‘succeed’ in reaching their destination in Europe are underreported in this research paper. However, this research paper also relied on the data collected by a European institution called Frontex which collects data about all the irregular migrants that enter the borders of Europe, mentioning their nationalities and the main routes they

enter through.³ Frontex divided European borders into sea and land routes distributed geographically as such: (1) Eastern Land Border; (2) Western Balkan; (3) Eastern Mediterranean; (4) Central Mediterranean; (5) Western Mediterranean; and (6) Western African. For the purpose of this study, the two routes that interest us are the Eastern and Central Mediterranean Sea routes. The Eastern route represents irregular migrants entering Europe through Cyprus or Greece, while the central Mediterranean routes concern migrants entering Europe through Italy. Below is another illustration of the data collected by Frontex for the year 2022.

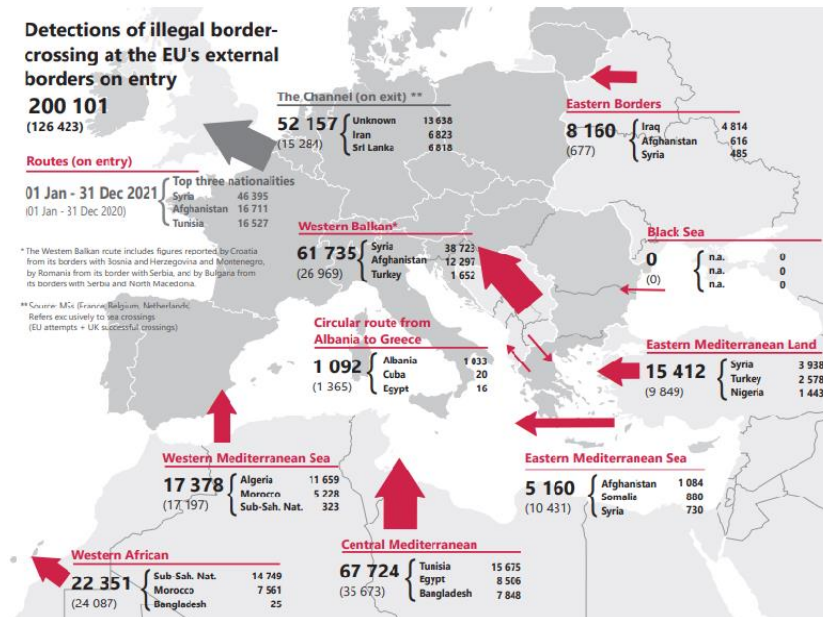


Fig 4. Detection of illegal border crossing, Source: Frontex.

Additionally, to increase the accuracy and breadth of the data, the project compared its collected data with published data from UNHCR, IOM, and Frontex. Unfortunately, these data sets are disjoint, incomplete, and sometimes contradictory. For example, UNHCR data is a sum of all successful and unsuccessful attempts without individual information about each attempt, the nationality of the migrants, their gender, or their fate. Meanwhile, IOM has only published partial data not in sync with UNHCR. While Frontex possessed a comprehensive data set of all irregular migrants who reached Europe, this data is only categorized by nationality and routes, without any information about the country where the attempts originated and the exact date (only the month is listed) of attempted travel.⁴

In light of the above, this study aims to develop a verifiable, openly accessible, and machine-readable data set that will help better understand the state of irregular immigration out of Lebanon throughout the said period. Consequently, the project merged all these partial data sets into a unified database that gives a clearer and more precise picture of irregular migratory movements. Although there is a policy recommendation at the end of this paper, it is important to highlight the need to replicate this project for Syrian shores. Indeed, many migration attempts from Lebanon include Syrian individuals. Additionally, collecting data about attempted migration from Syrian shores would facilitate Frontex data integration. At the moment, this paper cannot

³ Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, promotes, coordinates and develops European border management in line with the EU fundamental rights charter and the concept of Integrated Border Management. <https://frontex.europa.eu/>.

⁴ Frontex data can be accessed through this link <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>.

add the Syrian national from the Frontex database to the research because we do not know whether their journeys began in Syria or Lebanon. Should attempts in Syria be compiled in the future, this would permit a more comprehensive and accurate construction of irregular migration from Lebanon throughout the intended period.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data unequivocally shows a significant yearly increase in the number of both ships and individuals attempting to migrate from Lebanon’s shores. This trend is reflected in all the available data sets and sources.

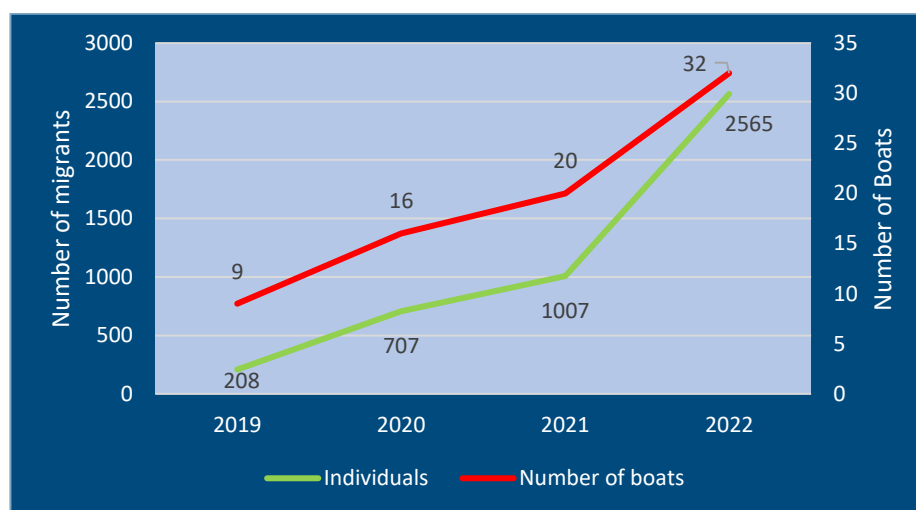


Fig 5. Number of Migrants vs. Number of Boats 2019-2022

As illustrated above, data collection shows an increase from 208 individuals reported in 2019 to more than 2,565 individuals in 2022. This amounts to a ten-fold increase. The numbers more than doubled between 2021 and 2022, and if the trend continues at the same rate, Lebanon is projected to witness at least 6,000 individuals attempting to migrate irregularly in 2023, which would constitute an increase of almost 30 times as many migrants as in 2019. UNHCR reported larger numbers than our research but with a similar increasing trend of incidents. Indeed, the numbers rose 200% between 2019 and 2020, to 70% between 2020 and 2021, and a staggering 160% from 2021 to 2022.⁵ In parallel, Frontex data of illegal⁶ border crossings on entry of the external borders of the Member States of the EU and Schengen Associated Countries have shown similar growth in irregular crossings from Lebanon. Indeed, Frontex data has reported an increase from 55 irregular migrants of Lebanese nationality entering Europe in 2020 to 91 in 2021 and an unprecedented 603 recorded individuals in 2022 – which presents a sixfold increase in the number of irregular Lebanese migrants entering Europe between 2021 and 2022. With the

⁵ UNHCR research methodology, according to direct inquiries by email, counts both failed or caught attempts and even those that reached their destination successfully, in addition to boats that left from foreign shores but were brought back to Lebanon. Their data lacks individual details or exact dates of crossings.

⁶ Frontex uses the term “illegal” to describe the migrants attempt to enter the EU without a proper Visa.

continuously worsening economic situation and a protracted political deadlock, there is no reason to believe these increased rates of attempts will slow down. On the contrary, projections indicate that the growth in attempts will continue unabated come spring 2023.

Although projections of an increase are clearer, there remains a large gap in the data when it comes to the composition of migrants by gender and age. Official reports on the attempts rarely mention the number of women, men, and children (and even then, only in a few cases). What little this project has unearthed shows that families make many attempts, despite all the dangers this entails. In one incident uncovered by the study, while on the sinking incidents in 2022, Reuters wrote that 40 children had lost their lives. Moreover, a number of incidents reported in the media outline first-hand accounts from survivors and smugglers who speak of a 'look the other way' security forces attitude concerning irregular migration, reinforced by what has been described as bribes and favors. Indeed, most public servants, especially among the Lebanese security forces, have seen their once-stable salaries fall below the international poverty threshold amid Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis. According to a Legal Agenda report, smugglers pay 10-15% of the money they collect from migrants to bribe security forces. This has affected the security forces' efficiency in controlling migration, as the number of 'caught' attempts continues to fall drastically. A local media report, citing 'official sources,' reported that in 2019, twelve boats attempted the crossing, and they were all caught. In 2020, there were seventeen attempts, with four succeeding in evading authorities. In 2021, 25 boats attempted the crossing, and 12 escaped.

Year	Success Rate
2019	0%
2020	23.5%
2021	48%

Fig 6. Migration Success Rates in Percentage

Additionally, several reports in the local press, such as an Orient Today article and a Legal Agenda report, speak of massive unreported waves of irregular immigration and countless daily attempts leaving Lebanese shores in the calm season. **Finally, in the best-case scenario for 2023, we are looking at a minimum of 7,500 reported irregular migrants leaving from the Lebanese shores in around 50-plus boats. This research projects at least 10,000 reported migrants leaving Lebanese shores on 75-plus boats in 2023.**

Monthly Departures

The data collected by this project shows that there are two 'peak' yearly periods for irregular migrants. Indeed, throughout the three years of studies, the period from April to the end of June (and sometimes into July) witnessed a significant increase in recorded attempts that coincided with the coming of spring and calmer seas. This is followed by a much busier second period between August and October that at times spilled into November if the seas were calm. This second period has a more significant recorded number of attempts.

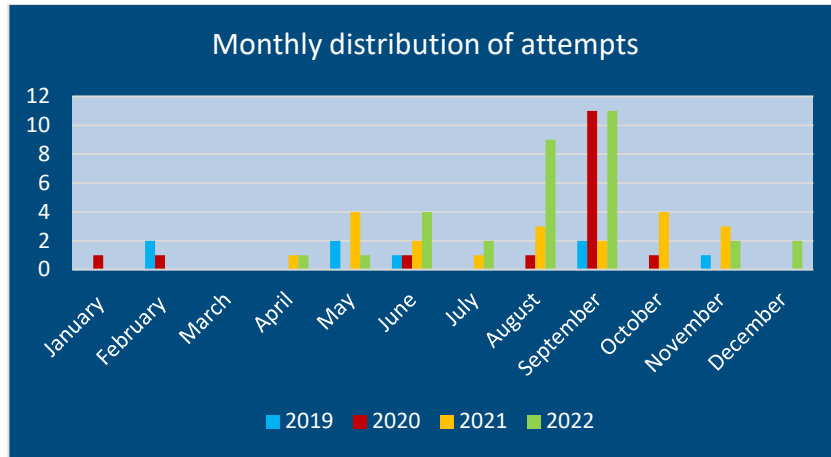


Fig 7. Monthly Distribution of Attempts 2019-2022

Indeed, in 2020 almost 70% of all recorded attempts occurred in the second period. In 2021, 60% of all attempts happened in the second period, while only 30% happened in the first period. The same trend continued into 2022, with 68% during the second period and 25% of attempts in the first period. This is corroborated by Frontex data that shows the number of illegal border crossings following the same overall trend as this study data. The data showed that in 2019, the second period, between August and November, witnessed 57% of all attempts, while in 2020, it reached 62%, and in 2021 the second period recorded 95% of all attempts. Finally, in 2022 58% of attempts happened during the second period. Meanwhile, the first peak witnessed only 30% in 2019, 16% in 2020, 3% in 2021, and 41% in 2022. **Overall, both data sets showed that irregular maritime migration from Lebanese shores is concentrated in two short periods, one centered around spring, between April and June. Meanwhile, the second busier period was during the summer and autumn, from August to November, when more than 60% of all attempts were recorded.**

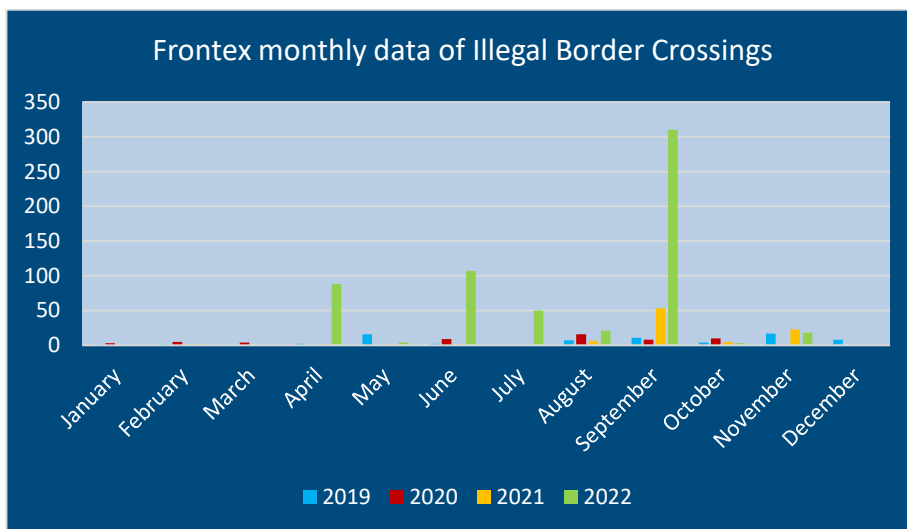


Fig 8. Frontex monthly data of illegal border crossings 2019-2021

Casualties

The number of casualties mounts with the increased number of migration attempts, significantly since the demand for migration constantly increases and smugglers tend to place more significant numbers on the boats.

Year	Casualties
2019	6
2020	28
2021	1
2022	157

Fig 9. Casualties 2019-2022

Search and rescue operations have increased steadily as well. Alarm Phone is an activist network that alerts and urges authorities to rescue distressed migrants in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas who are active on Twitter under the handle '@alarm_phone', as well as having a website. L'Orient Today reported that the group had seen a significant surge in calls received from boats that had set out from Lebanon and required saving due to malfunction or distress.

More Lebanese Migrants

The data has also shown a significant increase in the number of Lebanese migrants in absolute numbers and as a share of all migrants leaving the Lebanese shores. In previous years, most migrants were Syrians, with a limited number of Palestinians also attempting to make the journey. However, following Lebanon's economic crisis that began in late 2019, every year, the number and percentage of Lebanese migrants on boats heading out of Lebanon increased. According to UNHCR numbers last year, 62% of irregular migrants from Lebanon were Syrian, 11% Palestinian, and 28% Lebanese. The figure was on the rise compared to the previous years: in 2021, Lebanese migrants were 11% (186 out of 1,570), and in 2020 they were 18% (148 out of 794). This is also reflected in the data from the Frontex agency that showed the increase in the number of Lebanese irregular migrants entering Europe, which rose from 55 irregular migrants in 2019, to 70 in 2020, to 91 in 2021, and leaped to 603 recorded individuals in 2022. In other words, according to Frontex, irregular migration of Lebanese citizens grew by sixfold between 2021 and 2022.

The significant increase of irregular migrants from Lebanon and the rising percentage of Lebanese nationals fleeing the country is attributed to worsening social and economic conditions, which has been rocked by the worst financial crisis in its history. According to the UN, more than 45% of the population residing in Lebanon - including Syrian refugees, Palestinians, and seasonal workers of other nationalities, live below the poverty line. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the economic situation in Lebanon has continuously worsened in the last three years. Meanwhile, there is a growing willingness to leave the country that several surveys have highlighted. For example, a recent survey from ELKA Lebanon found that 61% of the representative sample wished to migrate.

Further Reach

This study uncovered a changing pattern in irregular migration out of Lebanon. Indeed, our data, corroborated with Frontex, has shown that since 2020 migrants have been attempting to reach farther shores, with increased frequency to Italy. The main reason is that on the 6th of October 2020, Cyprus and Lebanon signed a migration deal with the Lebanese Government, allowing Cyprus to return all migrants aboard boats attempting to reach Cyprus back to Lebanon. Frontex

data mirrors this finding by showing a sharp increase in Lebanese migrants arriving in Italy through the Central route starting in 2020 and even eclipsing the Eastern route (Greece and Cyprus) arrivals in 2021 and 2022.

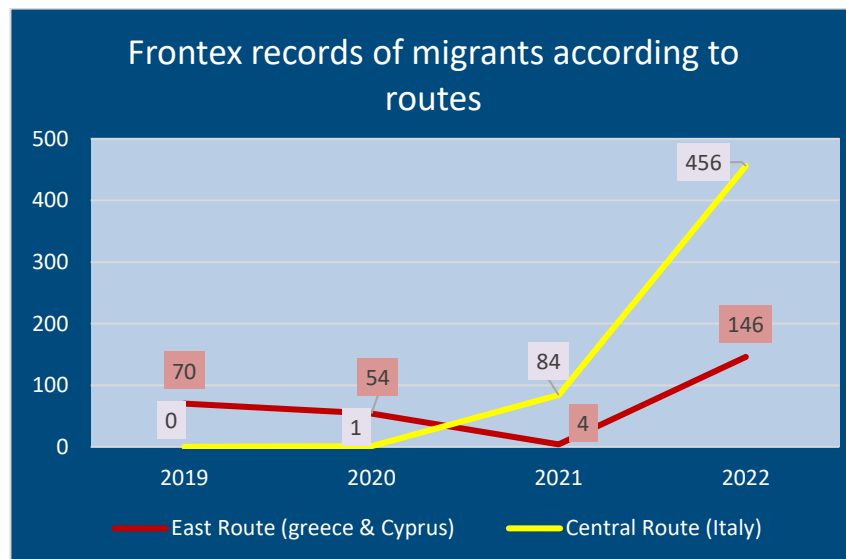


Fig 10. Frontex records of migrants according to routes 2019-2022

Moreover, several first-hand sources and interviews collected by Legal Agenda’s report show that most migrants or potential migrants are aware that Cyprus and Greece are off-limits. The Legal Agenda article reported that the migrants avoid Greece as a destination because “caught migrants are placed in camps that have few necessities for 14 days and are then sent back to Beirut. Meanwhile, Italy provided adequate camps and then released them, allowing them to leave for other European countries.” Meanwhile, most migrants interviewed reiterated that their ultimate destination was Germany. The previously mentioned activist network, Alarm Phone, reported that “they had received some eight distress calls from Lebanese boats between 2018 and 2021, all of which were headed to Cyprus, but the network has received around 14 calls in 2022 alone so far with most boats heading to Italy.”

Thus, this project can confidently project that a larger number of migrants from Lebanon will attempt to cross the 1.850 KM route to Italy with all the dangers it entails.

Wider Geographic Footprint

Most, if not all, migrant attempts start from the northern regions of Lebanon. Tripoli and Akkar’s shores are the least patrolled, closest to the poorest areas, and have a history of smuggling. Indeed, because of the long enmity between Lebanon and Israel, the Southern borders have always been dangerous. Additionally, the southern borders are constantly patrolled by UNIFIL forces patrolling the maritime borders to stop any friction between the two countries. Thus, the added scrutiny and dangers deter irregular migration attempts in the South. Meanwhile, to the north of Akkar, the Syrian shores are more controlled and patrolled, significantly closer to Tartous and the Russian base there. Thus, a clear concentration of irregular migration attempts (more than 90%) leaves from the northern Lebanese shores, especially between Madfoun in the Batroun District, to Abedeh, the Sheikh Zanad area, and the Arida northern border crossing between Lebanon and Syria.



Fig. 11-12. Source: Google Earth, 2023.

Northern Lebanon shores with the main spot of irregular migration departures. The Abdeh port (signalled in Fig. 11) is an important hub for migration activities and coordination. Nevertheless, this paper has observed a broader geographic distribution of attempts, since 2021, with some attempts reported from Mount Lebanon shores and even farther from South Lebanon in 2022. The following factors can explain the increasingly wider geographic distribution of attempts:

- i. Before 2020, most attempts targeted reaching Cyprus, and the shores of Tripoli and Akkar are the closest to Cyprus. Thus, it was more efficient and faster to start the attempts from the northern shores. However, with the previously discussed expansion of the irregular migration routes to Italy, the geographical advantages of starting from the north diminished.
- ii. The north and Tripoli, in particular, have always been one of the poorest regions of Lebanon, and it is very close to the Syrian territories. Thus, many of the attempts started there. However, with the worsening Lebanese crisis and increased national poverty, this has changed, and most regions are suffering, and the number of poverty is increasing everywhere.

The Cost of Attempts

According to the data collected by the project, the cost of clandestine migration attempts from Lebanon varied widely from 2,000 USD to 7,000 USD, and more in some cases, with an average of around 4,500 USD. There were several reports in the press, most notably by Legal Agenda and Al Hurra, and they spoke of similar numbers. Legal Agenda’s report spoke of a 5,000 USD average cost and gave an approximate breakdown of the other costs associated with a migration attempt. Indeed, the report stated that “a boat can cost around 35,000 USD to 50,000 USD for larger ones. A captain fee is 30,000 USD, and it costs 25,000 USD to bribe the security forces and the radar operators, and 15,000 USD for fuel and water.”

Alhurra’s report spoke of similar prices, averaging 5,000 USD for a trip to Italy with special prices for families of 4,000 USD per adult and 2,000 USD per child. Meanwhile, a trip to Cyprus would only cost 800 USD to 1,000 USD. Additionally, several media reports spoke of the difficulties in acquiring ships for the crossings and experienced captains. Legal Agenda’s report explained that most seasoned captains migrated to Europe. There is strong demand for any captain willing to

lead a boat to Europe, even with minimal experience. The compensation offered can reach 35,000 USD or 40,000 USD for a crossing.

Meanwhile, the report explained that no ships were available for sale in northern Lebanese ports. This has pushed for the exports of boats from the Syrian port city of Arwad. Finally, the costs associated with irregular migration attempts are relatively high. This echoes the general observation stating that those who attempt the crossings are not the neediest and the poorest in a community.⁷ On the contrary, those who still have some valuable possessions, such as a car, or furniture, and a close network of friends and family that can help them in gathering 10 or 20 thousand USD as a family to use on a possible crossing. Thus, irregular migration further compounds existing financial hardships as it pushes whole families and their close acquaintances into further poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE AVENUES FOR RESEARCH

Recently, mixed movements of refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants across the Mediterranean Sea have attracted greater public attention than similarly perilous, more numerous movements by land which have been politically instrumentalized. Despite significant efforts to reconcile interests under multiple cross-regional and bilateral fora, the focus and scope of initiatives to “manage mixed movements” remains unjustly reduced by states to a simplistic containment agenda at land and maritime borders, such as in the case presented through this study. We have compiled our recommendations below:

Long-term partnerships are needed. Combating irregular migration has been forcefully presented to the European public audience as the priority – and ultimately, the “migration crisis” at hand. Along these lines, for both sending and receiving states, indicators of whether or not migration policies are effective have been reduced to the number of times irregular sea crossings have been intercepted or halted. Such a narrow approach that remains disconnected and misinformed about the underlying causes of mixed movements, their different motives, and their different forms is bound to be ineffective in shifting migratory trends and their negative narratives. What remains missing and essential is partnerships between all countries along the routes to ensure a unified and coherent approach to these phenomena.

Addressing the root causes of primary and secondary movements is pivotal. Regardless of whether or not improved border management systems that can recognize the diverse reasons why people cross borders and move onward are put in place, a need for practical solutions will persist. As these effective solutions remain more complex and thus multi-faceted, they must not only address the root causes of primary and secondary migration movements, but also recognize the lack of safe and

⁷ “Migrants are often not from the poorest regions, as remoteness may make migration more difficult, and usually not from the poorest households, because the cost of migration may be too high”, Migration and Poverty, Arjan de Haan and Shahin Yaqub, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

reliable alternatives to dangerous travel for both refugees in many countries of first asylum and potential migrants en route to Europe.

Reducing smugglers' and traffickers' advantages remains essential. Gaps in protection and service delivery for refugees and migrants place smugglers and traffickers at a unique advantage to uphold, grow and maintain their businesses along multiple key routes. In the absence of obvious safe alternatives or accessible legal routes, smugglers and traffickers can still sell the idea of a better life to people who have no other options. In this context, and in the case of irregular movements from Lebanon more specifically, European countries have a crucial responsibility to ensure they assist countries along the routes to manage more effectively their migration and asylum systems.

Countries of origin must also take on some of the responsibility. Although often overlooked, the issue of responsibility for the countries of origin of migrants is an essential part of the equation. Indeed, citizens who are forced to migrate because of persecution, human rights violations, wars, and violence, or who leave home due to the absence of socioeconomic stability, remains pivotal to discussions on reducing or preventing life-threatening and irregular migration attempts. In Lebanon case, it presents an important intersectional example. The responsibility and initiative to address root causes in the case of Lebanon must be prioritized by Lebanon's Government alongside countries of destination.

ACRONYMS

COVID-19 - Coronavirus Disease 2019
EU - European Union
Fig - Figure
FRONTEX - European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
ILO - International Labour Organization
IOM - International Organization for Migration
IMF - International Monetary Fund
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
LAF - Lebanese Armed Forces
LBP - Lebanese Pound
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
PhD - Doctor of Philosophy
POV - Point of view
UN - United Nations
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFIL - United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
US - United States
USD - United States Dollar
WB - World Bank
WHO - World Health Organization

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