



Upinion - 11.11.11- PAX - Centre Libanais des Droits Humains - Access Center for Human Rights

Syrian Refugees' perspectives on current developments around a EU-Lebanon migration "deal"

May 2024

1. Introduction

This briefing paper illustrates the key findings from an online conversation held with **331** Syrian refugees in Lebanon through Upinion’s digital engagement platform.¹ The purpose of this conversation was to gauge Syrian perspectives on the current developments around a possible EU-Lebanon migration “deal”, the current security and safety situation for Syrian individuals in Lebanon, knowledge and fears of deportation, and future migration plans. The data collection took place from the 26th of April until the 3rd of May 2024.

322 out of 331 respondents finished the entire conversation, of which all of them filled in their demographic information, allowing for disaggregation of data. Data of all 331 respondents are reflected in this document as well as comparisons with data from Upinion’s previous conversations with its online community in Lebanon.

Data findings confirm the main analytical points and warnings outlined in a separate policy brief (April 2024) by 11.11.11, Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR), Centre Libanais des Droits Humains (CLDH), PAX and Upinion.² In this policy brief, the five organisations warned that providing financial support to Lebanese security agencies, under the guise of “migration management” and the stated aim to curb migration movements to Europe, could actually result in an increased number of Syrians who try to reach Europe’s shores, more refugees drowning in the Mediterranean Sea and an intensification of the activities of smuggling networks. Rather than strengthening key drivers of irregular migration (as Lebanese security agencies are directly responsible for one of the main drivers of irregular migration movements of Syrians towards Europe, the enhanced risk of forced deportations), the organisations stated, the EU and EU member states should conduct an enhanced human rights due diligence assessment of any funding to Lebanese security actors and review funding practices accordingly.

The five organisations also previously stated that highlighting the many risks and perils of an EU-Lebanon migration “deal” does not mean that any agreement between the EU and Lebanon is necessarily a bad development. On the contrary, given the rapidly deteriorating human rights and protection in Lebanon, a deal between the EU and Lebanon is long overdue. Such EU-Lebanon cooperation should however be grounded in a “durable solutions” and international law framework. As such, 11.11.11, ACHR, CLDH, PAX and Upinion called upon the EU and EU member states to initiate negotiations with the Government of Lebanon to adopt a joint “EU-Lebanon

¹ Upinion has developed an online tool that allows it to securely stay in touch with people in crisis- and displacement-affected countries. This in-house developed platform makes it possible to have real-time conversations and information exchange with communities in the same way they connect with their friends and families, using messaging apps like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, which are also widely used in Lebanon.

² See 11.11.11, ACHR, CLDH, PAX and Upinion (April 2024), “The Risks and Perils of an EU-Lebanon Migration Deal”, <https://cdn.uc.assets.prezly.com/91aed111-790a-4caf-9a80-09a03238d188/-/inline/no/EU-Libanon%20migratiedeal%20paper.pdf>

Durable Solutions Statement” aimed at protecting Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These talks should centre on a moratorium on summary deportations and an increase in the number of temporary legal residencies and work permits for Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon. In return, the EU should commit to providing additional funding to support vulnerable Lebanese host communities, resettling additional numbers of Syrian refugees to Europe, and holding discussions on enhancing Lebanon’s export potential and providing other economic incentives and benefits. These proposals are fully in line with the needs and priorities of Syrian refugees themselves, as can be seen in the data below.

1.1. Demographic information

It is essential to interpret the results while considering the sample characteristics unique to this conversation.

74% (n=326) indicated to be male and **26%** reported to be female, leaving a male: female ratio of 1: 0.36. This means there is an overrepresentation of Syrian men in the sample.

The majority of the respondents (**87%**, n=328) fell within the age range of 26 to 55, with smaller groups of people aged 18-25 (**8%**) and 56 and older (**5%**). This indicates a lower representation of the youth and elderly.

The majority of respondents live in Mount Lebanon (**22%**, n=331), Beirut (**21%**), Bekaa (**16%**), and North Lebanon (**15%**). A similar percentage of **5-9%** live in Akkar, South Lebanon, and Baalbek-Hermel. **2%** of the sample resides in Nabatieh. These results suggest a slight bias toward Syrian refugees in Mount Lebanon and Beirut.

Due to the sample size and distribution of participants in the conversations, it is important to emphasise that this research constitutes a qualitative inquiry that provides valuable insights into emerging trends. However, this report does not claim to establish statistical representativeness for the observed figures.

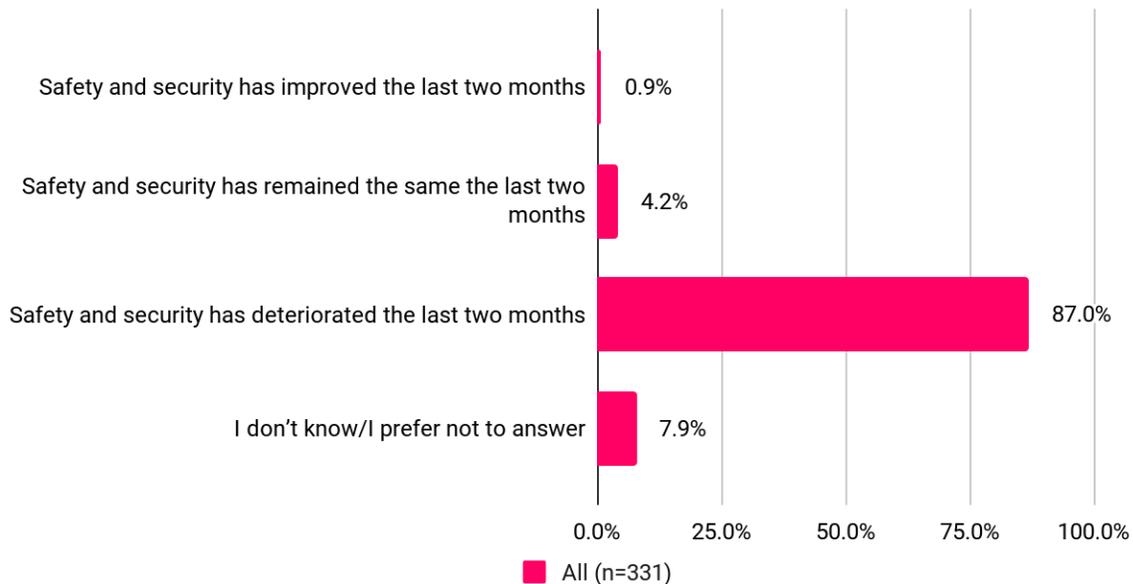
2. Data Findings

2.1. Security and safety situation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree with the following statement: *“In the past two months, the security and safety situation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon has strongly deteriorated”*.

The majority of **87%** (n=331) agreed with the statement. Among the remaining **13%**, most individuals stated they did not know or preferred not to answer the question (**8%**) or that the security and safety situation remained unchanged (**5%**). See the bar chart below.

Figure 1. The safety and security situation the last two months - all respondents (n=331)



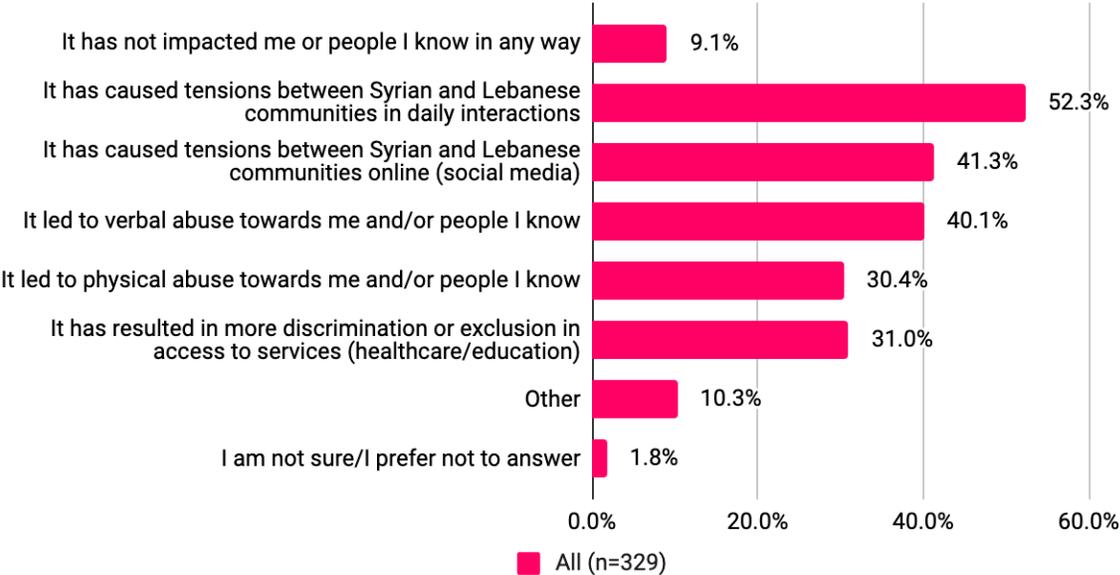
2.2. Hate speech against Syrian refugees in the media

To further depict the current situation, Syrian individuals were asked to what extent the hate speech in the Lebanese media - often portraying Syrians as harmful to Lebanon (i.e. the recent “undo the damage” campaign)³ - has affected them or the people they know. This was asked using a predefined list of multiple answer options.

³See https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/04/22/syria-lebanon-fear-xenophobia-violence?utm_source=The+New+Humanitarian&utm_campaign=d1bd328605-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_4_22&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d842d98289-d1bd328605-75609405

More than half of the respondents (**52%**, n=329) mentioned it has caused tension between Syrian and Lebanese communities in daily interactions in real life. Many respondents also indicated that these tensions exist online (**41%**), and/or that they take the form of verbal abuse (**40%**) or physical abuse (**30%**). Almost one-third also reported it has resulted in more discrimination or exclusion in access to services. See the bar chart below.

Figure 2. "How has this type of information affected you or people you know?" - multiple answers - all respondents (n=329)

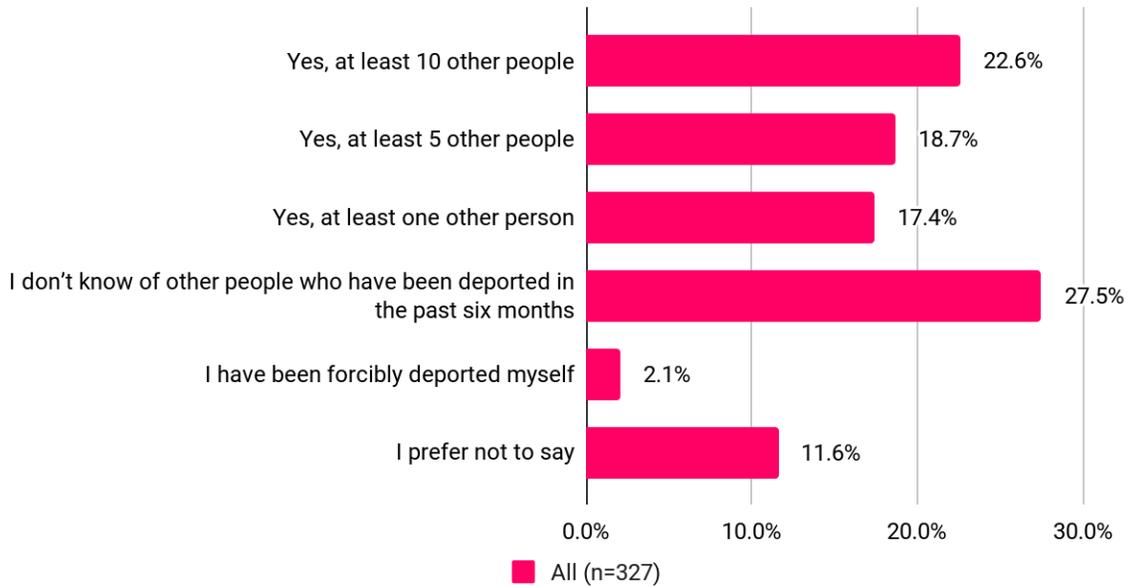


2.3. Increased risk of deportation

Regarding the issue of deportation, respondents were questioned about whether they knew of people who had been forcibly deported to Syria in the past six months. The majority of **59%** (n=327) indicated they knew of people who had been deported. This included **23%** who at least know 10 people, **19%** who at least know of 5 people, and **17%** who at least know of one other person. See the bar chart below.

7 individuals reported they had been deported themselves. Upinion is planning to ask these respondents follow-up questions to monitor their situation.

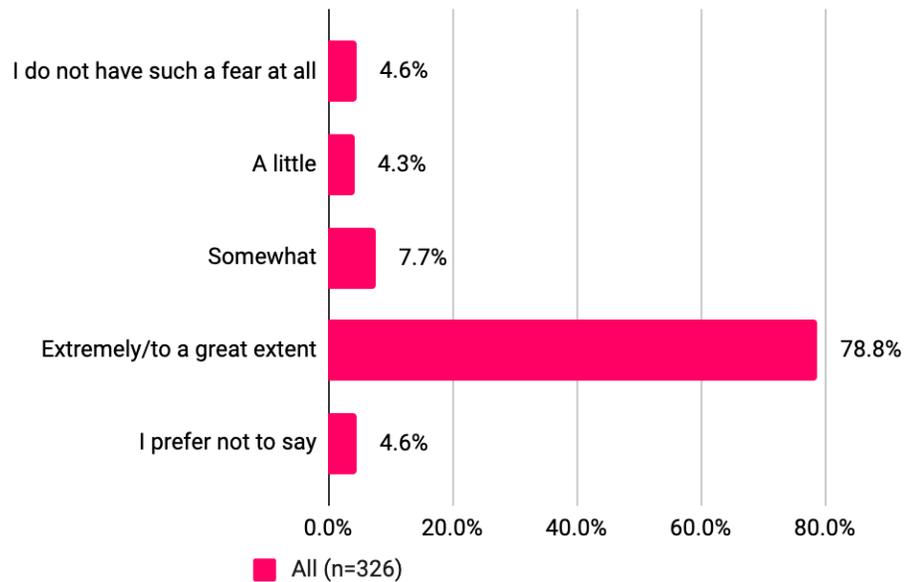
Figure 3. "Do you know of Syrian individuals in Lebanon who have been forcibly deported to Syria in the past six months?" - all respondents (n=327)



As a monitoring question, individuals were asked again to what extent they fear being deported to Syria within the upcoming three months. The large majority of **79%** (n=326) mentioned they have an extreme fear of being deported. This is a considerable increase when compared to a conversation with Syrian individuals in June-July 2023, when **55%** (n=307) reported extreme fear of deportation within the next three months.

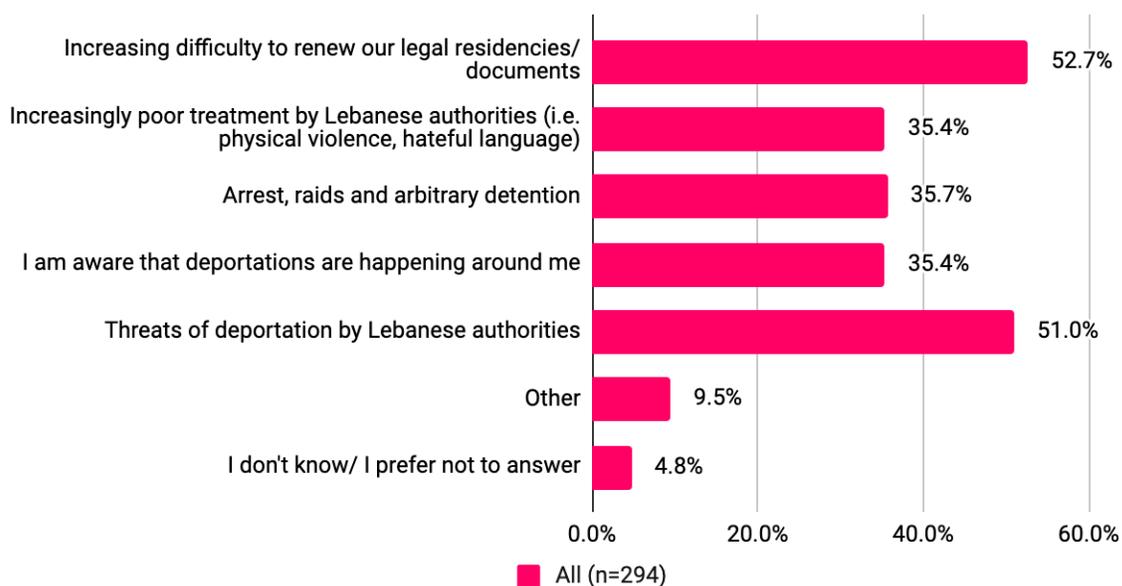
Only **5%** mentioned not having such a fear at all. See the bar chart below.

Figure 4. "To what extent do you fear being deported and/or forced to return to Syria within the next three months?" - all respondents (n=326)



When asked to provide the main reasons for their fears, whether a little, somewhat, or to a great extent, respondents gave varying answers. However, in line with previous findings in June-July 2023, the majority of respondents indicated both the increasing difficulties in renewing legal documentation (**53%**, n=294) as well as threats of deportation by Lebanese authorities (**51%**) to be key factors in driving their fears. Other reasons were also considerably mentioned. See the bar chart below.

Figure 5. "What are some of the main reasons that make you fear being deported or forced to return to Syria?" - multiple answers - all respondents (n=294)



2.4. Future migration plans

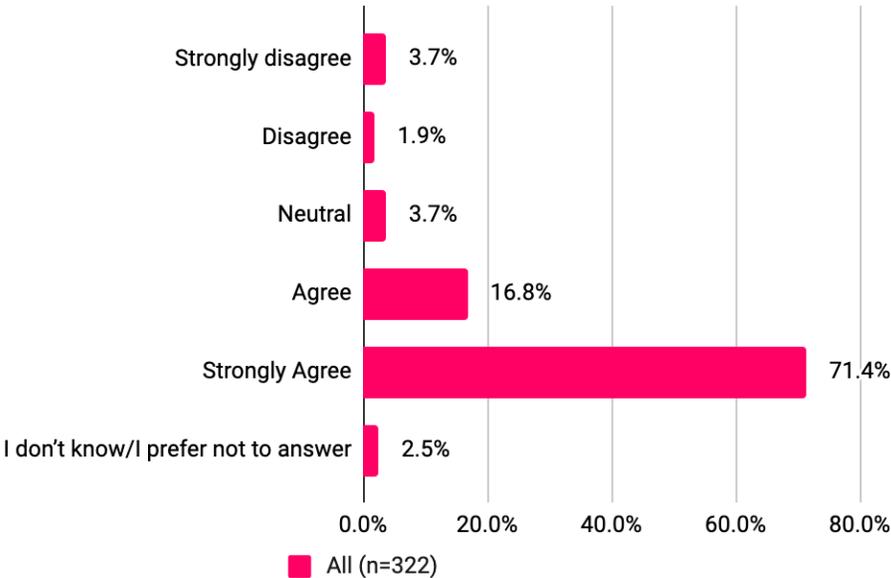
2.4.1. Intention to leave Lebanon

To gauge the intention to leave Lebanon due to the current context around safety, security, and cases of deportation, respondents were asked to what extent they agree with the following statement:

“The recent deterioration of the security situation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and the increase in forced deportations, has increased my intention to leave Lebanon for a European country”

Almost all respondents (**88%**, n=322) reported they agreed, with the large majority of **71%** mentioning they strongly agreed with the statement on fueled intentions to leave Lebanon for a European country. Only **6%** did not agree. See the bar chart below.

Figure 6. “To what extent do you agree with the statement?” - all respondents (n=322)

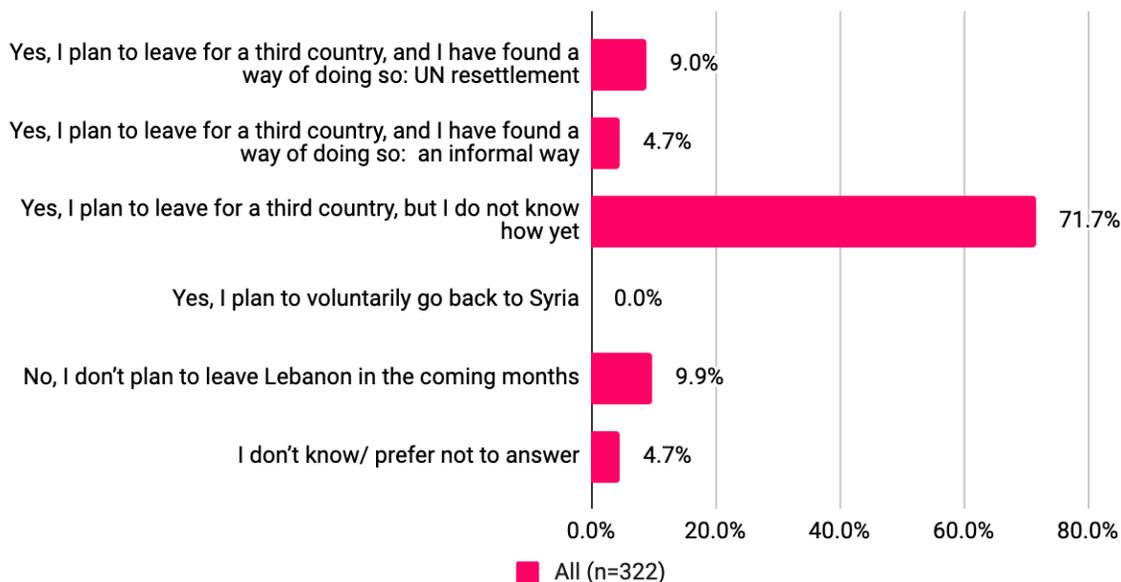


2.4.2. Migration plans for the next six months

All respondents were additionally asked to specify their concrete migration plans for the next six months, if they wanted to. Consistent with previous conversations, the large majority (**71%**, n=322) indicated they plan to leave Lebanon, but they do not know how yet. Although also marginally reported in previous Upinion conversations, this time **0 out of 316** respondents mentioned they plan to voluntarily go back to Syria.

Small groups of respondents indicated they will leave Lebanon through UN resettlement (**9%**) or they plan to stay in Lebanon for the next six months (**10%**). An additional **5%** mentioned they already made plans to move irregularly (i.e. by paying a smuggler) to a third country. See the bar chart below.

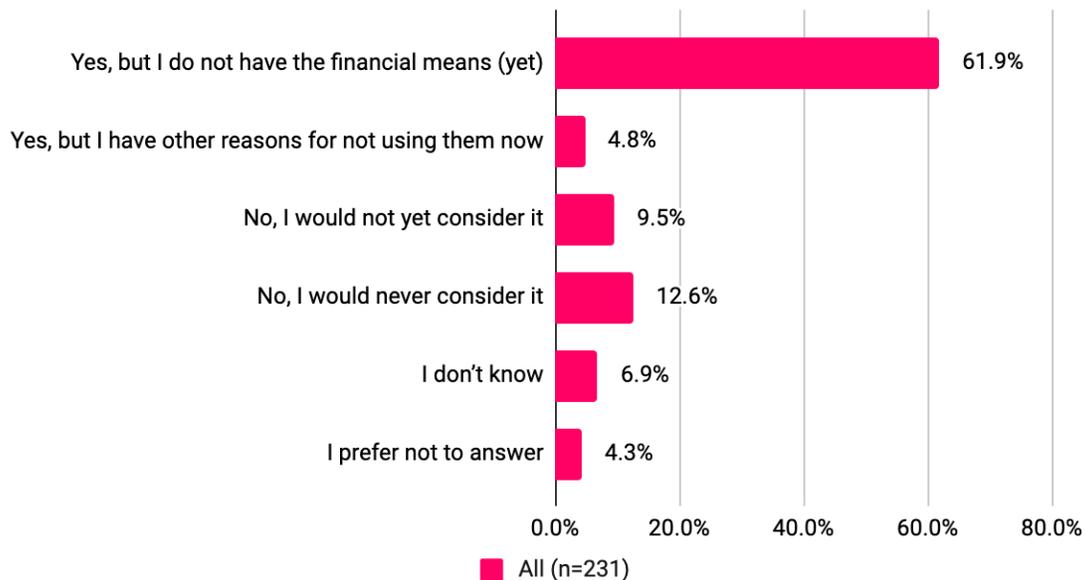
Figure 7. "Do you have concrete plans to leave Lebanon in the next six months?" - all respondents (n=322)



Those who reported they would like to leave Lebanon in the next six months, but they do not know how, were followed-up with a question on whether they would consider using informal or irregular pathways.⁴ **67%** (n=231) reported 'Yes', with almost all respondents (**62%**) indicating they consider it but they do not have the financial means (yet) to make the move. Only **13%** mentioned they would never consider it. See the bar chart below.

⁴ It was mentioned that informal or irregular pathways refer to moving to a third country without being resettled by the UN, or without having a visa or legal documentation.

Figure 8. "Given the current context and developments in Lebanon, would you consider using informal/irregular pathways within the next six months to leave the country?" - all respondents (n=231)

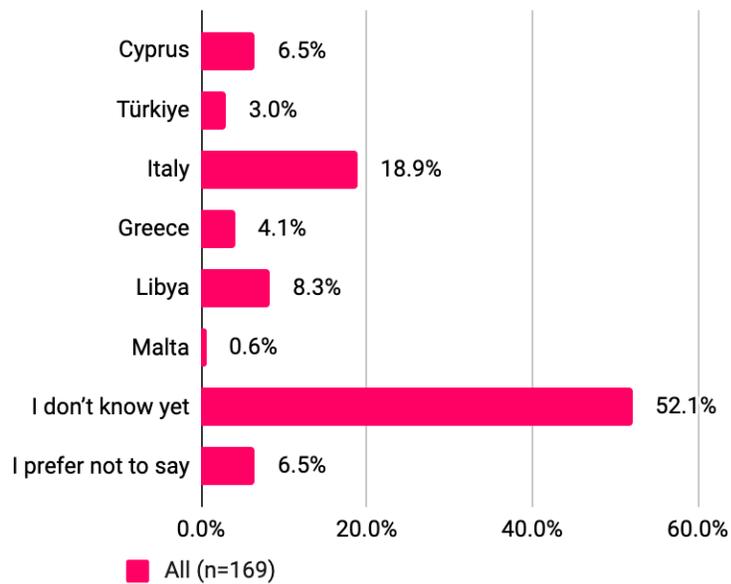


When all of those who reported they either already had plans or were considering using informal or irregular pathways to leave Lebanon within the next six months were asked to specify their migration route/destination, if they wanted to, most people reported they do not know yet (**52%**, n=169). While this may highlight the uncertainty in which route to take, this can also reflect the hesitancy to disclose this type of information.

Following this, most respondents reported Italy (**19%**), Libya (**8%**)⁵, or Cyprus (**7%**). See the bar chart below.

⁵ Libya has emerged as a transit country (also) for migrants coming from Lebanon and Syria, who often aim to travel to Europe afterward. See: <https://arij.net/investigations/syrian-immigrants-en/>

Figure 9. "Which migration route/destination are you (thinking of) taking?" - all respondents (n=169)



2.5. Priorities regarding an EU-Lebanon migration “deal”

Lastly, all respondents were asked to indicate their priorities for the content of a potential EU-Lebanon deal. This was done using a multiple-choice format, with answer options focused on durable solutions.

Out of the answers listed, the large majority (**83%**, n=322) reported that the deal should support more Syrian refugees in leaving Lebanon for another country (resettlement). This was followed by ensuring protection for Syrian refugees from being forcibly deported (**48%**) and the need for making it possible to obtain legal residency in Lebanon (**39%**), highlighting the need for protection in the current situation.

Additionally, economic priorities such as making it easier for Syrian individuals to obtain a work permit (**30%**) or providing Syrian refugees with more economic opportunities (**26%**) were also mentioned by considerable groups. See the bar chart below.

Figure 10. "If Lebanon and the EU would create a deal related to your current situation, what would you like to see in the deal?" - multiple answers - all respondents (n=322)

