

background

Most Switch Perspective participants have a link to Lebanon. Some were born and brought up in the country; others moved or migrated there as adults. Some are Lebanese, others come from Lebanon's Syrian and Palestinian communities. Some are from other parts of the world but came to work in the country.

Lebanon is a small country on the eastern Mediterranean shores, with around four and a half million citizens and almost two million refugees and migrant workers from a number of different countries. This makes the nation home to more refugees per capita than any other country in the world.

Lebanon's history of migration stretches far back in time. People from across the region, including today's Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, migrated both abroad and within the area. In history, the seafaring Phoenicians traded and travelled across the Mediterranean. During the Ottoman Empire, several minorities came to live in the region. In turn, periods of conflict and economic hardship in the 1800s led many others to seek safety in Europe, West Africa, the Americas and elsewhere. Many also left as a result of famine in the region during World War I. The same period saw the arrival in Lebanon of Armenians escaping the genocide against them. A few decades later, and increasingly following the 1948 creation of Israel, Palestinians displaced

from their homes arrived. Today, many Palestinians continue to live in what are still called refugee camps, socially excluded neighbourhoods in Lebanon's cities.

In more recent years, the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1990s forced large groups of people to leave and seek refuge elsewhere. In the mid and late mid-1900s, Syrian workers – who for long had been part of the Lebanese workforce – started to arrive in Lebanon in larger numbers. They have since been joined by people from countries like Sri Lanka, Egypt, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Sudan and Bangladesh, who have also come to work in the country. As a result of the war in Syria starting in 2011, many Syrian families crossed the border to seek shelter in Lebanon, and still remain in the country.

Much reporting has been done and continues to be done on these issues. Beirut is a long-standing hub for journalists and the base for many newsrooms, researchers and foreign correspondents. A large number of local and international NGOs have their offices in Lebanon, including many that work on displacement and migration. This is why the country provides an important and interesting place to reflect on stories of migration, which is what this publication sets out to do.

