



**FACES OF  
MIGRATION**

**COOPERATION OF DIACONIA OF THE ECCB WITH  
TAHADDI COMMUNITY CENTER IN LEBANON**  
**Good Practice Example**



# FACES OF MIGRATION

**Author: Erik Siegl**

Head of international projects in Centre of Relief and Development of Diaconia of the ECCB

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## COOPERATION OF DIACONIA OF THE ECCB WITH TAHADDI COMMUNITY CENTER IN LEBANON

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Regardless of the developments in the battlefields, the balance of the eighth year of the Syrian crisis does not indicate that the war and the associated hardships of the civilian population would be nearing the end or at least retreating. UNHCR estimates that up to a million Syrians were forced to leave their homes in 2018, most of them for the second or subsequent time. So far, this has been the largest number of refugees in one year for the entire war. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), about 20,000 people died as a result of the fights last year. In the province of Idlib alone, the escalation of fighting has triggered a new wave of 400,000 internally displaced persons and refugees since April.

The situation in neighbouring countries that host around 5.6 million Syrian refugees is also becoming more tense. In Lebanon, a country of an area comparable with the region of South Bohemia, the number of refugees is currently estimated at up to 1.5 million, tallying with a quarter of its total population.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Lebanon is a country that was in the past burdened with local civil war, several refugee waves and currently undergoes regional political conflicts. The economies of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are at best stagnating, at worst they are facing a recession. Unemployment, inflation and hence prices of basic food and services are rising. As public surveys show, the mood of the host society deteriorates, regardless of the direct individual experience with Syrian refugees, who are increasingly perceived as a financial burden, competition in the labour market and in small business. Despite its previous high level of support and solidarity, Turkey stopped registration of new arrivals in some of its provinces last year. Similarly, Lebanon took the same measure nationwide in 2015 already. Human rights organizations have been reporting on increasing numbers of forced deportations and extraditions of refugees back to Syria.

At the same time, the indebtedness of Syrian families has been increasing, along with the number of those who are resolving their difficult situation by further borrowing, by employing of children for minimum wages at the expense of their primary education or by early marriages of young girls. In Lebanon, for instance, early marriages concern up to 29 percent of girls aged 15-19, which is estimated to be up to four times more than before the war. It is unnecessary to explain why these phenomena (in the expert terminology referred to as negative coping strategies) pose many risks to the future of individuals and society as a whole.

Most refugees outside Syria still wish to return to their homeland, but only a few percent of them consider this feasible in the near future and are planning the homecoming now. As the end of the Syrian conflict and the associated sustainable and safe return to Syria are still not in sight, the international aid is playing an increasingly important role, since the local resources have become depleted. The aid naturally consists of the crucial material and food assistance allowing numerous families to survive physically. Equally important, however, is the long-term investment in psychosocial assistance, education and personal development of refugees, which jointly create the preconditions for their further success in life and the ability to live independently, whether back home in Syria or elsewhere. Yet this sort of support goes hand in hand with the material assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> By 2015, UNHCR officially registered 949,000 refugees; however, since then had to suspend registrations at the request of the local government.



**Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren** has long been helping Syrian refugees and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon through its Center of Relief and Development. With the support of the humanitarian program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Center has been providing assistance through local community centers since 2012 and 2017. These partners are contributing significantly to stabilization of the situation of the Syrian refugees and host communities in different ways right on site. Their work based on knowledge of local conditions and a partially voluntary “grassroot” initiative of the locals is the best prerequisite for the aid. The community centers are capable of obtaining and mobilizing support from the locals, as well as of transferring support from abroad to places where it often does not end through large aid programs, and with relatively low transaction costs.

Diaconia is of the opinion that this condition is well fulfilled by the Tahaddi Community Center in southern Beirut, which it has worked closely with for the past three years. The center was established in the 1990s in one of the poor neighbourhoods of the city (Hay el Gharbeh), inhabited by Palestinian refugees and by the Lebanese displaced in times of the civil war. This spontaneously built area lacks common infrastructure and temporarily built dwellings with unsuitable conditions largely predominate in here. During more than a quarter of a century of its operation, Tahaddi has deeply rooted in this local community. Its main mission is to help in an inclusive way and without distinction those who are the most vulnerable.



From the point of view of both the Syrian refugees and internally migrating Lebanese people, the Community Center provides the most precious thing - at least a minimum degree of certainty in their lives. Tahaddi is a certain safety net that brings their domicile stability at all times, albeit to a limited extent, with regard to its resources. Tahaddi's activities prevent further migration and its related risks, whether inside or outside Lebanon, as well as many negative and due to the Syrian war widespread phenomena such as child labour, marriages of underage girls, lack or nonexistence of education, illiteracy and crime.

How is Tahaddi managing to do so? It provides psychosocial counselling, runs a small primary healthcare clinic and a primary school on site (as the additional transport costs are a common obstacle to school attendance). Thanks to the support from the Czech Republic, the center also redistributes the aid in the form of monthly food vouchers and through the so-called social fund finances the purchase of cheap washing machines, refrigerators, gas cookers, mattresses or stoves, hence the essentials that the poorest families cannot afford. The social fund also covers certain administration fees, such as birth certificates or residence permits, which the center's social workers help to deal with. It also pays for the purchase of school uniforms and elementary school supplies, without which children would not be admitted to public schools.

It is through this wide range of services that Tahaddi is able to better capture existing or imminent burdensome phenomena in individual families, and to positively influence behaviour and choices through targeted material support. The regular \$ 80 monthly food purchase voucher can for instance significantly improve the budget of many families (often earning just \$ 200 a month) and to act as an important factor in the prevention of child labour and in their enrolment in school. Another important thing is the ability to target this particular assistance well and on time. Through a small clinic and its nurses' counselling services, Tahaddi is for instance able to systematically monitor and evaluate the nutritional status of newborns and children and to distribute accordingly infant milk and food vouchers to those most needy ones (it also teaches mothers proper breastfeeding techniques, as this is the preferred choice in the nutrition of newborns).

Tahaddi Center also organises courses enhancing working skills and runs directly in form of a social enterprise a sewing and tailoring workshop for women. Paradoxically, some of these women escaping from war for the first time in their lives earn modest income and thus get a stronger position within the family's decision-making. In addition to that, working and acquiring of new skills gives people the feeling of self-confidence and dignity, both much tested in their difficult situation.

The Community Center also organizes extracurricular leisure activities. In the macro-perspective, the range of these activities designed for children and young people is nevertheless completely disproportionate to the extent of the overall demand and interest; according to statistics, adolescents of up to 18 years of age form 51% of the total Syrian population in neighbouring countries. Despite that, every sort of leisure activities and activation brings them unquantifiable joy, skills and self-satisfaction.

The activities of community centers are naturally limited by their local reach and modest funds. They can therefore hardly replace the material and medical assistance distributed by UN agencies or, in some cases, directly provided by the host country. However, thanks to their connection with the local community, their flexibility and last but not least their much cheaper operation, they are an indispensable part of the overall support to the Syrian refugees and socially vulnerable residents of the host community. They can help quickly, flexibly and even to those who, for various reasons, have fallen through the sieve of UN agencies and large organizations.



**Diakonie**   
Českokobratrské církve evangelické

**Diaconia ECCB**  
**Center of Relief and Development**  
**Belgická 374/22, 120 00, Prague 2 – Czech Republic**

**[www.diakoniespolu.cz/en/](http://www.diakoniespolu.cz/en/)**



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