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## **CITIZENS IN THE DARK**

“The Persistent Social and Human Rights Impact of Lebanon's 1925 Nationality Act”

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## **Introduction**

“We are limited citizens, living in the dark, all because of a law which renders our identity to nothing” (Lebanese-Sudanese Father, N.H.).

Lebanon, often seen as an emblem of modernity in the Middle East, is yet shackled by a deeply embedded legal system that marginalizes its women. Despite the important roles that women play in society, Lebanon's 1925 Nationality Law No. 15 still denies Lebanese women the opportunity to confer nationality on their children or foreign husbands. This restriction, based on patriarchal and sectarian systems, has disastrous effects for thousands of families, rendering many stateless and depriving them of basic human rights such as healthcare, education, and legal recognition. This law's long-lasting influence reflects a larger struggle for gender equality and human rights in Lebanon, demonstrating how outdated legal frameworks may lead to societal exclusion and marginalization. This thesis will examine the social and legal implications of Lebanon's Nationality Law No. 15, a discriminatory article of law that denies Lebanese women the ability to pass on their nationality to their children and foreign spouses. The research question that guides this study is: “What are the Persistent Social and Human Rights Impact of Lebanon's 1925 Nationality Act on children and families?” The inquiry focuses on how this law, based on patriarchal and sectarian norms, perpetuates statelessness, economic marginalization, and violations of fundamental human rights for families impacted by this policy. To answer this research question, a combination of primary and secondary research approaches were used. In-depth interviews with individuals directly impacted by Lebanon's nationality law were used for primary research purposes. These firsthand accounts offer critical insights into the lived experiences of statelessness, discrimination, and exclusion in Lebanon. The interviewees come from diverse origins but have a common struggle: being denied Lebanese nationality owing to legal restrictions on women's rights. The thesis uses qualitative analysis of these interviews to portray the emotional and psychological toll on families, the economic obstacles they experience, and the broader societal implications of statelessness. The secondary research is based on a thorough review of the available literature, legal papers, policy briefs, and publications from international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the United Nations. This secondary study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the law's historical and political context, as well

as its position within international human rights frameworks. This study places Lebanon's nationality law into the worldwide discourse on gender equality and human rights by combining current legal analysis and advocacy initiatives. The nationality law has the greatest impact on children born to a Lebanese mother and a non-Lebanese father. These children are frequently left stateless, depriving them of the fundamental rights and privileges that Lebanese citizens enjoy. Without nationality, stateless people suffer substantial obstacles to public education, healthcare, and formal employment. Their legal status exposes them to social exclusion and economic marginalization, frequently locking them in cycles of poverty. The situation is especially serious for families with fathers from conflict-ridden countries like Palestine or Syria, who are already vulnerable owing to displacement and refugee status. For these families, Lebanon's nationality law exacerbates their vulnerable situation by denying them a path to legal status and security. The objective of this thesis is to critically examine these issues and conduct a thorough analysis into how Lebanon's nationality law infringes essential human rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and freedom of movement. This thesis highlights Lebanon's failure to meet broader international human rights obligations. Denial of nationality, particularly to children, not only violates the rights of Lebanese women, but also contributes to a larger human rights dilemma. Individuals who are stateless are left in legal limbo, unable to access the very systems created to safeguard them. Furthermore, the issue of statelessness in Lebanon is underreported and poorly understood, due in part to the lack of a national census since 1932. The lack of accurate data makes it difficult to identify the exact scope of the situation, but estimates suggest that thousands of people in Lebanon live without registered nationality. One of the primary significant problems in tackling statelessness in Lebanon is the country's strongly entrenched sectarian political structure, which has long resisted attempts at reform. Lebanon's political system is built on a consociational democracy, in which power is divided among numerous religious groups, each seeking to maintain its share of influence. The fear that providing nationality to the children of Lebanese women and foreign fathers—many of whom are Sunni Muslims—would disrupt the country's delicate sectarian balance has made reform especially difficult. This thesis will investigate the historical origins of this sectarian political structure and how it has influenced Lebanon's nationality policy over time. This study attempts to provide a clearer picture of why the Lebanese government has been

reluctant to alter the nationality law, despite rising demand from civil society and international organizations. Chapter I dives into the personal experiences of those affected by Lebanon's nationality law. Through interviews with afflicted families, the chapter explores the hardships of those born stateless since their mothers are unable to provide nationality. It examines issues such as statelessness, prejudice, economic marginalization, and educational difficulties, which all contribute to a cycle of exclusion for these families. Key issues such as lack of access to healthcare, documentation, and employment are discussed, demonstrating the far-reaching repercussions of statelessness. The chapter finishes with an examination of how corruption exacerbates these issues, as well as the psychological impact of statelessness on impacted individuals. Chapter II presents a historical perspective on the political and sectarian dynamics that generated Lebanon's current nationality regulations. Beginning with World War I, the chapter examines the evolution of Lebanon's political system under the French mandate, culminating in the 1925 Nationality Law. It examines how historical events like the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and regional conflicts formed Lebanon's demographic and sectarian issues, which still impact the country's nationality policy today. This chapter situates the nationality legislation within Lebanon's complex political history, providing insight into why improvements have repeatedly been stalled. Chapter III focuses on a legal analysis of Lebanon's citizenship and nationality rights. It follows the development of these principles from the Ottoman Empire to the present day, with a focus on the 1925 Nationality Law and the application of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) as opposed to *jus soli* (right of soil). The chapter investigates how these frameworks reflect a patriarchal and sectarian reliance on paternal lineage, preventing women from fully participating in the legal conferral of citizenship. It also discusses Lebanon's obligations under international human rights frameworks such as CEDAW and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), emphasizing the inconsistency between its legal commitments and current circumstances. Chapter IV looks at the larger social, legal, and economic implications of Lebanon's nationality law. It gives a detailed examination of how statelessness affects access to essential rights such as education, healthcare, and work, using examples from interviews and secondary data. The chapter also analyzes Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis, the 2019 revolution, and the 2020 Beirut port explosion, examining how these events have further marginalized stateless people. The

chapter finishes by comparing Lebanon's nationality law to similar laws in other nations, providing potential lessons learnt and policy proposals for improvement. Despite several attempts at legislative reform, Lebanon's nationality legislation has remained unchanged. Women's rights organizations and human rights activists have long advocated for revision, claiming that the law violates international human rights standards, notably those pertaining to gender equality. These campaigns have included petitioning the Lebanese government, working with international human rights organizations, and raising public awareness about the implications of the nationality law. However, these initiatives have thus far been ineffective in overcoming the political barriers to transformation. Finally, the purpose of this research is to highlight Lebanon's urgent need for legal reform, particularly regarding the 1925 Nationality Act. By denying women the right to pass on their nationality to their children, this rule perpetuates a system of discrimination and exclusion that keeps countless families out of legal recognition. This thesis argues that revising Lebanon's nationality law is not just a legal requirement, but also a critical human rights imperative. The nationality law has long-term socioeconomic and human rights consequences, harming the rights and dignity of thousands of stateless and marginalized individuals. This study intends to add to Lebanon's ongoing discourse on nationality rights by combining primary research, which captures the lived realities of individuals directly affected, with thorough legal analysis and a review of international frameworks. It offers a thorough assessment of the legal, social, and political issues that must be addressed in order to achieve genuine transformation. By bringing these issues to light, this thesis hopes to argue for the recognition and protection of all Lebanese citizens' rights, guaranteeing that no one is a "citizen in the dark."

## **Literature Review**

Concerning the literature available on this subject, a recent policy brief was written by the National Commission for Lebanese Women in 2021, this policy brief shares key findings from a recent study examining women's citizenship rights, the Lebanese Nationality Law 15 of 1925. As a methodology, they based their study on a desk review of current legislation pertaining to issues of nationality, as well as interviews with ministry of Justice officials and 11 Lebanese Women married to foreigners and/or their children. They also discussed the impact of this discriminatory nationality legislation on

women and their families. Regarding the personal status law in Lebanon, we have several articles discussing at length the discriminatory legal system in Lebanon in regards to women, most prominently: Lamia Rustum Shehadeh (2010), “Gender-Relevant Legal Change in Lebanon.”, Lina Khatib (2008), “Gender, Citizenship and Political Agency in Lebanon”, explaining at depth the personal status codes present in Lebanon, and how their presence hinders the rights of women in the country, especially regarding nationality rights. Concerning numbers and statistics, there is no official data on the number of Lebanese women married to foreigners, but a 2009 UN Development Program-backed study found that, between 1995 and 2008, there were only 18,000 marriages between Lebanese women and foreign men in the country. The study is called “Predicament of Lebanese Women Married to Non-Lebanese Field Analytical Study” written by Dr. Fahima Charafeddine in collaboration with the UNDP in 2009 and it is aimed to highlight the complicated hardships of families of women married to non-Lebanese men. Several attempts were done by international organizations to shed light on this subject: Human Rights Watch (2020), Human Rights Watch Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in Lebanon. Human Rights Watch (2018), Lebanon: Discriminatory Nationality Law, “Lebanon should amend an outdated nationality law to ensure that children and spouses of Lebanese women have the same right to citizenship as those of Lebanese men, Human Rights Watch said today.” Human Rights Watch (2020), Lebanon: Broken Promises On Women’s Rights, “Lebanese authorities are falling short of their international legal obligations to protect women and girls from violence and end discrimination against them.” Arab Center Washington DC (2023), The Harrowing State of Women’s Rights in Lebanon, “Because of Law 15 of January 1925, which was issued by the French High Commissioner during the mandate, Lebanese women still cannot pass their nationality to their children or to their non-Lebanese husbands, unlike Lebanese men, who can do both. This deprives children of citizenship and increases the risk of statelessness. The Lebanese government has failed to address this issue, citing the threat of the naturalization and resettlement of Palestinian and Syrian refugees as a reason not to change this law. The fear is that the naturalization of Palestinians and Syrians will alter the demographic balance in Lebanon in favor of Sunni Muslims. The only exception to this law is granted to unmarried mothers, as this group can pass on their nationality to their child after one year



if the child is still without citizenship.” Recently in 2021, a report has been done by the UNHCR and Siren Association entitled: ‘Mapping and Understanding Statelessness in Akkar’. This study provides an analysis of statelessness among people of Lebanese descent in the northern governorate of Akkar. It starts with an overview of the local context, shedding light on the level of socio economic instability, which has been exacerbated by the current global pandemic. It also introduces the history of statelessness nationally. This study on stateless persons of Lebanese origin residing in Akkar relied on both quantitative surveys and insights from key informant interviews, as well as qualitative information gathered from extensive fieldwork. Lastly, the report includes a section on policy recommendations. Additionally, there is a Lebanese NGO called ‘Frontiers Rights’ which deals with statelessness in Lebanon and assists individuals struggling with their citizenship and refugees. Their content is mainly in Arabic. Here is a translated extract from their definition of statelessness: ‘Stateless persons in Lebanon are considered non-existent. They lack any legal status or documents and there is no legal framework regulating their status and rights, in the absence of a national census of stateless persons. With the exception of people registered under the category of “under investigation” and registered with the authorities in a special registry, there is no personal status registry for stateless persons in Lebanon. Their marriage or the birth of their children is not documented. In general, stateless people are denied basic rights in Lebanon. The absence of a legal protection framework puts them in a vulnerable position and makes them vulnerable to exploitation and serious violations. In general, stateless people in Lebanon belong to economically disadvantaged social classes and thus constitute a very vulnerable and marginalized population group. Stateless people cannot enjoy civil and political rights, nor can they obtain social security or the right to work in the formal sector. They can enroll in schools, but they must obtain exceptional special permission from the Ministry of Education to take official exams at the middle and secondary levels, and this is done on a case-by-case basis. They do not have the right to access public health services except for vaccination and emergency cases, where they can be admitted to hospitals for primary life-saving care’(Frontiers Rights, n.d.). The literature on Lebanon's nationality law reveals a widespread system of gender discrimination, political manipulation, and human rights breaches. The National Commission for Lebanese Women, UNDP, and Human Rights Watch have all conducted

studies that demonstrate the law's devastating social, economic, and psychological impact on Lebanese women who marry foreigners and their children. Despite the fact that several international and regional groups have urged for reform, there is still resistance owing to sectarian and political concerns. Lack of comprehensive data on statelessness exacerbates the difficulties experienced by these families. Several studies have found that this prejudice is not justified by religious dogma, but rather by political considerations aimed at preserving demographic control, as evidenced by the ongoing exclusion of Palestinians and Syrians. According to the literature, Lebanon's failure to uphold international human rights commitments, notably those under CEDAW, shows a broader unwillingness to confront gender imbalance in its legal structure. In the following chapters, this research will delve deeper into the personal testimonies of those affected by the nationality law, providing a qualitative analysis of stateless individual experiences and investigating the historical, legal, and political forces that have perpetuated this discriminatory legislation. This study attempts to provide a thorough understanding of the law's long-term social and human rights impact, as well as to propose possible reform alternatives.

## **Chapter I: Real-life testimonies of people affected by Lebanon's nationality law.**

### 1. Context of the interviews

I have conducted seven interviews, with seven different individuals from different backgrounds, religions, age, and gender. All individuals are from Lebanese Mothers, but their Fathers are from different countries. Among them, three have Sudanese Fathers, two have Syrian fathers, one has a Palestinian father and another has an Egyptian Father, portraying Lebanon's diverse and multicultural setting. The interviews were conducted both online and in person, and all seven participants agreed to share their stories and be recorded. They all gave their agreement on the recorded audios, which I stored and archived. All participants have accepted to be a part of my dissertation and are willing to have their stories shared with the public. At the beginning of each interview, I encouraged participants to openly share their experiences and stories. They were all asked the same question: "How did the nationality law affect you and your family in all aspects of life—health, education, societal life, etc.?" The goal was to create a safe environment in which

individuals could freely share their views and experiences in a way that was comfortable for them. The interviews were done in a complete freedom, allowing participants to speak freely and without direction or interruption. Given the delicate and continuous nature of the topics, some of them had taken a pause mid-interview because they were overwhelmed by the emotional weight of their experiences. I ask the reader of this thesis to be very considerate when reading these testimonies, as they are real life stories and struggles of human beings that are deeply affected by the consequences of the discriminatory nationality law. I will introduce shortly the background and story of each interviewee, and for privacy reasons, their names will be replaced with their initials, the full story of each interviewee will be attached at the end as an Annex. In the following sections, I will use qualitative analytic approaches to interpret the interviews, with the purpose of identifying the most common patterns and thematic fields found in the testimonies. The analysis will concentrate on the subjects and areas most commonly discussed by participants, as well as those that are uncommon or unique to specific individuals.

## **2. Background of the interviewees**

### **Testimony 1, N.N:**

N. is a 31 Lebanese Mother to her 13-years-old son. Her family is severely impacted by Lebanon's nationality laws, which prohibit women from passing on their nationality to their marriages and children. Her husband, who is stateless due to Lebanon's complicated nationality laws and the death of his Syrian father, lacks legal papers. This has left their son stateless, unable to obtain a proper education, healthcare, or a safe future in Lebanon. Despite the hardships and political and institutional challenges in Lebanon, N.N stays committed to fight for her family's rights and to speak out against injustice. She is determined to teach her kid to be proud and to advocate for himself, drawing on her faith and resilience in the face of adversity.

### **Testimony 2, D.D, Sudanese-Lebanese:**

D.D is a 44-year-old Lebanese woman who grew up in Lebanon with her Christian Lebanese mother after being abandoned by her Muslim Sudanese father when she was

very young. She spent her youth unconscious of her unsafe legal situation, until she encountered challenges at school due to a lack of proper documentation. The realization of her statelessness interrupted her schooling and hopes of becoming a psychologist or veterinarian, forcing her to labor in low-profile positions with little legal protection. Although she ultimately received a Sudanese passport with her father's assistance, D.D never felt a connection to Sudan and was frequently considered as an outsider in Lebanon. Her marriage to a Lebanese man was filled with difficulties due to her lack of papers, and it took ten years to obtain Lebanese citizenship, during which she faced scrutiny and criticism. Despite societal prejudice and the challenges created by Lebanon's nationality regulations, D.D persevered. She credits her religion and her husband's constant support for guiding her through these difficulties.

**Testimony 3, R.A, Syrian-Lebanese:**

R.A. is a Lebanese-born woman who was raised in a Christian household by her Syrian father and Lebanese mother. Despite having been born and raised in Lebanon, she has endured significant discrimination her entire life because of her Syrian origin. Her youth was marked by domestic abuse, financial difficulties, and interrupted education. As an adult, R.A. faced legal roadblocks that prevented her from obtaining permanent employment and fake accusations that stained her record for over a decade. Despite marrying a Lebanese man, she is still unable to obtain citizenship because she can't have children. R.A. continues to feel rejected by Lebanon and battles with identity issues, but her faith gives her courage.

**Testimony 4, N.M, Sudanese-Lebanese:**

N.M. was born in 1977 to a Lebanese mother and a Sudanese father. As a child, she thought she was just like everyone else, oblivious of her legal predicament until the age of seven, when she discovered her father was still alive, she was Muslim, and she lacked official documents. She grew up feeling like an outcast in Lebanon, mistreated because of her Sudanese origin. N.M. struggled through life with only her birth certificate and no other formal documentation. Despite finishing high school, her hopes of furthering her education and seeking a career were crushed due to her legal status. She worked in secret, in undocumented positions, and was constantly afraid of being detected and deported.

N.M.'s life was characterized by persistent prejudice, verbal abuse, and bullying. She was denied the right to marry and have children, and she was even coerced into having an abortion. Despite her efforts to seek medical treatment for endometriosis, she was exploited in an unsafe and unsanitary hospital setting, leaving her in continual discomfort. For decades, she and her sister attempted to obtain legal recognition in Lebanon, but were greeted with bureaucratic failure, excessive expenses, and ignorant legal counsel. She now lives with her aging mother, unable to properly care for her or even leave the country. N.M. feels imprisoned by a faulty system and wishes for change for future generations.

**Testimony 5, N.H., Sudanese-Lebanese:**

N.H., a 47-year-old man born and raised in Lebanon, has endured discrimination throughout his life because of his statelessness. His Lebanese mother was unable to convey her citizenship to him, forcing him to live as a foreigner in his own nation. He grew up during the Lebanese Civil War and lived through its aftermath, attempting to get residency and lead a normal life. A decree issued in 2005 granted him temporary residency status, but it was not without restrictions. He was constantly confronted with bureaucratic obstacles, such as traveling abroad to renew his Sudanese passport, a nationality that held no importance for him. N.H. left Lebanon for Canada to provide a better life for his children, free of the corruption and injustice he faced. His children frequently ask why they don't have the same rights as their Lebanese cousins, reminding him of the injustice he's experienced. Despite departing with a sad heart, N.H. hopes his children will grow up in a country that values them, rather than Lebanon.

**Testimony 6, K.K, Palestinian-Lebanese:**

K.K. was raised by a Lebanese mother and a Palestinian father. Growing up in Lebanon during the civil war, he experienced prejudice from the Palestinian communities and Lebanese community. Despite having a math degree and a teaching profession, K.K. struggled with the limits imposed on Palestinians in Lebanon, such as employment and travel restrictions. His effort to obtain Lebanese citizenship was long and difficult, with barriers ranging from legal corruption to societal discrimination. Despite being married to a Lebanese woman and having Lebanese origin, he lived as a stateless refugee for years, with just a blue ID card and a brown travel passport. Eventually, through personal connections, K.K. and his family were granted Lebanese citizenship, which dramatically

altered how they were perceived in society. K.K.'s tale emphasizes the complexity of identity and nationality, as well as the struggle for basic rights that Palestinians endure in Lebanon. Despite the difficulties, he is grateful for the outcome and the chances his children now have.

### **Testimony 7, N.A, UNIPD Alumni, Lebanese-Egyptian:**

N.A., a 27-year-old engineer, has recently graduated from the University of Padova. Born to a Lebanese mother and an Egyptian father, N.A. grew up in Lebanon but endured discrimination because of his Egyptian citizenship. Though his youth appeared to be quite typical, as he grew older, the obstacles became more apparent. Teachers and authorities treated him differently because of his nationality, with government officials and school personnel making him feel like an outcast. His family fought with the Lebanese legal system, applying for naturalization for nearly a decade with no luck. N.A. recalls the financial and emotional costs of living in Lebanon without citizenship, where even his father's company ownership was impeded by bribes. Eventually, he was obliged to leave Lebanon for Egypt to pursue his schooling, which upset him at the time. Despite his strong feelings for Lebanon, numerous discriminatory incidents increased his sense of alienation. He now resides in Italy, having recognised that Lebanon will never truly welcome him as its own. Nonetheless, N.A. dreams of returning to the place that he calls home.

## **3. Thematic fields**

### **3.1. Statelessness and Documentation issues**

Many participants emphasized how their lack of citizenship had a significant influence on their lives, both personally and for their children. The lack of adequate documents resulted sometimes in statelessness, which limits access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, and employment. Lebanese Mother N.N. stated that: “My son was born without a nationality because I was unable to pass on my Lebanese nationality to him, and his father did not have citizenship. He does not belong in Syria or Lebanon. He is a child without a nation” (T1). As well as N.M. who mentioned that: “I had nothing to my name that proves who I am, the only document I had was my birth certificate, which is

not even legalized due to my father's disappearance as a kid" (T4). Palestinian-Lebanese Father K.K. recounted the story of how they had to struggle to find any kind of paternal lebanese lineage in their family: "We were constantly searching for proof that we were Lebanese...so we started searching for old documents that proved that we have some kind of lebanese lineage from our great grandparents...some documents that my great grandfather did the first communion or baptized...anything that proves paternal lineage"(T6). Additionally, Sudanese-Lebanese Father N.H. mentioned that "I was never able to get citizenship from my mother, I have lived my whole life in Lebanon as a foreigner...I was born and raised in Lebanon as a foreigner" (T5). He also describes the enormous obstacles of navigating bureaucratic obstacles: "We had to go to the Sudanese Embassy in Dubai, in Saudi Arabia or in Sudan (where there is war), imagine applying for a visa, booking tickets and hotel, traveling to another country and spending a huge amount of money, just to renew our passports to be able to live in a country we are born in"(T5). As seen, many have claimed that the law has made them foreigners, and in some cases stateless, in the land they call home. They face complex bureaucratic obstacles and bear the emotional toll of feeling estranged from their birthplace.

### **3.2. Discrimination, Bullying, and Racism**

All participants have shared a strong feeling of being discriminated against, on the basis of their status, religion, and country of origin. This prejudice has taken many forms, ranging from bureaucratic barriers to social exclusion and open hatred. Their stories demonstrate how deeply embedded these prejudices are in Lebanese society, increasing their feelings of alienation. Participants describe unpleasant situations in which they were judged, rejected, or mistreated because of their non-Lebanese blood, even though they identified culturally or socially as Lebanese. Individuals of Sudanese, Syrian, or Palestinian heritage were subjected to bias, marginalization, and verbal abuse in a variety of social settings, including schools, workplaces, and official institutions. D.D. shared with us an experience she endured in her school years, "of the most unpleasant experiences was when preparing for the First Communion. The nun told me, in front of all the other children, "You cannot practice with us because you are Sudanese and Muslim. "You do not belong in this practice." That moment was devastating since I identified as a Christian and felt completely Lebanese—I was born here, after all" (T2).

D.D. also recounts several instances where she was discriminated against on the basis of the religion of her father, “The community which we were living in was mostly Christians, and so they treated us differently, and even judged us, due to the fact that my father was Muslim”. In addition to her mother-in-law who does not approve of her because of her Father’s nationality: “My mother-in-law did not approve of me at first, telling my husband how could he date a “Sudanese girl”, and stating: “What would the people say about us? our son is married to a sudanese girl?” As if that was the end of the world... I was born and raised here, I am as Lebanese as they are” (T2). She also faced discrimination in governmental offices, “Authorities would often say “ let the sudanese girl come in”, in front of everyone, to single me out between Lebanese people, everyone would look at me differently. One official once told me, ‘how are you Sudanese? you don’t look Sudanese’”(T2). This racism is also seen in Syrian-Lebanese R.A’s childhood: “ I went to a Catholic school where we encountered severe discrimination; Syrians in Lebanon are frequently viewed as second-class citizens. My siblings and I were verbally abused, with the director openly calling us "a piece of Syrians" and “snakes” leaving us feeling horribly objectified” (T3). R.A. also faced discrimination as a grown up, especially from authorities: “Once the police came and accused us of faking papers, and of stealing money, and none of these accusations were true, they were only skeptical about her shop because she is Syrian.” (T3). She also mentioned the discrimination which specifically happens with Syrians in Lebanon: "In Lebanon, no one accepts Syrians, and it was tough to find work... I lived in fear because no one wanted to hire Syrians". N.M. also expressed her dissatisfaction at witnessing foreigners easily get citizenship through marriage to Lebanese men but she, born and raised in Lebanon, from a Lebanese mother, was denied it: “Imagine seeing Russians and Ukrainians women who married Lebanese men, having Lebanese citizenship, speaking a foreign language and me, born and raised in this country, speaking the language of the country, without any citizenship. Imagine asking for a permit to live in a country you were born in..”(T4). She also stated her frustration every time she would encounter people for the first time: “Those who eventually discovered the truth about my case would either pity me or begin treating me differently, considering me as somehow inferior”(T4). Furthermore, N.H shared his experience at the Sudanese embassy, where he was mocked and treated unjustly, because He did not look like any Sudanese: “Every time I would go to the Sudanese Embassy, I remember them looking



at me weirdly. I was the only white-skinned man in an Embassy full of black-skinned individuals, I would face a lot of bullying from that, they would mock me at the embassy and not take me seriously”(T5). The discrimination often extended to their children, who were bullied and excluded because of their family's nation or heritage. The same episode also occurred with his 11-years-old son while he was renewing his passport. “Once my wife and my child traveled to Saudi Arabia to renew the passport of my son, upon arrival, my son was harassed, no one believed he was Sudanese, they thought we were faking it to receive the passport. My child was 11 years old, he was bullied by the authorities in the embassy, even the consul verbally abused my son. The authorities would always ask; “Why was he renewing passports in Saudi Arabia? How is he sudanese?” (T5). Moreover, Palestinian-Lebanese Father K.K. also expressed the feeling of discrimination by stating: “I grew up in a place which always rejected our existence, always being bullied for my palestinian side, even though my mother was Lebanese”(T6), even when K.K was married, the discrimination on the basis of his nationality carried on with the parents of his wife: “Her parents were always cautious because I was Palestinian, always asking her if I am treating her well, if I am not hurting her, etc. Her brother, on the other hand, never accepted me, and never welcomed me into the family”(T6). Additionally, K.K. also faced discrimination from the judicial system in Lebanon. He shared that when presenting their plea for naturalization “they would automatically discriminate against us due to our palestinian background, we faced a lot of racism and that’s a recurrent problem in Lebanon, the mentality is very wrong..”(T6). In the case of N.A, he describes facing discrimination through several instances, most notably: “One time a teacher openly discriminated against me in front of the whole class, we were all playing around, and she decided to shout at me particularly, and told me “if you are used to messing around in Egypt, you are in Lebanon now..”.. “what will you even achieve in life? you are only egyptian”. You know Egyptians in Lebanon usually have mediocre jobs at gas stations, or house cleaning jobs, and so she regarded me in that particular stereotypical way” (T7), as well during his state exams, where he was always singled out: “It wasn't until the formal state examinations that I really realized how serious my situation was..government-appointed professors regarded me differently, questioning and occasionally frisking me as if I were a threat. Processing these feelings was challenging, particularly for a student who was already under a lot of stress from exams..my Egyptian passport made the state

officials notice me, so they singled me out...my family name sounded muslim to them and that made them also suspicious. The stress of the tests itself added to the already challenging situation..they just did that to bother me” (T7). Additionally, he also faced verbal abuse from his neighbors: “I recall having a neighbor who despised me—a very racist man. Every time he saw me, he'd throw me off my bike and spit on me. When we played in the neighborhood, he would single me out, yelling that I didn't belong, telling me to return to Egypt, and cursing Egyptians”(T7). N.A. also described an incident at the airport in which he was regarded as a criminal because of his Egyptian identity. "They couldn't believe an Egyptian man could speak Lebanese," he told me. Despite informing officials that his mother was Lebanese, he was placed in a room with immigrants from India, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia. "I've spent my entire life here; this is my home," he told the airport police, showing them images of his house, but their suspicion only grew. Moreover, N.A. also shared his experience of being routinely harassed at checkpoints due to his Egyptian identity: “Every time I passed a checkpoint, the officials would pull me over, inspect the car, and treat me as if I were a criminal. When I drove my mother's car, they occasionally accused me of stealing it, and refused to accept she was Lebanese, or thought I was an illegal in the nation”(T7). Finally, participants' testimonies demonstrate the deeply rooted discrimination in Lebanese society, where non-citizens face prejudice, marginalization, and abuse. These problems foster a strong sense of alienation and highlight the harsh reality for those who lack a full Lebanese identity.

### **3.3.Educational Barriers**

Several testimonies describe how the inability to gain Lebanese nationality impedes access to education, particularly at the secondary and university levels. Participants who lacked adequate legal papers or nationality frequently experienced bureaucratic barriers, discrimination, and limited possibilities that hindered their educational pursuits. For instance, N.N. shares with us the experience of her stateless son: “We struggled a lot to find a suitable school which would accept the fact that my son doesn’t have any papers. He attends a public school with poor amenities because he is unable to enroll in a private school or benefit from government tuition assistance programs for low-income Lebanese families. I fear the possibility of him sitting for his state examinations at the ages of 15 and 17, or possibly enrolling in university without identification” (T1). In D.D's case, her

education was interrupted because she was unable to take the state exams due to a lack of appropriate documentation: “At 15, I had to drop out of school since I couldn't take state examinations without a valid identity. The school director proposed that I retake eighth grade again to gain additional time in school. Leaving school dashed my hopes of entering college and becoming a psychologist or veterinary” (T2). She also adds how the effects of the law has affected her life's path: “This law has changed my whole life. If I had papers, surely my life would not have been like that, I would have continued my education, pursued a career that I love, and lived a respectful life” (T2). For R.A, her siblings and her had their education interrupted several times, “We didn't go to the best schools, we didn't have the means, and we had to interrupt our education several times due to lack of funds and our documentation, so we changed schools many times”(T3), and during her university years, she was treated differently than the Lebanese students: “In university, I was always treated as a foreigner, I had to fill papers for foreigners, and my tuition was three times higher because of my Syrian blood, despite the fact that I had never felt connected to Syria” (T3). N.M. also had to interrupt her education after graduating from school, “that was the end of my educational path, it all ended in the 12th grade. I dreamt of becoming an actor, a writer, a director... reality struck me, I couldn't work, nor go to university and continue my education” (T4), N.M. had big educational ambitions and dreams, she was never able to achieve them due to her situation: “I was a person who had ambitions, I dreamt to continue my education, I always compare myself to a bird without any wings in a cage, stuck and powerless” (T4). K.K. had another experience, whereas he was able to continue his education and go to university: “I was able to enter a private university (American University of Beirut) because my parents back then were financially capable of paying. In Lebanon, money is everything, if you are able to pay, there is no discrimination in education”(T6). Similarly, N.A. has had no major disruptions or setbacks in his school career: “My father was financially stable, and so we were able to get registered in a very decent school in Lebanon.” In summary, a lack of Lebanese nationality restricts access to education, with many encountering difficulties and interruptions. While financial stability aided some, such as K.K. and N.A., others saw their educational aspirations dashed due to incomplete documentation.

### **3.4. Employment Challenges and Economic Marginalization**

Individuals without citizenship face significant difficulties in obtaining legal and stable employment, with the majority turning to undocumented or under-the-table jobs. Without official identity or work permits, people are unable to gain access to formal employment sectors, regardless of their abilities or education. As a result, many people are forced to work in low-wage occupations that provide little to no job security, benefits, or legal protection. According to N.N. whose husband is stateless: “My husband works in terrible conditions without papers, and he fears that if he loses his current job, he will be unable to find another company ready to hire him without legal status” (T1). Similarly to D.D. who had to work in the shadows: “Instead of pursuing my dreams, I found myself working in a shop where no paperwork was required. I was always afraid of being exposed and losing my job” (T2). Relating also to the theme of discrimination, R.A. shared the reality of Syrians looking to work in Lebanon: “Working in Lebanon was especially tough because Syrians must have a sponsor, making it impossible to get work...I worked without paperwork for a long time, living in constant fear. Every job I started was very short, no Lebanese wanted to hire Syrians, and so I struggled a lot, especially because I needed a work permit and it was impossible to get it with all the discrimination...Everywhere I would apply, I would get rejected because of my file, and the employers who always prioritize giving jobs to Lebanese citizens” (T3). Likewise, N.M. also had to work in the dark, as she describes it: “I depended on the people’s help and pity to employ me as a person without any documentation, to work “in the black” as they say...I used to work in secret of course, as a housekeeper sometimes, but always in the dark” (T4). Additionally, the mother of N.M. had to sign a declaration which states: “she is the sponsor of me and my sister, and that if we are caught working in the country, my mother would be sent to jail, and I would be also jailed and deported to Sudan, no one knows what they would do to me before sending me to Sudan, abuse, rape..” (T4). She also stated the kind of jobs she was offered: “Some would even offer me exploitative, low-wage jobs like cleaning their homes and performing labor-intensive tasks. I didn't know how to answer, so I lied over and over” (T4). On the other hand, N.H shares that as a foreigner, he was legally not allowed to work in a professional field: “I can’t be a lawyer, a doctor, or an architect. The priority and favoritism was always to the Lebanese citizens, I always felt limited, as if there are boundaries around me, not allowing me to be free”(T5). In the same way, K.K. also expressed that Palestinians couldn’t work proper

jobs in Lebanon, but in his case, he was fortunate enough to land a stable job: “fortunately, I was recruited by a school in Lebanon as a math teacher. My case is very rare, usually Palestinians in Lebanon cannot work, our permits did not allow us to work any job, so we always worked “in black”, illegally. We could work basic jobs under the table, such as fishing and selling fish, wall painter, plumber, etc. if you have a degree in architecture you can’t become an architect, same thing for law and medicine, we would have to leave the country to be able to work in our professions” (T6). K.K. also discussed how, as a teacher, he had to go above and beyond to overcome prejudice against his Palestinian identity. "I always had to be extraordinary for them to overlook the fact that I was Palestinian," he added, adding that he was only allowed to continue teaching after putting forth exceptional effort. Regarding N.A, he expressed that his Egyptian Father was legally not allowed: “to own property in Lebanon since he was not a citizen.. The municipality only allowed him to run his gallery through bribes. He had an incredibly hard time getting by in Lebanon; he was not allowed to legally own anything”(T7). In summary, those without citizenship in Lebanon suffer major obstacles to secure employment, forcing many into low-wage, informal jobs with no legal protections. Interviewees, like N.N., R.A., and N.M., have expressed that a lack of documents leads them to work in secret or under severe conditions, while others, such as N.H. and K.K., face legal and societal discrimination in their professional pursuits.

### **3.5. Healthcare Access**

Healthcare is a major issue for persons without legal status, as they frequently cannot access public hospitals or medical services. This compels many people to rely on expensive private care or go without treatment, deteriorating their health and increasing the gap in healthcare access for marginalized groups. For instance, N.N shared her concerns by stating that: “We do not have health insurance or any other sort of state or workplace security. I live in constant terror of my son becoming unwell, knowing that without proper documents, no reputable hospital will admit him or my husband”(T1). Similarly, D.D. lacked health insurance and, when working discreetly, had to lie about her status: "To avoid revealing my situation, I pretended to have private coverage and denied needing social services"(T1). Additionally, she shared: “Thankfully until now I was never in need of hospitalization, I only remember as a child that my mother would

take us to health clinics that were in bad conditions, we couldn't afford private health care" (T2). D.D.'s sister N.M (T4) was severely affected on the health spectrum. At first, she shares her worries about the health of her mother: "I am living with my mom, and that she is getting older. I can't provide for her, I can't give her any insurance, always fearing hospitalization, always fearing needing money in case someone falls ill"(T4). N.N. also shared her experience with her major health concerns, stating, "I have numerous health problems and have had several operations in public hospitals, none of which were successful." She described how her health problems began after being diagnosed with endometriosis. "Because I had no papers, the health practitioner said, 'I know a hospital that does those things secretly, but you have to stay with me.' It didn't look like a hospital; it looked like a house, and we gave him \$500 in cash. The sheets were dirty and shattered, not professional at all, and the staff treated me badly". The operation had failed, and in the following years her pain kept on getting worse: "Another doctor checked on me and noticed that in fact the previous doctor had done a very bad job, and that he didn't fix the problem, he even made it worse. Ever since, I endure pain in silence" (T4). Moreover, K.K. explained how his Palestinian nationality prevented him from receiving healthcare benefits, while contributing to social security through his job: "I was contributing, but I couldn't get the benefits because of my nationality" (T6). He stated that, thankfully, his wife, who was employed, was able to register their children under her social security plan, one of the few rights afforded to Lebanese women. These stories highlight the complicated reality for people without legal status to obtain healthcare. They are frequently compelled to rely on expensive or inadequate medical care such as in the devastating case of N.M., exacerbating their health problems.

### **3.6. Corruption and Bribery**

Several participants emphasized the widespread corruption in Lebanon, noting bribery as a popular technique of obtaining legal rights, including citizenship. Many said that officials demanded bribes for basic duties like renewing residency permits or getting identification documents. N.N. emphasized her frustration with the corruption in Lebanon, recounting a personal experience: "my husband's brother was able to gain Lebanese citizenship by paying bribes to high-level authorities. In Lebanon, if you have money, you can have whatever you want; the system is corrupt, riddled with clientelism

and bribes” (T1). Similarly, R.A. shares the story while facing false accusations due to her Syrian identity: “We were given 1 month to leave Lebanon. My sister was able to be free of these accusations, because the father of her Lebanese husband was able to convince the authorities by sponsoring her shop, but I had to bribe a lot of officials for them to let me go”(T3). R.A. also disclosed that she had been sexually abused by high-ranking officials: “I had a friend who knew some high connections in the government, and had said that he could help me in my case...instead of him helping me, he sexually abused me in his office. It was traumatizing” she recalled. “I had to continue seeing him normally in public, because He was the only one who was able to remove the black spot of my folder...it was only till last year that I was free from those wrongful accusations”(T3). Furthermore, N.M. also expressed her frustration with the legal system, saying: “For many years, we collected the funds needed to hire a lawyer to resolve my case, imagine, after spending a huge amount of money, for 15 years, the lawyer never took us seriously, she never followed up on my case, always blaming it on the political situation in Lebanon and on legal courts being closed due to strikes and whatsoever” (T4). N.M. also adds, “In Lebanon if you want to get around you need to know someone, you need to pay a lot of money, you even need to belong to a political party, for them to get your things going” (T4), this statement reflects deeply how well-rooted corruption is in Lebanon. Likewise, K.K.’s experience with lawyers resonates with N.N.’s story: “We sought help from lawyers to present our case to the court...lawyers used to profit alot from this situation, they were all corrupted. The lawyers would always tell us ‘pay us the money, and we will get your papers don’t worry’...no one helped us, time passed and one or two of the lawyers even died, and still not one lawyer was faithful to his job, they profited from our situation” (T6). We can also identify obvious patterns of rooted corruption in how K.K. eventually obtained naturalization through clientelism and political interests: “We knew a woman who had strong ties to the President, and she volunteered to help me. She requested all of my documentation, and amazingly, my naturalization application was accepted that same day”. He further explained that this was largely due to his family background: “This was mostly because my mother and wife are Lebanese Christian Maronites, and I didn't seem like a threat to the demographic balance of Lebanon. As a matter of fact, I was considered a welcome addition to the Christian Maronite community, which is currently a minority in the nation” (T6). In parallel, N.A.

also recounts how they faced repeated challenges while attempting to renew their residency permits: “Every time me and my father went to renew our residency permits..we would face a lot of discrimination, Egyptians are usually considered second-class citizens in Lebanon. The authorities would complicate our case, lying by telling us that X paper was missing.. At the end my father would shout at them, bribe them, and they would eventually provide us with the permits”. N.A. also shared the frustration of trying to gain naturalization: "Imagine 12 years of repeatedly applying for naturalization with no results. We spent a fortune on lawyers, but none of them were truly helpful—they were all corrupt, taking advantage of our desperation to fill their wallets. No one resolved our problem”(T7). On another note, both R.A. and K.K. mentioned Lebanon's random naturalization sprees, which they described as unorganized, complicated, corrupt, and politically driven. In the words of R.A: “I remember there was a naturalization spree in the early 2000s, but we were unable to register due to the complexity of the process and a lack of understanding, so many people were given citizenship and they even didn’t used to live in Lebanon, it was a very randomized naturalization”(T3). Likewise, K.K. echoed the story of R.A by stating: “the naturalization decree done in 1994 was very random and unorganized and so our family wasn't able to be naturalized back then, but they never were able to comprehend”(T6). These testimonies demonstrate Lebanon's deeply entrenched corruption, where bribes and political ties are frequently the only ways to get legal rights. The system's failure causes vulnerable people to face exploitation, exacerbating their problems and perpetuating inequity.

### **3.7.Psychological and Emotional Toll**

The emotional and psychological toll of being denied legal rights is severe, with people frequently experiencing feelings of powerlessness, despair, and shame. Many interviewees expressed feelings of invisibility, being denied basic rights, and struggling to navigate bureaucratic systems that regard them as outsiders. For example, N.N. expressed her constant fear for her son's future, saying: “I'm frightened of the day when my son realizes the realities of his life in Lebanon. He is still under the age of 18, and I am willing to do everything it takes to ensure his safety and stability in the future”(T1). N.N. also adds the discouragement and lack of motivation which her stateless husband feels: “I would always blame my husband, telling him to do something, to go and demand



his rights, but he is beyond depressed, he doesn't like to talk about his situation, but I will not be silent" (T1). D.D. describes feeling ashamed of her situation: "I also worked as a home nurse for ten years, living in the shadows, embarrassed and hiding my reality during what should have been the happiest years of my life". She also reflects on the emotional pressure brought on by her familial relationships: "My mother-in-law would also argue with my husband telling him that he is educated and has diplomas and he should marry someone with more education, such as a doctor or a lawyer, not someone like me. Those comments were terrible, but my husband was always there for me, reminding me that my problems were not my fault, but the result of a flawed system. "(T2). She also adds the repetitive police checks which affected her deeply: "The police would frequently come to our house to check whether I was truly living with my spouse, for they assumed that our marriage was merely for citizenship grounds. They would come and ask the neighbors and the shops around us, if I was really living here, it was truly embarrassing, I felt constantly ashamed and afraid"(T2). For the case of R.A, she explains how her brother was deeply affected by their situation: "My brother did not deal well with our situation, due to quitting school at a young age, he started using drugs at a young age, from weed to pills.. and going up the ladder. He was arrested and sent to jail for several years for drug abuse". R.A. also mentioned the financial burden of receiving mental health treatment: "I went to several psychologists, but no one really helped me overcome my situation, and each session was extremely expensive, so I would always pause my treatment"(T3). Additionally, N.M also expresses feelings of shame: "I always saw how Lebanese treated people from lower countries, and so I became ashamed to tell others about my situation", she also shares the profound emotional impact of her situation: " I always felt that I didn't have the right to be like everyone else, seeing all of my friends graduating, working, traveling, achieving big things.. while I was stuck, like a bird in a cage, all because of this law." She expressed the depth of her despair: "I always thought of ending my life, I was suicidal, I attempted to end it several times, but it never worked." N.M. also disclosed the damaging coping techniques she adopted: "My coping mechanisms were all toxic, going to very bad places just to forget for a while and feel 'alive'"(T4). N.M. described feeling alienated and misunderstood as a result of her chronic depression: "I felt no one understood me, I was in depression at all times". She also stated how hard it was to meet new people, and the feeling of suffocation she would

feel: “They would ask about my career, what I do, why I wasn't working, and a slew of additional enquiries that made me feel suffocated. Every time I met someone new, I had to lie or come up with excuses, constantly justifying my circumstances. I wasn't able to be honest”(T4). Furthermore, N.H. highlighted the widespread challenges of individuals in similar situations, emphasizing how many resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms: “Thank God I didn't seek refuge in dark places, usually people around me with this situation usually end up wasting their lives with alcohol, drugs or stealing.. just to live”(T5). As well as K.K. who expressed the same thoughts: “A large number of my acquaintances suffer from depression as a result of the challenges we encounter”(T6). K.K. also reflects the problems his children faced: “My children grew up always worried on how to explain to their friends about our situation, even our neighbors rejected us for being palestinian, and the whole environment around us hated the presence of Palestinians and Syrians in Lebanon. So our kids always used to hide and lie to their friends, fearing that they would be judged”(T6). Furthermore, N.A. shared the emotional toll of defending his case before authorities: “I became so irritated and upset that I began crying, shouting, and swearing in Lebanese, asking them to understand my innocence”(T7). The emotional and psychological weight of living without legal rights causes people to feel trapped, lonely, and profoundly affected by their surroundings. Many people turn to unhealthy coping techniques, aggravating their problems within a system that constantly marginalizes them.

### **3.8. Family-Building Struggles and Generational Impact**

Legal and social exclusion have far-reaching consequences for families and future generations. Interviewees discuss the emotional cost of building relationships and starting families while being refused citizenship or legal status. The worry of passing on a life of marginalization to their children, along with the difficulties of marriage and societal acceptance, has left many people with feelings of pessimism, solitude, and a broken sense of identity. In the case of N.N, she expressed her resistance to have more children: “I can't bring myself to have more children knowing that they would face a life without identity, rights, or a future”(T1). This reluctance to have more children is due to the fact that her child, like his father, was born without legal status, she notes: “My child was born without a nationality because I was unable to pass on my Lebanese nationality to him and his

father did not have citizenship”(T1). Regarding N.M, she discovered the harsh reality of her situation when her sister (D.D-T2) wanted to get married, realizing that for her, “I can’t get married, and even if I wanted, it would have been very hard”, this fear was reflected during the years: “I fell pregnant by a guy I was dating back then, and I was pushed to abort my child, due to the situation I was living in, even though I truly wanted to keep my child”(T4). Echoing the situation of N.N, N.H. also portrayed the generational inheritance of this law by stating: “we now have two beautiful boys, who unfortunately are also without any Lebanese citizenship”(T5). On another aspect, K.K. expressed the pressure of building relationships, stating that: “even in my relationships I had to be outstanding in everything I do for someone to fall in love with me, and to disregard that I was palestinian”(T6). As for N.A, he recounts that he had always dreamed of marrying a Lebanese girl and building a family together, however, now he can't imagine doing so, wondering: “How could I marry a Lebanese woman and raise children who would battle with their identity?”(T7). Furthermore, D.D. and R.A., both stated that having children is essential for obtaining citizenship faster when a foreign woman marries a Lebanese man. They expressed their frustration with their inability to bear children, which slowed the process even further. In the words of D.D: “it took ten years to obtain my Lebanese citizenship because we did not have children, making the procedure even more difficult”(T2), and R.A who also echoed this concern: “I recently married a Lebanese man, but I’m still unable to obtain citizenship because I can’t have children”(T3). As portrayed, the challenges of family building and the generational impact of legal exclusion have a significant impact on people's lives and future goals. The emotional toll of navigating relationships and children while stateless causes sadness and fear about leaving a legacy of marginalization. As shown by the respondents' experiences, the inability to get citizenship not only disrupts personal relationships but also perpetuates a cycle of uncertainty and dread for future generations.

### **3.9.Political and Historical Context**

Political decisions, historical conflicts, and regional dynamics have had a significant impact on individuals' access to citizenship and social standing. Policies based on complex regional histories frequently decide who has legal rights, leaving many marginalized and stateless. Conflicts and shifting power structures worsen these

challenges by excluding or discriminating against specific groups based on their race, nationality, or family origin. Regarding N.N., she and her family attempted to present their case in court last year but blamed the lack of progress on the current political situation: “Lebanon's political paralysis—the country has been without a president and a functioning parliament for more than two years—has left the situations of stateless persons unanswered”(T1). In the case of D.D., she recounted how the civil war affected the way their community treated them: “The community which we were living in was mostly Christians, and so they treated us differently, and even judged us, due to the fact that my father was Muslim. During that time there was the civil war, as you know Beirut was divided East Beirut and West Beirut based on religious dominance, and so the hatred in that time was at its peak” (T2). As for N.M., she raised her economic concerns due to the economic crisis happening right now: “we always fear that the landlord will kick us out if we are not able to provide the money, especially with the current economic situation, she can higher the price as much as she desires due to the currency fluctuation”, she also explains the reality of Lebanon at the moment: “especially during those times of war, Covid, economic crisis, we can't even live anymore. There is no longer a middle class in Lebanon, there is extreme poverty and richness.” (T4). Similarly, N.H stated his frustration during the 2019 Lebanese revolts: “I couldn't participate in the revolts, I wanted to, it is my right, I too have lost a lot of money due to the crisis, but I couldn't go to the streets and demand my rights, I'm not even Lebanese”(T5). On the other hand, K.K. explained in detail how as a Palestinian, every decision he makes, depends on the political dynamics in the area: “We can't leave for better job opportunities because Arab countries used to have mixed stances around palestinian refugees, depending on the political interest of the country and the situation in the region. For example, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia accepted Palestinians on and off during the years based on the political situation, every country opened its border based on its ‘mood’”(T6). He elaborated on historical events that shaped his situation, emphasizing how political decisions affected the Palestinian identity: "In 1948, all Arab countries opened their borders for Palestinian refugees, and no one felt the need to focus on those matters. Of course, it is all political... It is the Americans who allowed the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to try to control the Lebanese grounds... That was the plan of Henry Kissinger"(T6). K.K. also highlighted the sectarianism that drives Lebanon's policy, pointing out how the Taif

Agreement and demographic concerns have impacted naturalization: "The Lebanese president always feared naturalization, fearing that by granting naturalization to Palestinian refugees, the demographic balance in the country will change in favor of the Muslim population... It was all a matter of sectarianism, no one really cared about the Palestinian refugees"(T6). Finally, he shared his personal experience of being denied admission into Lebanon due to political tensions: "We were stopped in the Lebanese airport. The authorities informed my wife that she could enter Lebanon, but I had to go back to Turkey... Apparently, there was a regional conflict, where Muammar Al Gaddafi threatened the Lebanese government, and as a response, our Prime Minister decided to ban Palestinians from entering Lebanon without a visa, even if they had the brown travel document... We are all victims of a political game"(T6). As seen in the testimonies, Lebanon's political and historical environment has resulted in statelessness and marginalization, with regional wars and sectarian politics determining citizenship status. These political actions have a significant impact on people's lives, resulting in a cycle of exclusion that extends on generations.

### **3.10.Migration**

Migration and settlement in Lebanon are influenced by various political and economic forces, which determine who can escape and who remains marginalized. While some people discover ways to leave, many more encounter social barriers that impede their ambitions for a better future. N.N. dreams on the possibility of leaving for better career opportunities, stating, "I often consider leaving Lebanon in search of better career possibilities and earn enough money to pay for legal representation that could help us find a solution for our son"(T1). She also expresses : "I am willing to travel and to live years without my child and my family, just to provide for him. The job which I currently have in Lebanon doesn't pay well, I'm a freelancer, and because of the current economic crisis, nobody is hiring me". In contrast, N.M. expresses a strong sense of belonging in a country that does not welcome her, hoping for the opportunity to work abroad: "I always dreamt that a country would 'adopt' me, for me to work abroad, just to provide for my mother, whose own country is not providing anything for her. If I had documentation I would leave this country"(T4). On the other hand, N.H. succeeded at immigrating to Canada, saying, "I do not want my kids to endure what I had to go through." For him, leaving

Lebanon was the only solution after 47 years of hardship: “I left Lebanon with a broken heart, to provide a better life for my children, for them to grow in a country which respects them, sees them for who they are”(T4). N.A. shares his father's decision to send him to Egypt for education: “My father obliged me to leave Lebanon at 18 and to continue my studies in Egypt. I was devastated.” Now, he feels like an alien in his own hometown, saying, “I never went back to Lebanon after this experience, I felt like a foreigner in my own country”(T7). These stories highlight the complicated process of migration, which is impacted by both personal circumstances and systemic barriers.

### **3.11. Identity Crisis**

The struggle for citizenship and legal recognition can result in a profound identity crisis, leaving people feeling detached from both their birthplace and their fundamental rights. Many interviewees showed a sense of detachment from their father's nationality, having never lived there or knowing little about it. At the same time, they discussed how Lebanon, the country where they grew up, rejects them, treating them as if they do not genuinely belong. D.D. shared her feelings regarding her country of origin: “I didn't identify with the Sudanese people; it felt like a different planet”(T2). Similarly, R.A. stated that although she was born and raised in Lebanon: “the country continues to reject me, treating me as a lesser person, leaving me feeling like I belong nowhere...I don't belong anywhere.. I feel like I have a conflict of identities.. I don't belong to Syria, nor to Lebanon, in the eyes of the Lebanese people, I will always be ‘a piece of Syrian’”(T3). Despite living in Lebanon her entire life, N.M. continues to suffer exclusion and systemic obstacles. N.M. went on to say: “I am a Lebanese citizen, I was born in this land, I will almost be 50 years-old now, I can't vote, I can't do anything, I am treated as an alien, as an outsider, where is the justice?”(T4). Similarly, N.H also echoes the same statements by stating: “I was raised and nurtured in Lebanon, I know every bit of its history, why am I not a citizen?”(T5). N.H went on and shared his detachment from Sudan, the country of his father: “I carry a passport which I don't belong to, I don't even know who the president of Sudan is, I don't know anything about their history, I usually google about the country if I want to know any information... I only carry the passport to be able to move around, it doesn't mean anything to me”(T5). Additionally, he expressed how he feels about his Lebanese identity: “The Lebanese identity is carved in me, its values,

traditions, culture, all inside of my heart, but that doesn't grant me citizenship" (T5). Likewise, K.K. recalled his internal conflict: "I was constantly living in a dilemma. I was born and raised in Lebanon, but I am always seen as Palestinian, even though I have never been to Palestine"(T6). He further explained, "I faced a conflict of identity during my younger years, when I used to meet Palestinians who lived in the refugee camps of Beirut. They would regard me as a traitor... because I used to live in West Beirut, and that I was Christian, and not living in a refugee camp like they were"(T6). Reflecting on this broader struggle, K.K. added, "Many of us have an identity crisis as children and wonder where we belong and who we are. As a result, we often grow up feeling torn between two different worlds. This has the power to deeply affect our minds and shape our entire lives; it's not just a passing phase"(T6). As seen, many individuals feel disconnected from their ancestral homelands and face rejection in the countries where they have spent their whole lives. This dual sense of alienation causes individuals to feel like outsiders in both places, raising important questions about belonging and identity. As they face these obstacles, their stories reflect the emotional struggles of being caught between cultures, as well as the systematic injustices that deny them basic human rights.

### **3.12. Fear of Burial**

Individuals affected by Lebanon's nationality law bear a significant emotional and psychological burden as they worry about where they will be buried. This anxiety stems from a deeper sense of exclusion and statelessness, not just the search for an ultimate resting place. Many of these people are denied the fundamental right to citizenship, and even in death, they are denied the dignity of belonging to the place from which their mothers come from, and to the land they were born and raised in. During interviews, N.M. revealed profound frustration and a painful sense of dislocation: "Even if I die, I don't have a place to be buried in, I don't belong anywhere..." (T4). This comment reflects the distress and loneliness that comes with being stateless, especially in matters as intimate as burial. Without the right to citizenship, the children of Lebanese women face the awful fact that, even in death, they are outsiders. N.N. echoed this worry, recalling a painful experience: "One of my husband's brothers recently died. He was also stateless, his family couldn't even make him a death certificate, nor bury him, they are nobodies in Lebanon, even if their mother is Lebanese." This testimony demonstrates how a lack of legal recognition can extend beyond life, denying people the right to even the most basic acts

of closure and finality. The inability to be buried in one's homeland not only represents these people's persistent statelessness, but it also reinforces their sense of exclusion from the country which they should have by birthright and heritage. For many, the prospect of being unable to rest in their own land serves as a terrible reminder of the discrimination they have faced their entire lives.

### **3.13. Checkpoints obstacles**

For numerous individuals affected by Lebanon's nationality law, military and road checkpoints are more than just physical barriers; they represent the daily problems of statelessness and the fear of exposure. N.N. (T4) voiced her deep worries about facing army roadblocks, stating: "One of the most scarring situations was the fear of army checkpoints along the roads. I used to imagine that I would automatically be deported back to Sudan if they realized I was without papers." The fear restricted her movements and kept her in places where checkpoints were not present, significantly limiting her mobility and access to basic necessities. Similarly, N.A. pointed out the discrimination he experienced due to his lack of Lebanese citizenship: "Every time I passed a checkpoint, the officials would pull me over, inspect the car, and treat me as if I were a criminal. When I drove my mother's car, they occasionally accused me of stealing it, and refused to accept she was Lebanese, or thought I was an illegal in the nation" (T7). The constant scrutiny and accusations, such as being suspected of stealing his mother's car, worsened his feelings of alienation. These situations demonstrate how checkpoints may become sources of embarrassment and worry for individuals without full citizenship, thereby exacerbating the daily hardships of their stateless existence.

### **3.14. Fear of reporting**

The theme "Fear of Reporting" emphasizes a prevalent and highly disturbing reality for those affected by Lebanon's nationality law. Even in situations of serious abuse, many people are discouraged from seeking justice or protection due to a lack of legal recognition and the persistent possibility of deportation. This fear creates an impassable barrier, making stateless people exposed to further abuse and injury. N.N. offered a devastating experience of experiencing sexual, physical, and emotional abuse: "I got sexually abused several times, but feared to report it, because I was afraid to get deported



if they found out I am without any papers. I also got physically and emotionally abused from family members, but never able to report anything" (T4). Her statement exemplifies the imprisoning fear of legal implications, since reporting abuse could result in exposure and deportation rather than protection. Similarly, R.A. described her horrible experience of being sexually abused by a high-ranking official: "I was sent to a high ranking official, and instead of him helping me, he sexually abused me in his office. It was traumatizing, I don't have the right to report him, who will I even report him to? They could easily have me deported. I had to continue seeing him normally in public, because He was the only one who was able to remove the black spot of my folder" (T3). Her abuser, knowing her vulnerable situation, took advantage of her fear of reporting, leaving her unable to pursue justice. These experiences demonstrate how the nationality law not only deprives persons of their legal rights, but also renders them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The dread of reporting abuse due to the danger of deportation effectively silences victims, creating vicious cycles of violence and impunity.

### **3.15. The Role of Faith**

The majority of participants stated that faith was an important source of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. During difficult times, many people looked to their beliefs for hope and guidance, finding solace in their spiritual practices and community. This reliance on faith not only helped them cope with their difficulties, but it also gave them a sense of belonging and identity, allowing them to face the complex nature of their situation. Firstly, N.N. beautifully stated that: "My only hope lies with God, who gives me the strength to persevere. Without faith, I would be even more filled with despair. I will battle to the end of my life for my family's recognition"(T1). Additionally, N.N. ends her testimony with a strong message of hope: "I was a dead person before I started believing, I was in constant depression, you wouldn't recognize me, but God has made me stronger. If my son doesn't have any identity on earth, I am sure that He has an identity in heaven and in God's eyes, my son matters, even without papers, he is still a human being" (T1). D.D. also expressed that "God's hand was at work, giving us hope and strength throughout our most difficult times"(T2). Similarly, R.A. stated, "The only thing I belong to is my faith and my Christianity, I chose to be Christian"(T3). Furthermore, N.M. shared that "my only hope was my faith in God, faith was the only thing that kept

me going”(T4). She further reflected, “At first I blamed God, not knowing why I was created, but at the end I witnessed God's love was the only thing that fulfilled me and noticed his hand was with me at each moment”(T4). Finally, K.K. concluded, “thank God a million times. I don't know how it worked out at the end, but it did... thank God always”(T6). It is extremely inspiring to see how faith has given them hope in tough circumstances. Despite their difficulties and tribulations, they express gratitude to God and retain a positive outlook through their solid faith.

#### **4. Qualitative Analysis of Thematic Fields**

As seen in the interviews, Lebanon's nationality law has deeply affected every aspect of the interviewees's daily lives. No matter the background, all participants describe a lost feeling of identity, most of them have never visited their father's countries, nor do they feel a sense of belonging to it, for they have spent their whole lives in Lebanon. From analyzing the interviews and the thematic fields, one can notice that not everyone was affected in the same way. People who are already in vulnerable positions and are coming from poor backgrounds, such as in the case of N.N., R.A., D.D., and N.M., are more the most affected by this law than any of the other participants. As said by K.K, “In Lebanon, money is everything”, interviewees who came from already wealthy or economically stable families such as N.H., K.K., and N.A., were surely affected but not as deeply as the others. Nevertheless, one clear aspect is that no matter their economic status, they all were victims of racism, bullying and discrimination in Lebanon. All participants have witnessed the corruption that lies in the Lebanese system, and as seen with the economically stable interviewees, they were able to get around by paying bribes to the officials, or through clientelism. The already vulnerable individuals had to endure the consequences of the corruption. Regarding the theme of statelessness and documentation issues, a qualitative comparison of participants' experiences demonstrates a common battle with statelessness and bureaucratic obstacles caused by Lebanon's nationality regulations. N.N. was unable to pass on her Lebanese nationality to her son, while N.M. suffered with the absence of legal papers as a result of her father's disappearance. On the other hand, K.K.'s family was looking for documentation of Lebanese lineage in order to obtain citizenship. As well as, N.H. who emphasized the complicated and expensive international procedures required to preserve legal status. Regardless of their

backgrounds, all participants encountered identical challenges, emphasizing how the system restricts them from full civic engagement and denies them basic rights. Concerning the theme of Discrimination, Bullying and Racism, participants described strong experiences with discrimination based on their status, religion, and background, often feeling rejected while identifying as Lebanese. D.D., born in Lebanon, was denied First Communion because she is Sudanese. R.A., of Syrian descent, experienced racism in school and from authorities as an adult. N.M., who was born in Lebanon, expressed her frustration at seeing foreigners get citizenship through marriage while she was denied it. Others, like N.H., were mocked at embassies, and his child was harassed while renewing his passport. K.K., a Palestinian-Lebanese, endured hostility from his wife's family as well as legal discrimination. N.A., of Egyptian descent, was harassed at school, checkpoints, and the airport because of his identity. For the theme of educational barriers, we can clearly observe the disparity between the participants, demonstrating how financial stability and access to resources cause notable differences in educational outcomes. Those with nationality and financial resources, such as K.K. and N.A., found it easier to negotiate their pathways, whereas others, such as N.N., D.D., and R.A., faced significant challenges due to a lack of citizenship and appropriate documentation. This difference influences not just their current educational options, but also their long-term goals and potential for success. In respect to employment, K.K. and N.H. both had secured steady jobs but experienced discrimination because of their legal status. N.H. was able to work abroad, while K.K. found work as a teacher in Lebanon. Others, such as N.M., D.D., and R.A., were forced to work under the table because they could not afford to leave the country or lacked the necessary papers. This difference demonstrates how financial stability or specific professional roles can allow some access to formal employment, while others are imprisoned in precarious work situations due to a lack of legal status. Concerning healthcare access, it is severely limited for individuals lacking legal status, forcing them to choose between seeking expensive, inadequate private care or going without treatment at all. Participants such as N.N. and D.D. emphasize the emotional strain that this uncertainty causes, as they are concerned for their families' well-being. N.M.'s experience demonstrates how substandard medical care due to undocumented status can exacerbate health problems; following an unsatisfactory operation in a private, unregulated clinic, her illness worsened, leaving her in constant pain. She cannot afford

better healthcare facilities because she is already impoverished but others are able to pay for private hospitals. As well as K.K.'s case which demonstrates the contradiction of contributing to social security but not receiving its benefits, highlighting how the healthcare system discriminates against non-citizens. These narratives highlight the growing inequalities and increased health risks faced by marginalized communities that lack legal status. As for the theme of corruption and bribery, the testimonies indicate a systemic culture of corruption in Lebanon, where individuals must navigate a landscape of bribery and political ties in order to gain legal status and citizenship. Participants such as N.N. and R.A. demonstrate how financial assets and connections shape the ability to settle legal difficulties, frequently leading to exploitation and greater marginalization. R.A.'s painful experience with an official exhibits power abuse and demonstrates how vulnerability can be used. N.M., K.K., and N.A. all emphasize the widespread problems in Lebanon's court system, recounting their bad interactions with lawyers and judges who take advantage of their weak positions. This raises an important question: if the institutions designed to provide protection and justice are biased and dishonest, who can protect these people's rights? K.K.'s experience of obtaining naturalization through political connections demonstrates the arbitrary nature of Lebanon's citizenship laws, which has no logical justification. In addition, both K.K. and R.A. emphasize that the naturalization sprees were chaotic and driven exclusively by political goals, favoring persons with connections or those perceived to be beneficial to demographic balance. This demonstrates a structural prejudice that perpetuates inequality, as many people remain denied citizenship privileges owing to a lack of political power or status. In regards to the theme of psychological and emotional toll, individuals portrayed deep emotional and psychological consequences as a result of their lack of legal rights, manifesting as powerlessness, shame, and despair. Participants such as N.N. and D.D. demonstrate how their concerns and feelings of invisibility are caused by a system that marginalizes them, compromising their sense of identity and well-being. N.N. also expresses how her stateless husband has lost all hope, and now feels demotivated to find a solution for his stateless child. Additionally, N.M.'s suicidal thoughts and toxic coping techniques illustrate the severe mental health issues faced by those in similar situations. The accounts depict a cycle of trauma in which close family ties are strained by societal stigma, as shown with R.A.'s brother, who was dealing with drug abuse as a result of their

circumstances. The emotional load extends to children, such as the children of K.K., who must navigate the stigma associated with their identity, forcing them to conceal their backgrounds for fear of being judged. For the theme of Family-Building Struggles and Generational Impact, interviewees expressed tremendous pessimism and dread for their children's futures in an environment where citizenship is unattainable. N.N.'s reluctance to have additional children derives from the realization that they would inherit a life empty of identity and rights. Similarly, N.M.'s experience with pregnancy and abortion exemplifies the hard reality that marginalized people face when compelled to make difficult decisions because of their status. K.K. and N.A. discuss the difficulties of forming relationships and the necessity to excel in order to overcome cultural biases associated with their identities. The hardships of D.D. and R.A. highlight the complexity of marriage and citizenship; the absence of children hinders their approaches to legal recognition. These experiences reflect a cycle of marginalization that harms not just current lives but also future generations, creating ripple effects along through generations, such as in the case of K.K., N.N., and N.H. The failure to gain citizenship disturbs family dynamics and instills a widespread fear of spreading a legacy of exclusion. Concerning the theme of political and historical context, interviewees have explained that conflicts and power dynamics have resulted in policies that marginalize them. N.N. discusses how political stagnation has hindered legal progress for stateless people, whereas N.M. links economic sufferings to the larger crisis, emphasizing the huge wealth disparities that create insecurity. Additionally, N.H.'s frustration during the 2019 protests exemplifies the marginalization felt by non-Lebanese citizens, who are frequently barred from participating in political debate while being touched by the situation. K.K.'s observations on Palestinian identity show how historical events and regional politics shape their status, with past decisions influencing present realities. He discusses how sectarian concerns affect naturalization policies, specifically fear about demographic shifts. With respect to the theme of Migration and settlement in Lebanon, it is shaped by complex political, social, and economic factors, influencing who can find refuge and who remains trapped in a cycle of marginalization. While some individuals manage to leave in search of better opportunities and stability such as N.H and N.A., many others are unable to escape the constraints of their legal status and socio-economic conditions such as all the rest of the interviewees. This disparity highlights the challenges faced by marginalized

communities, whose hopes for a better future are often hindered by systemic barriers and ongoing conflict. As for the theme of identity crisis, many interviewees indicate a strong disconnection from their ancestral nationalities, feeling alien in both their home countries and the countries where they live. For example, D.D. does not identify with Sudan, whereas R.A. feels rejected by Lebanon, resulting in a sensation of belonging nowhere. N.M. expresses a strong frustration with her lack of citizenship despite being born and raised in Lebanon. This gap fuels resentment and a pervasive sense of injustice. K.K. shows the internal tension that Palestinians confront in Lebanon, given that they are perceived as outsiders despite growing up there. He and others describe a collective identity crisis in which they are pulled between cultures and struggle to find their place. This twofold separation emphasizes the emotional toll of structural exclusion, illustrating how closely personal and political identities are interconnected. Regarding the fear of burial, The narratives show how Lebanon's nationality law affects individuals emotionally and psychologically even in the afterlife. N.M.'s statement, "“Even if I die, I don't have a place to be buried in, I don't belong anywhere”” expresses a profound sense of displacement and statelessness, even in death. The inability to obtain a burial place in one's birthplace represents a full detachment from one's mother nation. N.N.'s story highlights the humiliation imposed by the law, in which families are unable to get death certificates or burial rights for loved ones, exacerbating the sense of isolation and marginalization that dominates every part of their life. In analyzing the theme of Checkpoint Obstacles, N.N. and N.A.'s testimonials show how roadblocks increase the sense of isolation and insecurity for stateless people in Lebanon. N.N.'s fear of being deported at army checkpoints led to self-imposed limitations that greatly limited her freedom of movement and access to necessary services. N.A.'s experiences of being viewed as a criminal while having an international driver's license demonstrate how a lack of Lebanese citizenship leads to persistent mistrust and discrimination. Regarding the theme of Fear of Reporting, interviews depicted the systemic risks that stateless people experience in Lebanon. N.N. and R.A.'s testimonies indicate an intense connection between legal status and the likelihood of reporting abuse; fear of deportation acts as a powerful deterrent, resulting in widespread underreporting of events. The incidence of various abuses mentioned by N.N. suggests that such experiences are common among stateless people. Furthermore, R.A.'s meeting with a high-ranking official demonstrates a

lack of trust in protective institutions, as she sees her abuser as her sole option for handling legal obstacles. Concluding with the last theme, given that these testimonies were conducted in a humanistic approach through which people felt comfortable sharing their stories, I felt compelled to include the topic of faith. It surprised me to hear their devastating stories, followed by such unwavering hope. This was truly inspirational and deserves a place in this dissertation. N.N., D.D., and R.A. all emphasize how their faith sustained them and provided a feeling of identity and belonging. N.M.'s path from questioning to finding fulfillment in God's love exemplifies the transformative power of faith. K.K.'s thankfulness to God, despite the challenges he experienced, exemplifies how spiritual beliefs provided consolation and endurance. After having reflected upon the thematic fields presented in the interviewees, I will now be uncovering in the upcoming chapters the historical and legal complexity of Lebanon's discriminatory nationality law. The study will provide a better knowledge of how the country's history, legal framework, and external influences have shaped its citizenship and nationality rights. These chapters are essential as they provide context for understanding why Lebanon's nationality laws remain resistant to reform, despite ongoing social, political, and economic challenges.

## **Chapter II: Historical Brief of Lebanon: Uncovering the Roots of Tensions**

### **1. Overview of Lebanon's History**

To better understand the origin of the nationality law, one needs to understand the political context which Lebanon was set in. For many years, Lebanon has served as a playground for powerful nations seeking control over the area from Ottoman Empire rule (1516-1920) to French Mandate (1920-1943). Due to its advantageous location, it served as a hub for numerous empires and colonial rulers, all of whom had a lasting effect on the political and social structure of the nation. This outside interference increased tensions between the various religious communities in Lebanon, planting the seeds of a conflict that would eventually come to life. During the Ottoman Empire rule, Lebanon was home to two main religions, Maronites; an eastern Catholic particular church originating from Syria in the 5th century (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024), and the Druze; a monotheistic religion which combines numerous Christian, Jewish, and Islamic doctrines (Minority Rights Group, 2024). In an effort to obliterate the Lebanese identity, the Ottomans split Lebanon into districts, adding or dividing areas as they saw fit in order to weaken the nation. They even annexed a portion of Lebanon to Syrian districts. Moreover,

they created religious conflicts by attributing sectarian differences and designating rulers accordingly. Thousands of people were killed in a feudal sectarian conflict between Christians and Druze in 1860 (History of Lebanon, Ottomans- French- Independence 1516-1943, n.d.). Additionally, following the Ottoman Empire's defeat by the Allies, led by France and the United Kingdom, in World War I (1914–18), which included Syria and Lebanon as part of the empire, its territories came under the control of the United Kingdom and France. France was officially granted the mandate for Lebanon and Syria by the League of Nations in 1923.

## 2. The Effects of WWI on Lebanon

World War I had a catastrophic impact on Lebanon, which was still an Ottoman territory. During the war, Mount Lebanon and its surrounding areas experienced a famine crisis due to drought and poor growth. Ottoman Mount Lebanon had the highest per capita mortality rate of any delimited region during World War I, with more than one in every three people dying. Hunger and accompanying diseases destroyed the civilian population of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, killing around 200,000 people (Auman Pitts, 2021). During the Great Famine, Mount Lebanon's largely Christian population requested assistance from France. The Ottomans and Allies both used the 'famine weapon' against the Lebanese. The Allies had shut down all ports, including the main supply route to Lebanon, which relied largely on imports (Karlsson, 2009). The British believed that starvation would start an Arab revolution against the Ottoman Empire, causing it to fall from within. During the battle, discontent with the Ottomans and Arab nationalism increased (Karlsson, 2009). Syrians began collaborating with Sharif Husayn's army, led by his son, Prince Faysal (Faysal bin Al-Hussain bin Ali Al-Hashemi, 1883-1933). The Allies encouraged Arabs to rise up against the Ottoman Turks who supported the Germans, which Prince Faysal and the Hashemite family of Mecca did in 1916 (Thompson, 2000). This became known as the Arab Revolt. In October 1918, the Allies and Arab troops entered Damascus and Beirut. By the end of the month, an armistice was signed with the Ottomans. By November, the war was over. The military administration declared liberation and independence. Muslims in Lebanon and Syria supported a Syrian-Arab Kingdom commanded by Hashemite Prince Faysal, while Christian Lebanese preferred a separate state (Thompson, 2000). In parallel, socially and politically active women petitioned the Syrian Congress for women's suffrage, rejecting a paternalistic



administration. Thompson (2000), stated: "In essence, women favored universal democracy over both fraternal republicanism and the male hierarchy of paternalism". The League of Nations' European peacemakers changed their minds, and French rule was unilaterally imposed on the territory, dividing it into two countries, Syria and Lebanon, with their good will. The mandate was to prepare individuals for self-determination, similar to Woodrow Wilson's approach. The French were well-received in Lebanon, where many saw them as liberators.

### 3. The French Mandate and its Influence

Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the League of Nations appointed France to rule Lebanon and Syria. The 1920 Sykes-Picot Agreement, which divided the former Ottoman territories into French and British spheres of influence, placed Syria and Lebanon under French authority and were generally managed as a unified entity throughout the majority of the mandate period (Karlsson, 2009). In 1924, the Ottoman legal system was officially abolished. France took over a nation that had been terribly fragmented and traumatized by the horrors of World War I and the Great Famine of 1915-1918, both of which had severed the social order, and left people longing for a normalcy in the country (Thompson, 2000). Interestingly, the French controlled the Lebanese grounds indirectly through intermediaries, almost feudally. Local elites, including tribal sheikhs, religious patriarchs, and rural landowners, supported French High Commissioner Henri Gouraud against Syrian King Faysal in the 1920s and were rewarded for their cooperation and allegiance. "The French fostered a neo-feudal landowning class in both Syria and Lebanon with economic and political power that far surpassed that of the Ottoman era. In exchange for political loyalty, the French awarded large tracts of Ottoman imperial land to tribal shaykhs, village chiefs, and landlords in the plains of Lebanon and the north and northeast of Syria" (Fieldhouse, 2006, p.53-54). Although the political structure was founded on republican rights and representation, political power was dominated by paternalistic privilege. Prior to French intervention, the society was experiencing a paternalistic crisis, resulting in exacerbated gender conflicts. The first High Commissioner, Henri Gouraud, controlled through relationships with religious leaders, such as the Maronite Church in Lebanon, and other elites, employing a "divide and conquer" strategy that exacerbated sectarian differences (Fieldhouse, 2006, p.44).

However, a shift occurred when a leftist government took power in France under the leadership of General Maxime Weygand (April 1923 - November 1924) and Maurice Serrail (November 1924 - December 1925). As Karlsson (2009) stated, "This implicated a new policy with "France's colonial children" where "such a state would rule not through favors to mediating elites, but as Foreign Minister Aristide Briand put it, through respect for the Rights of Man". Although Maxime Weygand and Maurice Serrail utilized republican rhetoric, their government in Lebanon and Syria remained paternalistic and colonial, with the French serving as "tutors" to the local population, who had no role in their leadership (Fieldhouse, 2006, p.45). Weygand attempted to form partnerships with the middle classes rather than the traditional elites, and he excluded the Maronite Church from political decision-making in Lebanon. Serrail went much further, strongly eliminating religious leaders from political power and aiming to eliminate sectarian quotas in Lebanese elections. Sunni Muslims embraced this approach, as they had been under-represented in the 1921 census and regarded it as an opportunity to increase their political dominance (Fieldhouse, 2006, p.45). On August 1920, the French created "Greater Lebanon" with the help of the Maronite community by combining the ancient province of Lebanon (Mont-Liban, which was mostly Maronite) with the coastal areas of Tyre, Tripoli, Sidon, and Beirut, as well as the Bekaa Valley, which was mostly Muslim. On the other hand, Syria and the Lebanese Muslims were against this and insisted that Syria maintain sovereignty over the newly acquired territory. The French and Maronite communities objected, claiming that Lebanon's natural borders were determined by the newly drawn limits of "Greater Lebanon." The Druze were against the French establishment of Greater Lebanon, because it established an institutionalized Catholic hegemony and separated Lebanese and Syrian Druze politically (Minority Rights Group, 2024). This decision was welcomed with different points of views: the Maronites, who had a strong heritage of supporting France, applauded this and enjoyed favor for the following 20 years as long as France retained the mandate. The population was split roughly evenly between Muslims and Christians, and a sizable portion of it preferred to be a part of a larger Syrian or Arab state rather than be under French administration or be in an independent Lebanon (Minority Rights Group, 2024). Over two decades of conflicts and unrest followed the impasse that resulted. The arrival of the French to Lebanon had both its benefits and negative effects, public institutions and communications were

enhanced, schooling was increased, and higher education was virtually entirely under the control of religious organizations under the French occupation (Barnett et al., 2024).

#### 4. The Lebanese Constitution (1926)

During Henri de Jouvenel's appointment (December 23, 1925 - June 23, 1926), the Lebanese constitution was established. On May 23, 1926, the League of Nations pushed for its adoption. Lebanon's high sectarian tensions led to a rejection of non-sectarian politics. Additionally, De Jouvenel restored cooperation with the Maronite church, reinforcing its role in French control (Barnett et al., 2024). The Lebanese Constitution was based on the constitution of the French Third Republic. The constitution established a parliamentary government with a French High Commissioner who could dismiss the Chamber of Deputies, annul laws, suspend the constitution, and maintain control over the military, police, and foreign affairs (Barnett et al., 2024). The French created a confessional governance model to serve the needs of Lebanon's various religious communities. Article 24 of the constitution requires the interim allocation of posts based on confessionalism (A type of consociational governance in which religious sub-communities share institutional and political power in a proportionate manner) in an effort to preserve equality between Christians and Muslims, but it makes no mention of how these positions are to be distributed (Barnett et al., 2024). It does, however, provide that Muslims will occupy half the seats and Christians the other half. The complete text of Article 24 is as follows: "Until the Chamber of Deputies issues an Electoral Law, outside the sectarian record, representative seats are distributed according to the following rules:

- Equally between Christians and Muslims.
- Proportional between the sects of both sides.
- Proportional among districts.

Exceptionally, and once, representative seats vacant at the date of publishing this Law, and the seats created by the Electoral Law, are filled totally by appointment by a two-thirds majority of the National Détente Government, in implementation of the equality between the Christians and the Moslems, according to the National Détente Document. The Electoral Law determines the details of the application of this Article" (Lebanon 1926

(Rev. 2004) Constitution - Constitute, n.d.). Based on this constitution, the legislative power is to be controlled by the parliament, whose members are chosen in part by the French and in part by the electorate, while executive power is granted to the president and his cabinet of ministers. Furthermore, the early Lebanese political regime was influenced by both Ottoman and French forces. The French influence was both direct, through the High Commissioner, and indirect, through cultural and educational exchanges, with many Lebanese politicians studying law in France (Thompson, 2000). The Ottoman influence was clear in the allotment of legislative seats based on religious groups, which began with Ottoman elections in 1876. The constitution established universal male suffrage, but the two-stage electoral procedure favored political elites. Furthermore, procedures governing secret balloting were often broken, a practice that persists today (Thompson, 2000). Throughout the years, Lebanon acknowledged eighteen distinct religious groups from both the Muslim and Christian faiths, each of which is thought to comprise a sizable Lebanese population. Seats are distributed based on religious distribution since parliamentary representation is set up to mirror these divisions in society. The goal of this system of governance is to avoid giving any one religion group preference over another (Lebanon 1926 (Rev. 2004) Constitution - Constitute, n.d.). Lebanon's last official census took place in 1932, when it showed a population of 875,252, with approximately 53% Christians. Subsequent censuses were unofficial; in 1956, the population was reported to be 1,411,416, with 54% Christians and 44% Muslims (Raji et al., 2018). Most recent estimates indicate that 61% of people in Lebanon identify as Muslims and 33.7% as Christians. The Muslim population is divided roughly equally between Sunni (30.6%) and Shi'a (30.5%) adherents, with lesser proportions of people following the Ismaili and Alawite sects. Christians from Maronite Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Melkite, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, and Protestant churches can be found in Lebanon. Less than 1% of Lebanese people identify as members of smaller religious minorities, such as Judaism, Baha'i, Buddhism, and Hinduism (>0.1%). An additional 5.7% of the population is Druze (Cultural Atlas Editors, 2015). Conducting a census in Lebanon remains extremely sensitive due to sectarian differences and potential pressure from groups concerned about demographic shifts. Additionally, the French Mandate over Syria and Lebanon attempted to demarcate the borders between Lebanon and Syria, but only completed around 80% of the work, hence, creating a space for conflicts to eventually

emerge, as witnessed in the Syrian occupation of Lebanon from 1976 to 2005 (Kader, 2012). Consequently, despite the benefits brought by the French mandate, it is evident that it left the Lebanese grounds open to clashes and disputes. This vulnerability was exacerbated by the confessionalism system, which introduced religion into the political sphere and caused tensions among the Lebanese people. Additionally, the Lebanese constitution defines the family in a patriarchal perspective, with male lineage being the legal norm (Joseph, 1999). According to Joseph (1999), this has strengthened certain patriarchal social traditions that were more adaptable in the past when maternal lineage was equally important. All 18 recognised religious sects in Lebanon accept patrilineal and patriarchal customs. The centrality of kinship in Lebanese culture, one of the few commonalities connecting Lebanon's heterogeneous society, adds to the emphasis on male lineage (Joseph, 1999). To sum up, the confessional system created by the French mandate in Lebanon was intended to allow for the harmonious coexistence of Lebanon's religious and ethnic groupings by allocating authority based on demographic weight. Nonetheless, Lebanon's fragile sectarian balance within a minority society renders it particularly vulnerable to both internal and external factors. Minor changes in the political, diplomatic, or demographic climate in Lebanon can cause widespread uncertainty and instability.

## 5. The Road to Independence

The Mandate was unilaterally terminated on November 8, 1943, when the Chamber of Deputies amended the Lebanese Constitution, eliminating the articles referring to it and changing the French High Commissioner's specific powers. This came about following the election of President Bechara El Khoury and the appointment of Prime Minister Riad al-Solh. As a response, the French detained the Prime Minister, the President, and other members of the cabinet and banished them to an abandoned fortress. This episode brought together the opinions of Muslims and Christians regarding the mandate and sparked widespread street protests and worldwide pressure for the release of the Lebanese leaders (Barnett et al., 2024). In 1943, an unwritten agreement entitled the National Pact came to life between the two most prominent Christian and Muslim figures at the time. As a result, according to custom, the speaker of the house was to be a Shiaa Muslim, the prime

minister a Sunni Muslim, and the president of the republic a Maronite (Barnett et al., 2024). It is crucial to comprehend those details and observe how ever since its inception, religion dominates the political sphere of Lebanon, and is deeply-rooted in its bylaws. Following independence, Lebanon witnessed a variety of political perspectives on foreign policy (Khoury, 2021). Most Lebanese Muslims, together with the Druze and Greek Orthodox populations, supported Arab unity while acknowledging Lebanon's distinct role due to its confessional system and commercial importance. Radical advocates for a Syrian-Lebanese union opposed the separation of the two states on the extreme left. On the other hand, many Christians, particularly Maronites, emphasized Lebanon's historical ties to the West, with some rejecting any Arab political influence and advocating for a strong Western orientation in Lebanon (Khoury, 2021).

#### 6. The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)

Over the years, Lebanon has been heavily influenced by the changing dynamics of the Middle East, which have repeatedly worsened existing conflicts between its Christian and Muslim communities. The country's strategic location and diversified religious landscape made it a target for regional and international powers looking to exercise influence. Lebanon entered into a political crisis in 1958, fuelled by the growth of Arab nationalism and the Cold War, which exacerbated social tensions (United Nations Observation Group in Lebanon, n.d.). These disputes eventually led to the commencement of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, which was destructive and highlighted the country's deep sectarian divides (Sune, 2011). The Lebanese Civil War was both an internal Lebanese issue and a regional struggle involving numerous regional and international entities. It revolved around some of the problems that dominated Middle Eastern politics in the late 20th century, such as the Palestine-Israel conflict, Cold War competition, Arab nationalism, and political Islam. Conflicts over these topics overlapped with long-standing disagreements among the Lebanese political elite and some segments of the population about sectarian division of power, national identity, socio economic justice, and Lebanon's political connections. The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) arose from tensions between Lebanon's Christian and Muslim populations, which were exacerbated by socioeconomic inequities and the existence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). As explained by K.K. (T6) who was living in Beirut in that period of time: “Beirut

was divided into two parts during the war, East Beirut which was mainly muslim populated, and West Beirut, which was the christian part of Beirut.” D.D also recounted how the civil war exacerbated their situation: “The community which we were living in was mostly Christians, and so they treated us differently, and even judged us, due to the fact that my father was Muslim. During that time there was the civil war, as you know Beirut was divided East Beirut and West Beirut based on religious dominance, and so the hatred in that time was at its peak” (T2). The conflict began with Christians opposing the PLO and Muslims and communists supporting it, resulting in heavy violence and a split Lebanon. Israel and Syria intervened, initially supporting the Christians. In 1982, Israel invaded and drove the PLO out of Beirut. The war concluded in 1989 with the execution of the Taif Accord (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). Approximately 90,000 individuals died during the course of 15 years of fighting (Sune, 2011). The Taif agreement aimed to end the conflict, preserve the Lebanese state, and eliminate confessionalism. It advocated for equal power and "a life in common" for all Lebanese citizens. Political reforms included a new power-sharing mechanism that changed the number of Christian-Muslim seats in parliament to 50:50 and high-ranking positions to 5:5. The agreement delegated implementation to Syria and did not specify a deadline for reforms, instead referring to a gradual process (Bennet, 2013). Consequently, Confessionalism was not eliminated, but rather reproduced under a more balanced formula. This resulted in continued competition among religious groups, leading to further divides and conflicts (Bennet, 2013). According to K.K. (T6), “we faced a lot of racism and that’s a recurrent problem in Lebanon, the mentality is very wrong...especially because of the whole Taif Agreement and how the government is divided.” Hence, as described by K.K., the Taif accords exacerbated the already growing tension between religious groups. Interestingly, in an interview titled "Living Together: A History Of Christians & Muslims In the Middle East," Lebanese historian Charles Al-Hayek stated that Christians and Muslims in Lebanon were previously referred to as "Milk Brothers," symbolizing the two communities' strong connection. This word refers to a tradition in which a Christian mother might nurse the child of a Muslim friend, and vice versa, demonstrating their close bond (Hayek & Sarde After Dinner, 2023). It is essential to highlight that over the years, the Lebanese people have not harbored animosity against one another due to religious differences. Instead, the ruling authorities have constantly

fuelled this tension by integrating religion into every element of political life, producing a culture of perpetual conflict.

#### 7. The Impact of Neighboring Conflicts on Lebanon

Over the years, several regional wars, most notably the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Syrian Civil War, have had a tremendous impact on Lebanon, affecting almost every aspect of the country. Firstly, the war between Israel and Palestine began with the creation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, which sparked the first Arab-Israeli War (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). The large influx of Palestinians into Lebanon began, following the Nakba, in which 750,000 Palestinians were displaced during Israel's establishment. This initial wave was later augmented by new immigration following the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, in which Israel occupied more Palestinian lands. Over time, repeated waves of refugees have resulted in a stateless community of some 270,000 people, who today live in 12 camps around Lebanon. Both opposition commanders and refugees have sought safety in Lebanon to avoid escalating Israeli attack (Cordall, 2024). According to a report conducted by a team of researchers in the American University of Beirut in 2010, the Palestinian community in Lebanon is best described as “one of protracted (long-term) refugees rather than refugees fleeing from recent conflict” (Chaaban et al., 2010). Secondly, the Syrian conflict also had massive consequences on Lebanon. In March 2011, pro-democracy protests occurred in Syria, threatening President Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian authority. The government responded with ruthless repression, prompting the establishment of opposition militias. By 2012, the conflict had grown into a full-fledged civil war (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024a). As a result, Lebanon witnessed an enormous influx of Syrian refugees. According to the UNHCR (2022), Lebanon's government estimates that 1.5 million Syrian refugees live in Lebanon, with around 815,000 registered with UNHCR. Consequently, Lebanon, which was already facing severe political and socio economic issues, now hosts the region's two largest refugee populations. The entrance of these populations put the country's already limited resources and infrastructure to the test, aggravating existing pressures and complicated efforts to address internal challenges. Taking as an example the case of K.K. (T6) and R.A. (T3), whose fathers are from Palestine and Syria, respectively, lead lives strongly influenced by current regional hostilities. Both are considered foreigners in Lebanon, labeled as refugees and rejected by many members of the Lebanese population.



Their stories demonstrate how political instability and war continue to exacerbate exclusion and marginalization. After having analyzed the historical context and sequence of events that have contributed to current tensions in Lebanon, this paper will look at how these circumstances have shaped the country's nationality law and the reasons behind its lack of reform. Furthermore, it will discuss Lebanon's position on international human rights norms and how this affects its legal and social policies.

### **Chapter III: Citizenship and Nationality Rights in Lebanon**

#### 1. Understanding Citizenship and Nationality

According to Butenschon et al. (2000), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) distinguishes between nationality and citizenship. Article 15 of the UDHR (United Nations, n.d.) states that;

- I. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
- II. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

As stated by Karlsson (2009), the concept of citizenship originated with the birth of the modern nation state after the peace of Westphalia in 1648, as well as the social contract (Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jaques Rousseau, and John Locke), in which people agree to give up some of their natural freedoms in exchange for civil rights and the establishment of civil society. Rania Maktabi discusses that citizenship confers all-encompassing rights and is governed by a single authority (Butenschon et al., 2000). Citizenship provides access to state resources based on political, social, and economic modernisation levels. Civil resources include legal protection and access to courts, social resources like welfare, education, and health services, political resources such as voting and representation, and economic resources including land and water use, work permits, state administration jobs, legal inheritance, and property rights. Citizenship rights include the right to reside permanently inside the state's territory (Butenschon et al., 2000). According to the OHCHR (2021), "The right to a nationality is a fundamental human right. It implies the right of each individual to acquire, change and retain a nationality". The Lebanese Court of Cassation has ruled that nationality is the formation of a political and legal relationship

between an individual and the state. Confirming an individual's nationality means recognition of their links to a specific community or state. In other terms, it is a legal relationship between an individual and a specific state (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021).

## 2. The Origin of the Nationality Law

The Nationality Act of 1925 established Lebanese nationality law, which defines citizenship rights and obligations and establishes who is eligible for them. According to the law, under specific conditions, citizenship can be obtained through naturalization, paternal descent, or birth within the territory. The discriminatory nature of this law, particularly with regard to its rules governing the transfer of nationality to spouses and children, is a noteworthy feature. Lebanese women married to foreign citizens are unable to pass on their nationality to their husbands or children, whereas Lebanese men can confer their nationality to their foreign spouses and children born overseas. Articles 1, 2, and 10 of Law No. 15 of January 19, 1925, of the French High Commissioner, who took over legislative authority in the State of Greater Lebanon, are applicable to Lebanese nationals by nationality of origin. This decision says the following:

“Article 1:

Is considered Lebanese :

- Every person born of a Lebanese father .
- Every person born in the Greater Lebanon territory and did not acquire a foreign nationality , upon birth , by affiliation .
- Every person born in the Greater Lebanon territory of unknown parents or parents of unknown nationality .

Article 2:

The illegitimate child whose nationality has not been established during his minority shall have the Lebanese nationality if one of his parents in respect of whom affiliation is first established and if the proof of affiliation regarding both the father and the mother results from a single contract or judgment , the child shall acquire the nationality of the father should the latter be Lebanese

Article 10:

1st While preserving the option rights provided for in the Peace Treaty signed at Lausanne in 1923, is considered Lebanese every person born on the Greater Lebanon territory of a Lebanese father also born in the said territory and was in November 1914 an Ottoman subject”(Decree No15 on Lebanese Nationality, 19 January, 1925). Those articles suggest paternal dominance over the citizenship domain, giving the utmost priority to the Father figure, which means that obtaining Lebanese nationality is linked to patriarchal lineage, resulting in clear discrimination against Lebanese women. As seen above, a man can freely confer his Lebanese nationality to his foreign spouse and children; however, a Lebanese woman cannot do the same unless her children are born out of wedlock (Decree No15 on Lebanese Nationality, 19 January, 1925).

### 3. Citizenship during the Ottoman Empire

In 1918, European forces divided the Ottoman Empire, following a period of westernization and reforms in the nineteenth century. Mahmud II (Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1807-1839) implemented economic, social, and religious reforms that centralized the state, regulated property ownership, and limited the power of religious clerks. The reforms challenged the idea of Muslim supremacy (Lapidus, 2002). In 1840, new law codes for administration and economy were created, mostly based on Western laws, with Western-style courts. In 1870, the Mejlle civil law was created, marking the first attempt to codify the Islamic Shariah. This was superseded by the secular Family Law of 1917. The Family Law of 1917 equalized the political standing of various religious communities, including the Muslim sect, which had traditionally held a privileged position in this field. The law enhanced Muslim women's rights in areas including marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Flournoy & Hudson, 1929). The Ottoman Citizenship Law (Tabiyet-I Osmaniye Kanunnamesi (the TOK)) was issued on January 19, 1869, inspired by the French citizenship law of 1851. It regulated many aspects of modern citizenship, including naturalization (Articles 3 and 4), surrender of citizenship (Articles 5), and the impact of marriage on women's citizenship (Articles 7) which noted the following; Article 7, “The woman who, while an Ottoman subject, marries a foreigner may return to her original nationality if, within three years following the date of her husband’s death, she petitions for it. [...]”(Flournoy & Hudson, 1929). Women were granted dependent citizenship through the Citizenship Law of 1869, as was the case in

other Western countries until the 20th century. This was mainly accomplished to prevent immigration (Bredbenner, 2024). The Citizenship Law reduced Muslim citizens' prior elevated status. Article 27 of the 1876 Constitution further stated: 'All subjects of the Empire are called Ottomans, without distinction, whatever faith they profess; the status of an Ottoman is acquired and lost, according to conditions specified by law' (Art 8) (Flournoy & Hudson, 1929). Moreover, the Ottoman concept of citizenship relied on geographical affiliation (*jus soli*) rather than ethnicity or religion. According to Article 9 of the TOK (Butenschon et al., 2000), anybody who lived on Ottoman territory at the time of its promulgation were deemed Ottoman citizens if they practiced one of the three monotheistic religions. Therefore, the TOK established Ottoman citizenship based on descent (*jus sanguinis*), the law of blood (Art 21).

#### 4. Analysis of the Impact of the Ottoman Empire and the French Mandate

By analyzing the complicated interplay of sectarian governance under the French Mandate and Ottoman authority, one can notice how their presence highly contributed to Lebanon's nationality law. The Ottoman Empire's approach to citizenship was primarily focused on geographical association and religious identity, resulting in a fragmented notion of nationality. When the French took control, they reinforced these differences by formalizing sectarianism in the governmental system, allocating power along religious lines, and giving preference to specific sects. This dual legacy of Ottoman and French influences has made it difficult to amend laws, especially the nationality law, because entrenched sectarian interests oppose changes that could upset the balance of power. As a result, Lebanon's nationality law remains essentially unchanged, particularly in its discriminatory provisions. This is a direct result of sectarianism's historical entrenchment and a lack of national cohesion, making it difficult to reach the wide agreement required for effective legal reforms. The long-lasting effects of both Ottoman and French administrative legacies continue to define the political environment, impeding efforts to resolve statelessness and promote equal citizenship rights for all Lebanese.

#### 5. Jus Sanguinis- Right of Blood

Lebanese law states that acquiring Lebanese nationality at birth is based largely on the nationality of the father (*jus sanguinis*), and secondarily, in some situations, on birth on Lebanese territory (*jus soli*). When a birth is registered, the law automatically confers

Lebanese nationality (Ruwad Frontiers Association, 2011). Firstly, *Jus sanguinis* signifies that a child's nationality is bestowed based on his or her father's nationality. The Lebanese Nationality Law is founded on patriarchal blood bonds, which means that acquiring Lebanese nationality is tied to patriarchal lineage rather than matriarchal lineage (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021). Furthermore, the Lebanese Nationality Law distinguishes between legitimate children (legitimate filiation) and illegitimate children (natural filiation). *Jus sanguinis* on the father's side is accepted as a foundation for determining the original nationality of a legitimate child (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021). Natural or illegitimate filiation results from physical contact between a man and a woman outside of marriage. A child born from this relationship is referred to as a natural or illegitimate child. An illegitimate child can be granted Lebanese citizenship if the father is Lebanese in two cases: when paternal filiation is established to a minor child prior to maternal affiliation, and when paternity and maternity are established simultaneously. Moreover, article 15 of the Personal Status Records Registration Law, promulgated on December 7, 1951, states that if a child is born illegitimately, the birth certificate must be completed by the child's sponsor, a doctor, or a midwife. In this scenario, no mention is made of his or her father's name unless he personally recognises paternity or has delegated this responsibility to someone else. If the father refuses to acknowledge the child, the person producing the birth certificate names the illegitimate child. Furthermore, the birth certificate preparer is not permitted to mention the mother's name unless she confirms that she is the child's mother or by court order (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021). Additionally, an illegitimate child may receive Lebanese nationality from the mother if she is the first to recognise the child and is Lebanese at the time of recognition. If the father later recognises the child, the child retains Lebanese nationality, even if the father's nationality differs (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a). In the words of Elie, a son of a Lebanese woman married to non-registered person who was interviewed by the National Commission for Lebanese Women (2021), "I asked my father to agree with the allegation that I was not his son and that I was an illegitimate child for my mother to register me on her name as an illegitimate child so that I can obtain Lebanese citizenship, work and travel like other Lebanese". Likewise, Sobhia, a Lebanese woman married to a foreigner, also expressed her frustration: "My husband left me two months after my marriage while I

was pregnant. I gave birth to my son, who is now five years old. I don't know anything about my husband, and I don't have a copy of his passport. I registered my son as an illegitimate child to have an identity card and nationality and to be able to enter school. I'm sick of my life, and I want to secure my son" (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a). In the case of D.D. (T2), she also shares: "People advised my mother to declare that we don't have a father, to declare we are illegitimate children, in the hopes that the authorities would facilitate our papers... but even that didn't work" (T2).

In all cases, the key aspect is that Lebanese law favors paternal nationality over mother nationality when establishing a child's eligibility for citizenship. If the father's Lebanese nationality is confirmed under these conditions, the child may be granted citizenship. The legal divide between legitimate and illegitimate offspring complicates the procedure for many families, leading some to declare their children illegitimate in order to get Lebanese citizenship. This system highlights the critical need for reform to establish gender equality and defend the rights of both mothers and children.

#### 6. Jus soli- Right of soil

Secondly, Jus soli (right of soil) is granted only if two conditions are met: Under Article 1 of Law No. 15 of 1925, a person is called Lebanese if: 1- They were born in Lebanese territory, as evidenced by a certificate from the mayor and parish priest. 2- They do not acquire foreign nationality at birth, according to records from the Directorate-General of General Security. Moreover, another alternative to gain Lebanese Citizenship is through secondary or derived citizenship which is defined as nationality gained after birth, such as by marriage or naturalization (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a). According to Article 5 of Law No. 15 of 1925, a foreign woman married to a Lebanese male can request Lebanese citizenship one year after the marriage is registered with the Civil Status Office. This is applicable to non-Lebanese women, including those with foreign nationality, citizenship under study, or no specified nationality (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a). It is worth noting that, while foreign women are granted Lebanese citizenship for marrying a Lebanese man, Lebanese women endure discriminatory restrictions. While foreign women can get citizenship by marriage, Lebanese women cannot pass on their citizenship to their offspring, even if they are of Lebanese heritage and origins.

## 7. Naturalization

Lastly, regarding the naturalization pillar, according to Article 3 of Law No. 15 of 1925, a person can acquire Lebanese nationality through an order issued by the President of the Republic after investigation and at the request of: 1- A foreigner who has lived in Lebanon for five years without interruption. 2- A foreign man who marries a Lebanese woman and has lived in Lebanon for one year without interruption. If the applicant for naturalization meets the general requirements for naturalization, the legislator grants the alien husband nationality through a personal decision issued by the President of the Republic, without the intervention of the judiciary and outside the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Personal Status. 3- A foreigner who provides valuable services to Lebanon; in this situation, the application should be allowed via a reasoned decision. Estimable services may include actual missions in private armies if conducted for two years or longer (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a). As stated, naturalization is granted when an alien shows his or her desire to obtain Lebanese nationality through a request to the competent authorities within the parameters provided by law. The authorities accept or reject with complete freedom, even if other legal prerequisites are completed, because naturalization is an act of sovereignty left to the ultimate discretion of the State and not a right for everyone applying for it. When a naturalized father submits a Naturalisation Decree in the Personal Status Record after the birth of one of his children, this execution is not retroactive, so the issue is the naturalized person's acceptance of naturalization, and if this acceptance occurs later after the birth, he cannot register the child on his record. However, he must submit a nationality case rather than a birth registration suit (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a). It should be emphasized that the Naturalisation Decree takes effect only after paying the legally needed costs, and thus the naturalized individual receives the Lebanese nationality as of the payment of these payments, rather than the date of the issuance of the decree. If a child is born before the naturalization fees are paid and is born from a non-Lebanese father, the child cannot be registered administratively or by a single judge; instead, the child must obtain legal nationality in accordance with the principles in order to be registered in Lebanese records (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a).

#### 8. Naturalization decree (1994)

In 1994, President Elias El-Hrawi, Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, and the Minister of Interior issued a decree granting a large number of people Lebanese nationality. Originally intended to naturalize stateless groups such as Kurds, Arabs of Wadi Khalid, and Bedouins, the decree primarily benefited non-stateless individuals: 42% of those naturalized were Syrian nationals, 36% were stateless, 16% were Palestinians, and 6% were of other nationalities, including descendants of Lebanese immigrants. This edict came after the Commission on Naturalisation was established in 1992, under Rafic Hariri's first postwar government (Hourani, 2014). The decree sought to address concerns raised by the disputed 1932 Census, which affected citizenship status. However, it lacked clear eligibility conditions and conferred citizenship without defined qualifications, resulting in a number of issues, including arbitrary decision-making, exclusion of people from the country, and administrative errors (Hourani, 2014). On August 26, 1994, the Maronite League challenged the naturalization decree, claiming that it was unconstitutional and offered citizenship to unqualified individuals rather than descendants of Lebanese emigrants (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a). The League stated that providing citizenship to Palestinian refugees infringed their right to return while also disrupting Lebanon's confessional balance and communal peace, known as the "Lebanese formula." They voiced fear that the naturalized group's 75% Muslim membership would upset the fragile sectarian balance, and that the naturalization was politically driven (Hourani, 2014). The Maronite League's challenge to the 1994 naturalization proclamation was heard by Lebanon's State Consultative Council, the highest legal body. On July 5, 2003, the Council referred the naturalized persons' files to the Ministry of Interior for re-examination, recommending the denaturalization of questionable individuals (Frangieh, 2016). However, the Council's decisions are not legally binding, and instead rely on the state's goodwill. As a result, the Ministry organized a committee to analyze the applications and verify legal compliance. Although a draft decree to withdraw nationality from those who did not meet the requirements was prepared, it has yet to be signed, most likely due to political concerns, particularly the reluctance of any prime minister to oppose Sunni interests, given that Sunnis were the primary beneficiaries of the original decree (Frangieh, 2016). Moreover, in the 1950s, President Camille Chamoun permitted Palestinian Christians to apply for



Lebanese citizenship in order to increase the Christian population. Additionally, the entry of Palestinian refugees, predominantly Sunni Muslims, in Lebanon in the early 1970s was first welcomed by the Sunni community as a means of increasing their demographic presence, but other groups saw this move as an imminent threat. Furthermore, K.K. (T6) describes the naturalization of 1994 as: “very random and unorganized...our family wasn't able to be naturalized back then, but they never were able to comprehend”. As well as R.A. (T3) who also mentioned the randomized side of the naturalization spree: “we were unable to register due to the complexity of the process and a lack of understanding, so many people were given citizenship and they even didn't used to live in Lebanon, it was a very randomized naturalization”. Naturalization attempts in Lebanon have typically been led by those in power's political objectives, with little to no regard for people who are really affected by nationality laws. The process has consistently been managed to promote sectarian and demographic interests rather than the demands of stateless people or marginalized groups. Instead of offering relief to people directly impacted by the law, such as families that have lived in Lebanon for generations without citizenship, naturalization has been used as a tactic to retain political dominance and protect dominant groups' interests.

#### 9. International Human Rights Frameworks in Lebanon

In its preamble to its Constitution, Lebanon has stated that it is committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lebanon 1926 (Rev. 2004) Constitution - Constitute, n.d.), which states that all people are free and equal regardless of gender, color, belief, religion, or other characteristics. The Declaration established human rights, such as the right to non-discrimination, nationality, freedom of expression, education, the right to seek asylum, and other civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. These rights are equal and indivisible—no right is more vital than another—and denying one right frequently impedes the enjoyment of others (United Nations, n.d.). As stated in the preamble of the Constitution; “Lebanon has an Arab identity and belonging. It is a founding active member of the Arab League, committed to its Charter; as it is a founding active member of the United Nations Organization, committed to its Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The State embodies these principles in all sectors and scopes without exception” (Lebanon 1926 (Rev. 2004) Constitution - Constitute, n.d.). The Lebanese Constitution states that Lebanese nationality, as well as how it is

gained, held, and lost, will be defined by the law, and that all Lebanese will be treated equally before the law (Lebanon 1926 (Rev. 2004) Constitution - Constitute, n.d., Art.4). They shall have equal civil and political rights and be subject to the same public obligations and duties without distinction (Lebanon 1926 (Rev. 2004) Constitution - Constitute, n.d., Art 7, 12). However, the Constitution does not show any text that defines discrimination. At the same time, while it guarantees equal citizenship rights before the law, it does not guarantee equality between men and women before the law, primarily because religious courts handle all matters concerning personal status, and each court refers to its own laws, resulting in contradictions with constitutional provisions and the perpetuation of discrimination and inequality in national legislations (Lebanon 1926 (Rev. 2004) Constitution - Constitute, n.d., Art 9). At the international level, Lebanon has ratified the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1972, as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991. The CRC states that a child must be registered immediately after birth, that they have the right to acquire nationality from birth, and that States Parties must ensure that these rights are implemented in accordance with their legal, national, and international obligations, particularly where the child would otherwise be stateless if this was not done (OHCHR, 1989). Lebanon adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as Law 592 in 1996 (United Nations General Assembly, 1979). Although the signature and ratification of CEDAW enabled the Lebanese state to make significant progress for women, it had certain reservations. These reservations included Article 9 (2), which strives to grant men and women equal rights in terms of the ability to pass on their nationality to their children (Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2020). Article 9 of CEDAW declares that, “states parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to an alien nor change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of the husband”(Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2020). The entry of these reservations calls into question Lebanon's commitment to advance women's human rights. Additionally, according to the Joint Submission to the Human Rights Council in the UPR's 37th Session done by

Collective for Research & Training on Development- Action et al., (2009), Lebanon's refusal to withdraw its reservations to CEDAW and reform its antiquated and discriminatory nationality law, constitutes a violation of international obligations. Furthermore, it contradicts Lebanon's claim in its 2015 UPR submission that it is "motivated by its desire to protect and promote human rights for all its citizens without distinction, and for foreigners resident in its territory". By comparing the collected testimony with Lebanon's conformity to international human rights norms, it is clear that many of the interviews collected underlined the discriminatory character of Lebanon's nationality laws, notably in terms of gender equality. For example, N.N. (T1) described her experience of being unable to pass on her nationality to her child due to her husband's lack of citizenship, emphasizing how these rules prevent women from fully exercising their rights as entrenched in international human rights frameworks. Despite Lebanon's proclaimed adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people like N.N. are denied basic rights such as the right to nationality for their children. Additionally, N.M. (T4) also mentions the differences in rights, particularly when comparing her status to that of foreign women who can easily obtain citizenship by marrying Lebanese males. She wonders why she, being raised in Lebanon, remains stateless while others with no cultural or social links to the nation are granted citizenship without difficulty. This story demonstrates how Lebanon's reservation on CEDAW Article 9(2), which provides women the ability to convey nationality to their children, exacerbates the inequality that women face in the country. These experiences illustrate that, despite Lebanon's ratification of key international agreements such as CEDAW, the actual implementation of these rights remains weak, with many women and their families continuing to suffer as a result of discriminatory nationality laws.

#### 10. Regional and National Frameworks

On the regional level, Lebanon has ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights (ACHR). In 2017, the Arab League Secretary-General urged its member states to defend all citizens' equal nationality rights, regardless of gender, and to strengthen the process of lifting nationality reservations under the CEDAW Convention (Refworld - UNHCR's Global Law and Policy Database, 2024). In 2018, the Arab League released the Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity as a ministerial declaration, calling for gender equality

in nationality rights and the right of children in all Member States to have a legal identity (Refworld - UNHCR's Global Law and Policy Database, 2024b). In 2016, Lebanon joined the ESCWA Committee on Women and voted in favor of the Muscat Declaration: Towards Gender Justice in the Arab Region. This declaration acknowledged the commitment of the following actions to achieve gender justice: "harmonize national legislation with international and regional commitments ratified by member States, so as to ensure the repeal of all discriminatory laws" (UNESCWA, 2016). Furthermore, despite Lebanon's adherence to multiple international human rights conventions, no movement has been made towards abolishing the discriminatory nationality law. Lebanese women married to foreign men are still unable to freely grant citizenship to their children or foreign partners.

#### 11. The Legal System in Lebanon

In the 1930s, the conflict between French and religious patriarchs over legal power intensified. The French imposed a dual legal system on the Lebanese and Syrian populations, a legacy of the Ottoman Empire. The dual legal system gave religious patriarchs control over personal law, including inheritance, marriage, and child custody, while the state handled the rest (Karlsson, 2009). Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution emphasizes respect for religious sects and their personal status regulations. This implied that citizens of various creeds and genders had separate statuses. However, there were several gray areas where the French and religious patriarchs contested jurisdiction. At the present moment, Lebanon has two sets of laws: civil and secular, which govern non-family matters such as the penal code, labor law, citizenship, contracts, and inheritance for Christians; and personal status codes, which govern family matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship, adoption, and child custody. The aforementioned legislative measures granted each religious group the power to run their own affairs, as well as to legislate, judge, and carry out penalties for their individual congregations (Shehadeh, 2010). As stated by the United Nations Democracy Fund, "Lebanon lacks a civil code regulating personal status matters such as marriage, inheritance, child custody, and so relies on 15 separate personal religious-based status laws and courts for the 18 recognized categories. As a direct result, individuals are treated differently because of their religion and gender"(UNDEF, 2021). The country's several recognised religious

communities, including twelve Christian, four Muslim, Druze, and Jewish confessions are each overseen by a separate religious court. For instance, the Sunni and Ja'fari (Shi'a) personal status codes, based on the secular Ottoman Family Law of 1917 and Hanafi and Ja'fari religious schools, were implemented in 1942. The Druze personal status code was introduced in 1948. The Christian and Jewish personal status codes were issued in 1951 during a secular government, but were never ratified due to opposition from lawyers and clergy. The former argued that the codes gave religious groups too much control, while the latter argued that they were insufficient. Religious officials frequently promoted judicial plurality as critical to preserving Lebanon's religious diversity. In practice, the variety of laws means that Lebanese individuals are handled differently in essential areas of their lives, especially regarding matters for women rights (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

#### 12. Comments on the Personal status codes

According to the Human Rights Watch (2015), in its final comments to Lebanon in 2005, the CEDAW committee concluded that Lebanon's reservations were incompatible to the Convention's object and purpose, and recommended it to withdraw them. The committee also recommended Lebanon to "adopt a unified personal status code which is in line with the convention and would be applicable to all women in Lebanon, regardless of religious affiliation." The committee urgently repeated its appeal in 2008, expressing disappointment that Lebanon had made no progress towards a single personal status code (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The government's reservation contradicts Lebanon's international obligation under CEDAW article 2 to work "to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs, and practices which constitute discrimination against women" (United Nations General Assembly, 1979) to which the government makes no reservation. The Lebanese government continues to use these norms to excuse human rights abuses against women. The Lebanese government should act immediately to achieve equality in substantive and procedural laws and policies controlling personal status laws (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Due to the distinct confessional Personal Status Codes and dependent citizenship for Lebanese women, several rights are only available to female citizens through male relatives. This situation is made even worse if the spouse is not from Lebanon. Children

whose fathers are not from Lebanon have less access to jobs, education, and healthcare (Karlsson, 2009). The lack of a unified civil code that transcends religious personal status laws delays the potential to change the nationality law. Since personal status codes are deeply rooted in Lebanon's legal system, any changes to the nationality law would necessitate navigating the complicated and competing interests of many religious communities. For instance, a child normally receives Lebanese citizenship if their father is Lebanese. However, as mentioned before Lebanese mothers cannot simply pass on their nationality to their offspring, oftentimes, some Lebanese mothers have claimed that their children were born out of wedlock (unmarried) since it is simpler for them to obtain nationality in certain conditions. This demonstrates how personal and family situations influence Lebanon's nationality regulations, which Uri Davis has criticized (Butenschon et al., 2000).

### 13. The discriminatory nature of the nationality law

“Imagine that in Sudan, which is not considered a progressive country, Sudanese mothers can give their nationality to their children, and still Lebanese women can't, just because the government fears the naturalization of palestinians... but if a muslim Lebanese man wants to get married to four palestinian women, that is not considered wrong.. strange logic” (D.D. Sudanese-Lebanese Mother). Lebanon's citizenship law is often regarded as one of the most obvious examples of gender discrimination in the country. It violates the fundamental ideas of freedom and equality that underpin the Lebanese Constitution. What is particularly problematic is that there is no religious rationale for this law; it differs from personal status laws, which meet fierce opposition from religious leaders when reform efforts are attempted. The resistance to amending the citizenship statute appears to be motivated more by political considerations than real concerns about religious or sectarian balance. This discourse frequently frames the issue in terms of regional and national challenges, such as the prospective naturalization of Palestinians (Charafeddine, 2009). A Lebanese woman is a citizen with specific duties under the Constitution, both during war and peacetime. She has the right to select her representatives and vote for them. The Constitution grants her the right to defend her country when necessary. She demonstrated her competency in this sector. She pays taxes, just like other citizens. Despite this, she is considered a foreigner in her home nation. She must wait in huge lines for her children's

residence permits. She relies on the "powers that be" to acquire work permits for her foreign husband, safeguarding his presence with her and their children (Charafeddine, 2009). One famous slogan from a campaign done in 2009 by the UNDP says: "He takes after his mother in everything: the color of her eyes, her smile, her kindness,... but not her nationality. He is destined not to be Lebanese because his father is not Lebanese"(Charafeddine, 2009). The citizenship law that discriminates against women was passed on January 19, 1925. Palestinian refugees moved to Lebanon in 1948, Syrian Refugees in 2011. This demonstrates that the law is discriminatory by nature and unrelated to fears about Palestinian settlement in Lebanon. In 2009, Fahmia Charafeddine conducted an extensive field analytical study on the Lebanese grounds on the topic of nationality law. In her report, she noted that it's crucial to remember that Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese women are not all part of the same sect, and hence the fear of demographic shift is illogical. Not every Syrian and Palestinian are Sunni. Prioritizing demographic balance over people and the resulting social and psychological issues is unjust (Charafeddine, 2009). In summary, Lebanon's nationality law is discriminatory on several levels. It denies Lebanese women the right to pass on their nationality to their children or foreign husbands, resulting in gender inequity and leaving many children stateless, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and jobs. The regulation is politically driven, with the goal of preserving sectarian balance by prohibiting Palestinian and Syrian naturalization, despite the fact that this worry is unjustified. It also goes against Lebanon's Constitution, which guarantees equality, by socially and psychologically marginalizing women and stateless families, perpetuating marginalization and stigma.

#### 14. Attempts and Challenges to Reforming Lebanon's Nationality Law

Over the years, civil society organizations and national stakeholders in Lebanon have worked to change the Lebanese Nationality Law No. 15 of 1925, allowing women to pass on their nationality to their spouses and children. Lebanon's unwillingness to amend its nationality law stems from concerns about demographic changes and political manipulation (Canadians for justice and peace in the Middle East, 2007). In 2001, a network of Arab feminist and women's rights organizations recognised that denying Arab women the right to confer nationality is in fact the denial of their citizenship. This was believed to be consistent with the patriarchal nature of the region's regimes, in which

women are subordinate individuals who are subjects of their male kinship relations rather than complete citizens of their nations. A regional civil society-led movement followed, focussing on research and information production, legal and political lobbying, and mobilizing women to share testimonials about how they are denied the right to confer citizenship. This movement has elevated the topic of gendered citizenship on the political agenda, both in the Arab region and globally (The Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, 2024). Many countries in the region have altered their laws, although to varying degrees. Egypt amended its nationality law in 2005, giving women married to non-Egyptians the opportunity to confer nationality on their children born after the reform was implemented. Algeria followed suit in 2005, ensuring full gender equality when giving citizenship. Morocco accomplished the same thing in 2007, however Moroccan women were not allowed to confer nationality on their non-national partners. To date, numerous Arab countries have revised their citizenship laws to varying degrees, leaving Lebanon completely immune to any good change in that regard, as well as naive to the negative effect on the affected population, which has been aggravated by the severe economic crisis (The Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, 2024). As discussed previously, several attempts were made to manipulate the demographic balance in favor of particular religious groups. Fear that Lebanese women who have married the refugees would be granting citizenship to muslim individuals, hence, affecting the demographic balance of the country, and consequently, affecting the divisions of seats in the parliament in favor of the Muslim percentage, a fear of the Christian community (Canadians for justice and peace in the Middle East, 2007). A ministerial committee was appointed by the Lebanese government on March 22, 2012, to consider a proposed revision to Article 4 of Decree No. 15, which governs Lebanese nationality. The draft bill sought to alter the current regulation, however, the committee, which included the deputy prime minister and ministries of labor, interior, foreign affairs, justice, media, and social affairs, unanimously rejected the proposal. They advised the government to retain the status quo and not pass the draft law, consequently preserving Lebanese citizenship as a privilege reserved for children of Lebanese men exclusively (Moufarrege & Karam, 2013). The reasons presented by the committee in its report only fuelled feelings of injustice among those advocating for political reform in Lebanon, as well as women's rights activists. The committee used "the higher interests of the state" to defend its refusal to provide Lebanese



women the ability to transfer their nationality to their children. The committee was "unanimous" in reaching this conclusion, using arguments whose soundness was disputed by the National Association for Lebanese Women's Affairs in a legal study it forwarded to the prime minister, requesting that he reviews the issue of the requested amendment to the Nationality Law and "give the concept of Lebanese citizenship some actual content" (Moufarrege & Karam, 2013). The committee's report highlighted concerns that equal nationality rights for women would destabilize Lebanon's demographic balance, notably among the Palestinian population, and thus jeopardize civil peace. As a result, the committee advised against altering the statute, instead proposing limited privileges for children of Lebanese mothers (National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021a). Over the years, Lebanon has prioritized citizenship for people living outside the nation over the children and wives of Lebanese women residing in Lebanon. In 2015, parliament passed legislation granting citizenship to members of the Lebanese diaspora residing abroad, yet again excluding descendants of Lebanese women. The law only applies to people who have a "father or grandfather with Lebanese origins" or are "the foreign wife of a Lebanese man." A 2016 judgment by Lebanon's Constitutional Council maintained the statute (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In March 2018, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil proposed altering the citizenship law to recognise Lebanese mothers married to non-Lebanese men's equal right to pass on their nationality to their children. However, the new bill would exclude men and women who are married to Palestinians or Syrians, consequently reinforcing discrimination on the basis of nationality. In a report done by the Human Rights Watch (2018), they have interviewed a Lebanese woman named, who is a victim of this law, where she states: "His proposal not only differentiates between Lebanese and other Lebanese, but also between Lebanese women and other Lebanese women," she claimed. "It was a stab in the back, a knife in our backs and hearts". In May, the latest in a series of controversial naturalization orders handed Lebanese citizenship to over 400 foreign individuals, generating outrage among those advocating for citizenship for the children and spouses of Lebanese women married to foreigners (Human Rights Watch, 2018). According to a report conducted by Abby Sewell (2018), when submitting the bill, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil stated that the proposed exception was intended to prevent "settlement" by Syrians and Palestinians, and that his plan would allow citizenship to be granted to those people on an individual basis "The Lebanese state is

committed to the right of return for Palestinian refugees and displaced Syrians, so we have to take into account the consequences of granting citizenship," added the minister (Sewell, 2018). It is clear that Citizenship in Lebanon is heavily politicized, with the premise that safeguarding the "higher interests of the state" affects thousands of families and individuals. This raises the question: why should women bear the responsibility of balancing the country's demographics? This strategy unfairly lays responsibility on women, compromising their rights and the futures of their families, and especially their children.

### **Chapter Three: Consequences of the Nationality Law**

#### **1. Statelessness in Lebanon**

The primary negative effect of the nationality law is that it can render people stateless in certain circumstances. In its first article, the 1954 convention on statelessness defines a stateless person as "a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law" (United Nations, 1954). Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and there is no statelessness determination or protection system in effect. Lebanon's failure to ratify the statelessness treaties contributes to a lack of a legal framework to address the country's substantial number of stateless individuals. Stateless people and children of Lebanese women who are denied Lebanese citizenship experience numerous human rights violations and hardships throughout their lives. Stateless people lack access to public healthcare, property ownership, formal employment, and freedom of movement due to the insecurity of passing through interior checkpoints (Stateless Hub, 2024). They may be unable to travel because they lack an ID; children are unable to take public exams to gain access to certain professions; formal employment is frequently denied, and informal sector jobs carry an increased risk of exploitation; and some children are denied education and healthcare, resulting in lifelong discrimination (Stateless Hub, 2024). Additionally, due to a lack of legal status and records, stateless people are unable to register their marriages and children's births, perpetuating statelessness throughout generations. Their deaths are not registered. They are unable to own property and must register their homes and cars - if they can afford them given their lack of economic rights - in the names of family or friends who have nationality, which may lead to tensions and dependency. They cannot inherit property

(Collective for Research & Training on Development- Action et al., 2009). A 2019 study by Siren Associates and MARCH, discovered approximately 2,200 stateless people in Tripoli and its surrounding areas, 75% of whom had a Lebanese mother, and estimated that another 27,000 people were stateless throughout Lebanon. Siren Associates and UNHCR (2021) conducted a follow-up survey, identifying 4,088 stateless people in the northern governorate of Akkar, accounting for 25% of them. Lebanon also hosts roughly 174,000 Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA, as well as several thousand "non-ID Palestinians" who are not registered with UNRWA or the Lebanese government and have no legal status in the country. Furthermore, given the high number of stateless people in Lebanon, the lack of an efficient monitoring system to manage this complex issue is alarming. Without sufficient support or acknowledgement, stateless people are vulnerable, unable to get essential rights such as education, healthcare, and legal protection. The government's lack of action worsens the problem, keeping families in a cycle of uncertainty and exclusion. According to the UNHCR and SIREN (2021), Lebanon's stateless population is classified into two categories: "under-study" (Qayd El Dares, QeD) and "unregistered" (Maktoum El Qayd, MeQ). The state confers the under study (QeD) status on a group of stateless persons. Lebanese authorities consider them to be of foreign origin and uncertain nationality, regardless of any historical or cultural ties to the country. The security services are under review of their situation. The Maktoum al Qayd (MeQ) is a word used to designate individuals who are not included in any official civil registration. This includes individuals born to a stateless father or unknown parents, as well as those born to parents who did not register their child's birth within the one-year deadline, resulting in a lengthy and costly court procedure. Lebanon's failure to adopt the 1954 and 1961 statelessness agreements has resulted in serious human rights violations against its stateless community. Stateless people, like those in the testimonies, suffer considerable barriers to accessing public services including healthcare, education, and work. For example, N.N.'s (T1) testimony underlines her concern that her stateless child may be refused public exams and university admission owing to a lack of proper documentation. Similarly, D.D. (T4) was compelled to abandon her schooling and goals due to a lack of identity documents, leaving her working under risky conditions with no legal rights. Likewise, N.M. (T4) describes the financial and emotional toll she paid for an unlawful, poor operation due to her undocumented status. These experiences clearly

show how the Lebanese nationality law not only deprives persons of their rights, but also creates a cycle of marginalization.

## 2. Lebanon's current political situation (2019-present)

The essence of this section aims to explain that in light of the country's multiple challenges, the attention has turned away from legal matters. People are primarily preoccupied with obtaining fundamental necessities, with little focus or effort directed towards altering laws or addressing long-standing systemic issues.

### 2.1. October 2019 Lebanese Revolution

“In 2019 there was the Lebanese revolution, I couldn't participate in the revolts, I wanted to, it is my right, I too have lost a lot of money due to the crisis, but I couldn't go to the streets and demand my rights, I'm not even Lebanese” (N.H, T5).

In the last five years, Lebanon has faced a succession of crises that have significantly hindered the country's progress in every aspect. On October 17, 2019, the people of Lebanon took to the streets in unprecedented numbers, asking for an end of the entire political and economic power system that has governed the country since the armed conflict ended in 1990. The government's plan to impose more taxes as part of austerity measures sparked this collective rallying, most notably a "WhatsApp tax," which would charge for a global free-of-charge phone service (Amnesty International, 2021). The people took to the streets in response to a series of devastating economic shocks: private banks stopped allowing customers access to their dollar-denominated savings and current accounts; the Lebanese currency lost its stability for the first time in 30 years; and unemployment, inflation, and poverty rates, as well as all other socioeconomic indicators, indicated that Lebanon was on the verge of economic and social chaos (Amnesty International, 2021). In the words of Amnesty International (2021), “According to the World Bank, it was an unprecedented collapse, most likely the third worst economic catastrophe in 150 years.” Against this backdrop and under these conditions, people across Lebanon demanded social justice in a variety of human rights, including their rights to education, health, and employment, as well as a new civil status code, equal nationality rights for Lebanese mothers, and the right to truth and justice for disappeared

families. In brief, people demanded fundamental structural and political change, based on improved civil, economic, political, and social rights, as well as responsibility for corruption, negligence, and violent behavior. From October 2019 to March 2020, the period of protests witnessed a shift in divisions within Lebanon. The popular slogan "killun yaani killun" (Arabic for "all of them means all of them") was chanted widely, referring to all political parties in Lebanon. This marked a significant moment where the Lebanese people, regardless of their political history, sectarian affiliation, or individual opinions, came together as a unified force against the ruling establishment (Amnesty International, 2021).

## 2.2. Beirut Port Explosion (August 2020)

Adding on that is the Beirut port explosion on August 4, 2020, which according to the Human Rights Watch (2023), was one of the most powerful non-nuclear explosions in recent history, killing at least 220 people, injuring over 7,000, and causing significant property damage. The explosion was caused by the detonation of tonnes of ammonium nitrate, a flammable chemical compound often used in agriculture as a high-nitrate fertilizer but also capable of producing explosives. Moreover, the explosion damaged 163 public and private schools, rendered half of Beirut's healthcare facilities inoperable, and disrupted 56% of Beirut's private enterprises. Infrastructure, including transportation, energy, water supply and sanitation, and municipal services, suffered substantial damage, resulting in losses of US\$390-475 million. The World Bank estimates that the explosion caused material damage ranging from \$3.8 to \$4.6 billion (Majzoub, 2021). By mid-2020, inflation was soaring, unemployment and poverty were at all-time highs, and the health-care system was on the verge of collapse as hospitals tried to stay afloat (Mawad, 2023).

## 2.3. COVID-19 and the Economic Crash

Additionally, the COVID-19 outbreak and reaction have exacerbated Lebanon's existing economic and social issues, exposing the country's fundamental flaws and resulting in significant company closures. This has disrupted the economy at all levels, resulting in supply chain breakdowns, skyrocketing prices for critical products, decreased purchasing power, and a widening trade deficit, all of which have harmed families, communities, and local economies (Mercy Corps, 2020). Currently, around 80% of the population lives in

poverty, and 36% lives in "extreme poverty," which means they earn less than \$2.15 per day (Salhani, 2024). Moreover due to the economical crisis, Lebanon's public services have deteriorated, including the state-run energy grid, which can only offer one hour of power to each family due to financial mismanagement. The majority of Lebanese families rely on private generator businesses, despite the fact that this industry is illegal and highly polluting. These "generator mafias" frequently bribe officials to keep their operations running, transforming this temporary solution into a permanent aspect of daily life (Salha, 2024). For instance, N.N. (T1), stated how the economical crisis is affecting her work: "I am willing to travel and to live years without my child and my family, just to provide for him. The job which I currently have in Lebanon doesn't pay well, I'm a freelancer, and because of the current economic crisis, nobody is hiring me". This statement demonstrates the direct effect of the economic crisis on individuals which own small businesses and are now unemployed because of the situation. Participants like N.M. (T4) described their experiences of living in great poverty, unable to obtain adequate healthcare or other necessities as a result of the economic collapse. N.M. emphasized her discontent with the escalating expenses of basic needs and her constant worry of eviction due to fluctuating currencies, reflecting the broad problem faced by many. In her own words, "there is no longer a middle class in Lebanon, there is extreme poverty and richness".

#### 2.4. Government failure

Lebanon has been without a president for almost two years, when Michel Aoun's tenure expired on October 31, 2022, with competing political and sectarian blocs unable to agree on a candidate. National and international measures to break the deadlock in the election of the next Lebanese President have failed to produce any real results. The presidential vacuum is exacerbated by the fact that Lebanon's government has been in caretaker mode for more than two years, dating back to the legislative elections on May 15, 2022 (Security Council Report, 2024). Basem Shabb, Member of Parliament in Lebanon from the Future Parliamentary bloc states that : "the void caused by the lack of a president has created a crisis of paralysis in the Lebanese government" (Security Council Report, 2024). For example, N.N. (T1) has described how the presidential vacuum has affected their case by stating: "We attempted to present our case in court last year, but Lebanon's political paralysis—the country has been without a president and a functioning parliament for

more than two years—has left the situations of stateless persons unanswered”. Due to Lebanon's continuous crisis, many people are struggling to access basic essentials such as food, water, and electricity on a daily basis. Despite these significant issues, the urgent need to modify the nationality law has been largely overlooked and is unlikely to be addressed in the near future. The Lebanese people are locked in a cycle of presidential vacuums, regional crises, a crumbling economy, and a never-ending fight for basic rights, making nationality legislation a low priority for the country. As a result, stateless people and others affected by present nationality laws, who are already marginalized, face even greater challenges. Their precarious condition makes them disproportionately affected by the country's continuing crises, compounding their struggle to obtain basic services and rights.

#### 2.5. Impact of the October 7th Palestinian-Israeli Conflict on Lebanon's Current State

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a major and unprecedented attack against Israel from Gaza. The assault consisted of rocket fire, ground incursions, and hostage taking. Israel responded quickly, with retaliatory airstrikes and a ground offensive in Gaza. The battle has resulted in considerable civilian losses on both sides, with thousands of Palestinians murdered as Israel's military operations spread far into Gaza (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024c). The October 7 Hamas-Israel conflict has had a considerable impact on Lebanon, particularly by heightening tensions along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Hezbollah, Lebanon's prominent Shiite militant group, has traded fire with Israeli forces many times since the battle began. The situation escalated on Monday September 23, 2024, Lebanon had the deadliest day since the end of the country's civil war in 1990. According to Lebanon's health ministry, about 700 people were killed this week as Israel drastically increased its bombings, claiming to be targeting Hezbollah's military capabilities (The Associated Press, 2024). The stunning death toll in a single day, which continues to increase, as well as the catastrophic impact on civilians, with about 500,000 people displaced from south Lebanon, the Bekaa, and other areas under heavy shelling (Amnesty International, 2024).

In summary, given the string of catastrophic events that have enveloped Lebanon since 2019—from the October Revolution to the economic collapse, rising poverty, inflation, COVID-19, the Beirut Blast, government failures, and now the violent conflict—

addressing the nationality law has become an unattainable priority. The country is swamped with urgent crises, leaving little room to address long-term issues such as nationality change. The country's socioeconomic and political collapse has had a significant impact on vulnerable groups, as shown in the testimonies. The recurring crises in Lebanon heavily impact marginalized people, particularly refugees and stateless groups, aggravating their poor condition. The concern of demographic imbalance remains a significant obstacle to reform, but the country's depleted resources and inability to address basic governance issues push this issue even further down the list. Thus, nationality law reform has been pushed to the bottom of the political agenda due to more than just demographic shifts. The country's priorities remain on urgent survival rather than systemic change.

### 3. Learning from Nationality Laws in Other Countries: Lessons for Lebanon

According to a report conducted by the UNHCR (2019), 25 countries continue to have laws that deny women the right to pass their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men, while three countries also have laws that deny men the right to pass their nationality to children born outside of marriage. Over fifty countries have nationality laws with gender-discriminatory factors with the majority denying women the same right as men to grant nationality to a noncitizen spouse (UNHCR, 2019). While Lebanon maintains an outdated framework based on patriarchal and sectarian concerns, other Middle Eastern and international countries have taken significant measures to modernize their nationality laws in accordance with international human rights standards. Looking at the evolution of nationality laws in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, offers a broader context for how these legal frameworks have changed to promote gender equality, eliminate statelessness, and protect marginalized people. By evaluating these situations, we may determine how Lebanon could benefit from similar revisions and what roadblocks remain on its path to more inclusive nationality legislation. In the case of Egypt, prior to 2004, Egyptian law only allowed for the conferral of nationality through paternal descent, with a few exceptions. By prohibiting Egyptian women from passing on their nationality to their offspring, such legislation demonstrated the belief that women were not full members of the national political society on an equal footing with males. Under criticism from both internal and external forces, the Egyptian government amended the law in



2004, allowing women to confer nationality on their children (MacKay, 2012). However, Palestinians were initially barred due to political concerns over demographic changes, they were excluded from Egypt's 2004 law that permitted women to transmit nationality on to their children. This exclusion was finally lifted in 2011, when Egyptian women married to Palestinian men were granted the ability to pass on their nationality to their children following extensive activism and legal challenges (Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative, 2011). Approximately 100,000 Palestinians live in Egypt, where they face major prejudice, especially in terms of residency documentation and educational fees. According to the Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative (2011), "The new government [of Egypt] has made a welcome step toward the Palestinians. This is a step forward for human rights". This legislation reform was viewed as a win for women's rights rather than a significant demographic shift (MacKay, 2012). Lebanon, like Egypt, is concerned that providing nationality to the children of Lebanese mothers and foreign fathers could disrupt the country's delicate sectarian balance. Egypt's cautious attitude to Palestinians demonstrates that Lebanon can implement reforms while maintaining control over specific groups, ensuring that demographic concerns are addressed without entirely denying rights to all children of Lebanese mothers. Regarding Jordan, its nationality law has been heavily criticized for its gender discrimination, particularly in allowing only fathers to give citizenship to their children. This exclusion affects more than 110,000 Jordanian women married to non-Jordanian men, many of whom are displaced Palestinians (Holleis & Knipp, 2022). According to a 2013 alliance of advocacy groups, the present law discriminates against families and makes it difficult for them to receive essential rights such as healthcare and education (Whitman, 2014). Over the years, Jordan has made some relatively small amendments to nationality rights for children of Jordanian mothers, primarily in reaction to international pressure and campaigning for women's rights. While these reforms do not bestow full citizenship, they do confer some rights and protections on young children (OHCHR, 2023). The government has granted Jordanian mothers' children access to basic services such as school and healthcare, which represents a huge step forward. For example, the 2021 Education Law has measures that allow Jordanian mothers' children to attend school without facing any discrimination. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health has provided access to healthcare treatments for these children whose access was previously limited (OHCHR, 2023). These improvements

represent an increasing recognition of women's and children's rights in Jordan, however complete citizenship rights for children of Jordanian mothers are still out of reach. The amendments can be viewed as small development, laying the way for future improvements to nationality legislation. Jordan's experience could serve as a model for Lebanon, demonstrating how activism and international pressure can result in real reforms, even in a complex sociopolitical setting. Lebanon could be inspired by Jordan's recent reforms and explore introducing an initiative that gives rights and privileges to children born to Lebanese mothers. Lebanon may alleviate these children's massive inequalities by providing them with access to vital necessities such as education and healthcare. Establishing a specific program to facilitate registration and secure access to these essential services would not only benefit impacted families, but would also help to social cohesion and stability in a country facing severe demographic challenges. Such initiatives that address statelessness and discrimination may foster a more inclusive society. Regarding Tunisia, it stands out in the MENA area for its proactive approach to combating statelessness, having ratified both the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Tunisia and Libya stand out among MENA countries for their commitment to decreasing statelessness through international legal requirements (United Nations Information Service, 2023). In addition to its international commitments, Tunisia has achieved substantial progress towards gender equality in its nationality legislation. In response to civil society pressure, the Nationality Code was amended in 2010 to allow Tunisian mothers to automatically confer their nationality on their children, fostering greater equality (Boston University School of Law, 2023). Tunisia's birth registration process is more inclusive than in other MENA nations, ensuring recognition and protection for the majority of children born there. The country has taken steps to meet the needs of vulnerable people, such as refugees and migrants, by providing them with legal protections that lessen the possibility of statelessness. Initiatives to integrate these groups into society contribute to the overall reduction of statelessness (Boston University School of Law, 2023). Lebanon should draw inspiration from Tunisia's strategy to eliminate statelessness and promote gender equality in nationality legislation. Tunisia has ratified both the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, demonstrating a strong commitment to addressing this issue through international legal

frameworks. Lebanon, which has yet to ratify these treaties, might follow suit to accord with global standards and reinforce its legal stance on statelessness, offering more protection for people who may fall between the gaps. Lebanon might also benefit from implementing more inclusive birth registration processes, similar to Tunisia's system, which ensures that the majority of children born in the country are recognised and protected. Tunisia has also taken significant steps to protect vulnerable people, such as refugees and migrants, by providing legislative protections that limit their chances of becoming stateless. Lebanon, which faces its own complicated demographic and refugee challenges, might launch similar measures to integrate marginalized communities, providing them with fundamental legal rights and promoting social stability. Tunisia's reforms demonstrate that change is achievable, even in a complex sociopolitical situation, and provide Lebanon with a blueprint to more inclusive nationality laws. Furthermore, Canada combines *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* (right of blood), allowing citizenship to be obtained by being born on Canadian land and to Canadian parents, regardless of birthplace. This dual-pathway approach creates a balance between protecting the nation's identity and preventing children from becoming stateless. It establishes an effective framework for a flexible and inclusive nationality law (Legislative Services Branch, 2024). This approach strikes a compromise between preserving national identity and being inclusive, resulting in a strong basis for nationality legislation. Adopting similar concepts could assist Lebanon in reforming its nationality law to be more inclusive, solving concerns of statelessness and ensuring that future generations are connected to their ancestry, all while promoting a stronger society.

#### 4. A call to reform

For Lebanon to move forward, there must be a serious commitment to revising the nationality law, allowing Lebanese mothers to pass on their nationality to their children regardless of their spouse's nationality. It is also critical to put in place a strong system for tracking and supporting stateless people. Without these reforms, the difficulties experienced by families will persist, developing a sense of hopelessness and limiting their ability to create safe and stable futures for themselves and their children. Reform must go beyond simply changing the nationality law; it is also critical to build a strong system for tracking and supporting stateless people, ensuring they have access to basic legal, social,

and economic rights. Thousands of people who are stateless are left in legal limbo, denied access to education, healthcare, employment, and fundamental human decency. Additionally, according to the Joint Submission to the Human Rights Council in the UPR's 37th Session done by Collective for Research & Training on Development- Action et al., (2009), in order to prevent statelessness, Lebanon should establish a legal framework that assures that all stateless children and those at danger of statelessness receive nationality without discrimination. A fair, accessible, and internationally consistent mechanism for determining statelessness must be created. The birth registration process should be simplified, with universal registration to prevent future statelessness. In March 2023, an event at the American University of Beirut was hosted where civil society leaders from the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region, along with UN and Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights (GCENR) representatives, called for reforms to nationality laws that deny women equal rights with men. Experts from Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, and Libya highlighted the wide-ranging harms caused by gender discrimination in these laws, noting that they negatively affect individuals, families, and society as a whole, hindering sustainable development in affected countries (The Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, 2023).

## 5. Conclusion

In the words of Karim Chebbo, “My Nationality is a Right for Me and My Family” Campaign Manager: “Women carry their children for nine months, give them life, but can't give them citizenship. What is this discrimination that is not only against women, but against entire families?” (The Asfari Institute for Civil Society & Citizenship, 2023). The Lebanese Nationality Law of 1925 remains a serious obstacle to gender equality and human rights in Lebanon. This research, which combines real-life testimonies, historical analysis, and an examination of Lebanon's legislative system, demonstrates that the law has a significant impact on Lebanese women and their families. The law's failure to allow Lebanese women to pass on their nationality to their children and spouses not only renders many people stateless, but it also exacerbates social, economic, and legal marginalization. Despite Lebanon's modern image and international commitments under conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the nationality laws have proven impossible to change due to entrenched

political and sectarian concerns. The narratives of individuals directly affected by Lebanon's nationality law demonstrate the profound and widespread impact of statelessness. Children born to Lebanese mothers and foreign fathers frequently dwell in legal limbo, denied the basic rights that Lebanese citizens enjoy. Stateless people have limited access to education, healthcare, and work opportunities, locking them in a cycle of poverty and exclusion. The psychological toll is particularly high, with many interviewees expressing feelings of alienation, helplessness, and frustration as a result of their inability to fully participate in Lebanese society. One of the most important conclusions from the interviews is the influence that economic background has in molding individuals' interactions with the nationality law. While wealthier families can sometimes get around the system through bribes or personal connections, people from impoverished origins are sometimes left with no options. Stateless people are commonly forced to work in low-wage, illegal employment that provides no legal protection or access to social assistance. The economic repercussions of statelessness are thus intrinsically connected to deeper problems of inequality and corruption in Lebanon. Another important conclusion is the widespread corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency that plagues the Lebanese legal system. Many interviewees stated that they had to pay bribes to obtain basic legal documents or services. Others stated how political connections frequently dictate who is granted Lebanese citizenship, with specific individuals profiting from their connections to powerful figures. This corruption mentality not only exacerbates socioeconomic inequality but also undermines trust in Lebanon's institutions, making substantive reform much more difficult to be carried out. The political and sectarian aspects of Lebanon's nationality law are also important for explaining its continuance. The country's political system, which is founded on a delicate balance of power among religious groups, has prioritized demographic concerns throughout many of its initiatives. Fears that providing Lebanese women the power to confer nationality on their children will alter this equilibrium have posed a significant barrier to reform. Concerns about the prospective naturalization of Palestinians and Syrians have been invoked to justify preserving the status quo. This political strategy reflects a larger contradiction between Lebanon's adherence to international human rights standards and its domestic sectarian dynamics. These findings have far-reaching consequences for Lebanon as well as the broader realm of human rights. First and foremost, the failure of

the nationality law to allow Lebanese women equal rights in transmitting nationality to their children is a clear violation of Lebanon's international legal obligations. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) requires Lebanon to ensure gender equality, and the current nationality law directly contradicts this concept. The social consequences are just as significant. The statelessness imposed by the nationality law produces a permanent underclass of people who are barred from fully participating in society. These people are denied education, healthcare, and formal work, all of which are required to live a dignified existence. Statelessness has far-reaching intergenerational consequences, as children inherit their parents' legal and social marginalization. This contributes to an intractable cycle of poverty and exclusion. From an economic perspective, the nationality law and the consequent statelessness exacerbate Lebanon's larger concerns of inequality and underdevelopment. As shown in the testimonies, the law reduces the country's economic potential by restricting a large percentage of the population from formal employment and social services. Legal obstacles prevent stateless people, many of whom are skilled and educated, from fully contributing to the economy. Reforming the nationality law would promote social fairness while also boosting Lebanon's economic development by allowing stateless people to engage more fully in society. Finally, the nationality law's continued existence has severe political repercussions. The law illustrates the strong sectarianism that still dominates Lebanon's political landscape. The concern of changing Lebanon's demographic balance has been a key hurdle to reform, particularly the naturalization of Palestinian and Syrian refugees. However, this limited political calculus overlooks the long-term effects of enforcing discriminatory legislation. Lebanon's stability and social cohesiveness are jeopardized as long as a sizable segment of its population remains marginalized and denied legal recognition. While this research sheds light on the impact of Lebanon's nationality law, it is vital to recognise its limitations. One notable restriction is a lack of complete statistics on the number of stateless people in Lebanon. The lack of trustworthy official statistics makes it impossible to accurately assess the scope of the problem. While estimates show that thousands of persons are affected by the nationality law, the real degree of statelessness in Lebanon remains unknown. Another restriction is the scope of the testimonies used in this study. While the interviews provided valuable personal perspectives, they were limited to a small sample

of people. The experiences of those interviewed may not fully reflect the diversity of experiences among stateless people in Lebanon, especially those from diverse religious or socioeconomic backgrounds. Future study might benefit from a wider range of interviews, as well as quantitative data, to provide a more complete picture of the problem. Furthermore, the study was performed during a moment of substantial political and economic upheaval in Lebanon, which could have influenced the interviewees' perceptions. The current economic crisis, along with the consequences of the Beirut port explosion and the COVID-19 pandemic, has worsened the difficulties encountered by stateless people. While these crises emphasize the need for reform, they also complicate efforts to separate the specific impact of the nationality legislation from broader socio-political reasons. Based on the findings of this research, several suggestions can be made to alleviate the challenges raised by Lebanon's nationality law. The most essential recommendation is to amend the statute itself. In order to comply with international human rights responsibilities, Lebanon must modify its nationality law to allow Lebanese women to pass their nationality on to their children and marriages. This will not only ensure gender equality, but also reduce the social, economic, and psychological challenges that stateless people experience. In the short term, Lebanon should take steps to reduce the effects of statelessness by ensuring that stateless people have access to fundamental services. This involves ensuring that stateless people can receive education, healthcare, and formal employment without discrimination. Special measures should be provided for children of Lebanese mothers, allowing them to attend schools and colleges and obtain healthcare services regardless of their legal standing. These solutions would serve to relieve the immediate difficulties experienced by stateless people while longer-term legal reforms are sought. Another suggestion is for Lebanon to learn from other countries in the region that have revised their nationality regulations. Egypt and Jordan, for example, have made tremendous progress in permitting women to transfer their nationality to their children. Lebanon should draw on these precedents to create a legal framework that combines its political concerns with its human rights duties. International organizations, such as the United Nations and the Arab League, can help facilitate these reforms by offering technical assistance and pushing for political change. Finally, Lebanon's civil society organizations must continue to advocate for nationality law reform. The testimonies gathered for this study show the power of personal experiences

in highlighting the human impact of discriminatory policies. Civil society may use these stories to establish a larger reform coalition, bringing together activists, lawyers, and legislators to advocate for legal change. International human rights organizations can intensify these efforts by putting pressure on the Lebanese government to comply with international law. To summarize, Lebanon's nationality law is not only a legal issue, but also a significant human rights burden for thousands of individuals and families. The law's discriminatory nature fosters statelessness, social marginalization, and economic suffering, especially for Lebanese women and children. Despite several efforts by civil society and international organizations to advocate for reform, political and sectarian concerns have continually stalled progress. However, the human cost of maintaining the status quo is too great to be overlooked. Reforming Lebanon's nationality law is a critical step towards achieving gender equality, social justice, and human rights. Only through legal reform will Lebanon be able to address the systemic inequalities that have afflicted its nationality laws for nearly a century. By providing Lebanese women the ability to pass on their nationality to their children, Lebanon can break the cycle of statelessness and ensure that all citizens, regardless of gender or background, have equal access to their basic rights. This change is not only about legal justice; it is also an important step towards creating a more inclusive and equal society for future generations. I would like to conclude this thesis by stating the profoundly saddening final words of N.N.: "For my final words, I want to declare that I am a human who doesn't know if she is a human, because a human has the right to live and dream, even animals have freedom, I don't even have freedom, all doors are closed. I am a prisoner of a law, I am a victim of the system, I am a person living dead. I pray that a miracle happens and the law would change. I am old now, I will not benefit anymore, but for the coming generations.. I can't even leave the country, I am forever stuck...I pray someone takes my case, to write it, to voice my voiceless life." As human rights activists, it is our prime responsibility to raise up the voices of the voiceless and to be beacons of hope in a world full of injustice.



## **Annex- Testimonies**

### **Testimony 1, 31-years-old Lebanese Mother, N.N.**

“My name is N.N, I am a 31-year-old Lebanese woman, mother to a 13-year-old son and a wife. My family and I have been greatly impacted by Lebanon's nationality law, which forbids women from passing on their nationality to their spouses and children. My husband's mother is Lebanese, and his father was Syrian, but he died when he was young. Due to Lebanon's discriminatory nationality laws, my husband could not receive Lebanese citizenship from his mother, and the complexity of Lebanon's system prevented him from obtaining Syrian citizenship from his father. As a result, my spouse, who was born and raised in Lebanon, has no legal documents—no registration, no identity cards—only his baptism and birth certificates. This renders him basically stateless. This circumstance has had an awful effect on our kid, who, like his father, is stateless. My child was born without a nationality because I was unable to pass on my Lebanese nationality to him and his father did not have citizenship. He does not belong in Syria or Lebanon. He is a child without a nation. My husband works in terrible conditions without papers, and he fears that if he loses his current job, he will be unable to find another company ready to hire him without legal status. We live in ongoing uncertainty, concerned about my son's future in Lebanon. We struggled a lot to find a suitable school which would accept the fact that my son doesn't have any papers. He now attends a public school with poor amenities because he is unable to enroll in a private school or benefit from government tuition assistance programs for low-income Lebanese families. I fear about the possibility of him sitting for his state examinations at the ages of 15 and 17, or possibly enrolling in university without identification. I often consider leaving Lebanon in search of better career possibilities and earn enough money to pay for legal representation that could help us find a solution for our son. We do not have health insurance or any other sort of state or workplace security. I live in constant terror of my son becoming unwell, knowing that without proper documents, no reputable hospital will admit him or my husband. We attempted to present our case in court last year, but Lebanon's political paralysis—the country has been without a president and a functioning parliament for more than two years—has left the situations of stateless persons unanswered. We have to wait for a new president to come, for then a new parliament to

be formed, and eventually they will start opening the naturalization case, we still have a long way to go. My despair has been made worse by the fact that my husband's brother was able to gain Lebanese citizenship by paying bribes to high-level authorities. In Lebanon, if you have money, you can have whatever you want; the system is corrupt, riddled with clientelism and bribes. I'm even willing to marry a Lebanese man just to get his citizenship and pass it along to my child. I'm frightened of the day when my son realizes the realities of his life in Lebanon. When he will start thinking of applying to University or planning his future job, what will I tell him? He is still under the age of 18, and I am willing to do everything it takes to ensure his safety and stability in the future. I can't bring myself to have more children knowing that they would face a life without identity, rights, or a future. I would want to have more kids, but what future will they have? I can't do this to them. One of my husband's brothers recently died. He was also stateless, his family couldn't even make him a death certificate, nor bury him, they are nobodies in Lebanon, even if their mother is Lebanese. My husband and child are unable to travel; as stateless individuals, they are trapped—where could they go? I am willing to travel and to live years without my child and my family, just to provide for him. The job which I currently have in Lebanon doesn't pay well, I'm a freelancer, and because of the current economic crisis, nobody is hiring me, so we are now passing through a very hard month...my husband who works in black doesn't get paid enough, and now, we are at the end of the month... our fridge is empty, schools are starting soon, my son needs a new backpack, he needs lunch for school, I have no idea how to provide that... I will leave it in God's hands. Along the years, we tried to get the "laissez-passez" type of passport for my son, but the authorities wouldn't allow it, as he had no document in his name, and his father is also stateless, hence, they couldn't help us in any way.. we want to leave, but we can't. I would always blame my husband, telling him to do something, to go and demand his rights, but he is beyond depressed, he doesn't like to talk about his situation, but I will not be silent. Despite the hardships, I refuse to be ashamed of our situation. I will continue to raise my voice and speak up wherever I can. As my son grows older, I will teach him to be proud and to speak out for himself. My only hope lies with God, who gives me the strength to persevere. Without faith, I would be even more filled with despair. I was a dead person before I started believing, I was in constant depression, you wouldn't recognize me, but God has made me stronger. If my son doesn't have any identity on

earth, I am sure that He has an identity in heaven and in God's eyes, my son matters, even without papers, he is still a human being. I will battle to the end of my life for my family's recognition. I am Lebanese, born and raised, and it is my right to pass on my nationality to my children. I pray that God will protect us and that everything will turn out for the best for my dear son."

**Testimony 2, Sudanese-Lebanese Mother, D.D., 44 years old.**

"My name is D.D, and I am 44 years old and was born and raised in Lebanon. My mother, N. is a Christian Lebanese, while my father, A. is Muslim Sudanese. My parents split when I was very young, and my father departed when I was only a year old. He abandoned us without registering or providing any documentation. I was raised by my mother's family, and for much of my youth, I was uninformed of my fragile legal situation. When I was 12, the truth of my situation became clear to me at school. The school desired some documents, and I noticed my mother continuously describing our situation, which made me realize something was wrong. I had no official documents, simply a birth certificate. In my school years, no one from my friends knew about my situation, not even my best friend. I always lived in secret. One of the most unpleasant experiences was when preparing for the First Communion. The nun told me, in front of all the other children, "You cannot practice with us because you are Sudanese and Muslim. "You do not belong in this practice." That moment was devastating since I identified as a Christian and felt completely Lebanese—I was born here, after all. In Lebanon, you are judged based on your religion, especially that I come from a mixed family (Christian Mother and Muslim Father), the community which we were living in was mostly Christians, and so they treated us differently, and even judged us, due to the fact that my father was Muslim. During that time there was the civil war, as you know Beirut was divided East Beirut and West Beirut based on religious dominance, and so the hatred in that time was at its peak. At 15, I had to drop out of school since I couldn't take state examinations without a valid identity. The school director proposed that I retake eighth grade again to gain additional time in school, and that was the end of my educational path. Leaving school dashed my hopes of entering college and becoming a psychologist or veterinarian. Instead of pursuing my dreams, I found myself working in a shop where no paperwork was required. I was bound to jobs that had no social security, nor being registered in a respectful company. I

was always afraid of being exposed and losing my job. To avoid revealing my situation, I pretended to have private coverage and denied needing social services. I also worked as a home nurse for ten years, living in the shadows, embarrassed and hiding my reality during what should have been the happiest years of my life. Eventually, my father assisted us in obtaining Sudanese passports, but every visit to the Sudanese embassy felt foreign—I didn't identify with the Sudanese people; it felt like a different planet, I would spend hours in the Embassy to get my papers done, I didn't feel any connection to those people... but still I was always identified as the "Sudanese girl". People advised my mother to declare that we don't have a father, to declare we are illegitimate children, in the hopes that the authorities would facilitate our papers... but even that didn't work. Every time I would go with my mother to any governmental office, authorities would often say "let the Sudanese girl come in", in front of everyone, to single me out between Lebanese people, everyone would look at me differently. One official once told me, "how are you Sudanese? you don't look Sudanese", I wanted to tell him that it's true, I don't even know Sudan. We grew up in a community filled with racism, often bullied and discriminated against, our neighbors and community treated me and my sister like an outsider. Even when we went to church, one of our neighbors would look at me in a weird way, as if I don't belong in the community. This law has changed my whole life. If I had papers, surely my life would not have been like that, I would have continued my education, pursued a career that I love, and lived a respectful life. Years later, I met my husband, a Lebanese man. Our wedding registration was exhausting and demanding because I was not registered anywhere, the Sudanese Embassy required a lot of papers to register our marriage. My mother was fortunate enough to get a three-month residence permit for me, allowing us to marry outside of Lebanon. We eventually went to get married in Cyprus, because in Cyprus civil marriage is allowed, unlike Lebanon. Additionally, in the Embassy of Cyprus the authorities also investigated my case. They had doubts that I was marrying my husband just to get Lebanese Citizenship.. It was horrible. After our marriage, my husband was able to provide me with a residency permit, but it actually took ten years to obtain my Lebanese citizenship because we did not have children, making the procedure even more difficult. In Lebanon, if you don't have children, nationality is hard to obtain for non-Lebanese women. I can't explain how hard it was... I felt like I was begging for my identity. It seemed like a miracle when we

eventually got the call that my identity card was ready, we were overcome with joy, my husband was crying of joy... we couldn't believe it. During those years, the police would frequently come to our house to check whether I was truly living with my spouse, for they assumed that our marriage was merely for citizenship grounds. The police would come and ask the neighbors and the shops around us, if I was really living here, it was truly embarrassing, I felt constantly ashamed and afraid. I also suffered criticism from my surroundings. My mother-in-law did not approve of me at first, telling my husband how could he date a "Sudanese girl", and stating: "What would the people say about us? our son is married to a Sudanese girl?" As if that was the end of the world... I was born and raised here, I am as Lebanese as they are. My mother-in-law would also argue with my husband telling him that he is educated and has diplomas and he should marry someone with more education, such as a doctor or a lawyer, not someone like me. Those comments were terrible, but my husband was always there for me, reminding me that my problems were not my fault, but the result of a flawed system. He always reminds me that I am loved...Regarding health matters, thankfully until now I was never in need of hospitalization, I only remember as a child that my mother would take us to health clinics that were in bad conditions, we couldn't afford private health care. In Lebanon, if you lack the necessary papers, your ambitions can often be crushed. If we had the money, we would have engaged a lawyer to defend my case, any lawyer's fee is not below 3,000\$...If you have money in Lebanon, you can achieve everything. Imagine that in Sudan, which is not considered a progressive country, Sudanese mothers can give their nationality to their children, and still Lebanese women can't, just because the government fears the naturalization of palestinians... but if a muslim Lebanese man wants to get married to four palestinian women, that is not considered wrong.. strange logic. Surviving life without papers is a tough reality that robs many of us of our potential and dreams. I believe God's hand was at work, giving us hope and strength throughout our most difficult times."

**Testimony 3, R. A. 40 years old, Syrian-Lebanese**

My name is R.A. and I was born and raised in Lebanon with a Lebanese mother and a Syrian father who was a runaway soldier from the Syrian army. I grew up in a Christian environment with five siblings, all living in a small house. My father, who is now dead, was an alcoholic, and was always drunk and wasted. My mother didn't know how to write

and read, which meant that she couldn't work a proper job, so she used to work in agriculture, and sometimes a house cleaner just to provide for us, and make up for my father's lack of productivity. My father used to beat us all the time, he would constantly fight with my mother, we couldn't study, we couldn't live properly. We didn't go to the best schools, we didn't have the means, and we had to interrupt our education several times due to lack of funds and our documentation, so we changed schools many times. My brother did not deal well with our situation, due to quitting school at a young age, he started using drugs at a young age, from weed to pills.. and going up the ladder. He was arrested and sent to jail for several years for drug abuse, but he is now out of jail and being treated thankfully. I remember there was a naturalization spree in the early 2000s, but we were unable to register due to the complexity of the process and a lack of understanding, so many people were given citizenship and they even didn't used to live in Lebanon, it was a very randomized naturalization. I went to a Catholic school where we encountered severe discrimination; Syrians in Lebanon are frequently viewed as second-class citizens. My siblings and I were verbally abused, with the director openly calling us "a piece of Syrians" and "snakes" leaving us feeling horribly objectified. We always knew that Syrians were rejected in Lebanon, especially that back then, the Syrian army was present on Lebanese grounds during the war. In university, I was always treated as a foreigner, I had to fill papers for foreigners, and my tuition was three times higher because of my Syrian blood, despite the fact that I had never felt connected to Syria. Working in Lebanon was especially tough because Syrians must have a sponsor, making it impossible to get work. At first my mother's friend sponsored me, but with all the hatred towards Syrians in Lebanon, she didn't accept to continue the sponsorship. I worked without paperwork for a long time, living in constant fear. Every job I started was very short, no Lebanese wanted to hire Syrians, and so I struggled a lot, especially because I needed a work permit and it was impossible to get it with all the discrimination. My sister married a Lebanese guy, and she was able to receive the courtesy residency permit for three years temporarily. Because of the law, she is only able to receive citizenship if she has kids, because they fear that she would marry a Lebanese man just to receive citizenship. She also opened a nail shop, and she tried to sponsor me. I started working with her, but I still had to hide every time the police came to search shops, looking for undocumented Syrians. They would always come and terrorize us. Once the police came

and accused us of faking papers, and of stealing money, and none of these accusations were true, they were only skeptical about her shop because she is Syrian. It was horrible, we never did any harm to anyone, we were born and raised here, our mother is Lebanese, why would they treat us this way, just because our father was Syrian? We were given 1 month to leave Lebanon. My sister was able to be free of these accusations, because the father of her Lebanese husband was able to convince the authorities by sponsoring her shop, but I had to bribe a lot of officials for them to let me go. But still, there was always a spot on my name, anywhere I would go, my file was tainted for 11 years, accused of things I haven't done, which made me quit my job. Everywhere I would apply, I would get rejected because of my file, and the employers who always prioritize giving jobs to Lebanese citizens. Over the years, I discovered that there was a person who hated me and my family, and he was the one who filed those accusations, just because of the hatred towards Syrians in Lebanon. I don't care anymore, I forgive him. I also had to leave Lebanon and go to Syria for three months, just to declare that I have changed my sponsor, that was the law back then. Followingly, I had a friend who knew some high connections in the government, and had said that he could help me in my case, and so I was sent to a high ranking official, and instead of him helping me, he sexually abused me in his office. It was traumatizing, I don't have the right to report him, who will I even report him to? They could easily have me deported...I had to continue seeing him normally in public, because He was the only one who was able to remove the black spot of my folder, and it was only till last year that I was free from those wrongful accusations. I recently married a Lebanese man, but I'm still unable to obtain citizenship because I can't have children. Although I was born and raised in Lebanon, the country continues to reject me, treating me as a lesser person, leaving me feeling like I belong nowhere. I always hear things like "the Syrians have eaten us, they stole everything from us, they ate the dry and the green fields", and so I lived my life always ashamed of my background. I went to several psychologists, but no one really helped me overcome my situation, and each session was extremely expensive, so I would always pause my treatment.. The Lebanese people continue to treat Syrians very badly, they only pay attention to the refugees and poor population, they don't care about the educated and resilient Syrians who have lost everything in the war. I don't belong anywhere.. I feel like I have a conflict of identities.. The only thing I belong to is my faith and my Christianity, I chose to be Christian. I don't

belong to Syria, nor to Lebanon, in the eyes of the Lebanese people, I will always be “a piece of syrian”. If people would only look deeper than their eyes can see, maybe the world can be a better place.

#### **Testimony 4, N.M, 47-years-old Sudanese-Lebanese**

My name is N.M, born in 1977 to a Lebanese Mother and a Sudanese Father. Regarding my childhood I can honestly remember that I thought that I was a normal person, I was living with my mothers side of the family, as my sister D.D mentioned our father left us at a very young age and my parents were divorced. As an older child, I was told that my father was dead, it was just until the age of 7 years old that I was told the truth, that my father was in fact alive, that I was in fact muslim and not Christian, and that I had no papers, and I was not Lebanese. At the age of 9 I got baptized. Growing up in Lebanon, I always saw how Lebanese treated people from lower countries, and so I became ashamed to tell others about my situation. I had nothing to my name that proves who I am, the only document I had was my birth certificate, which is not even legalized due to my father’s disappearance as a kid. Some years later, my father came back and registered us in the Sudanese Embassy as his children, and so we were granted Sudanese passports, but still, we did not have any residence permits in Lebanon. Over the years, my sister and I were admitted to a public school. Even though we have no documentation, the director empathized with our case, and so he kept us. He always saw in me how passionate I was about studying, he saw the potential which no one did. When the state exams arrived in the 9th grade, I only had a paper from the Sudanese embassy.. I honestly do not know how they accepted that I sit for the state exams, I guess they didn't pay any attention.. as well as the state exams of the 12th grade, I presented them and passed them.. but that was the end of my educational path, it all ended in the 12th grade. I dreamt of becoming an actor, a writer, a director... reality struck me, I couldn't work, nor go to university and continue my education. I depended on the people’s help and pity to employ me as a person without any documentation, to work “in the black” as they say. The hardest times were when I was surrounded by individuals who had no idea about my situation. They would ask about my career, what I do, why I wasn't working, and a bunch of additional questions that made me feel suffocated. Every time I met someone new, I had to lie or come up with excuses, constantly justifying my circumstances. I wasn't able to be honest. Those who



eventually discovered the truth about my case would either pity me or begin treating me differently, considering me as somehow inferior. Some would even offer me exploitative, low-wage jobs like cleaning their homes and performing labor-intensive tasks... as if those were the only paths I could take... I didn't know how to answer, so I lied over and over. It's sad actually, I always felt that I didn't have the right to be like everyone else, seeing all of my friends graduating, working, traveling, getting married, achieving big things.. while I was stuck, like a bird in a cage, all because of this law. I always thought of ending my life, I was suicidal, I attempted to end it several times, but it never worked. My coping mechanisms were all toxic, going to very bad places just to forget for a while and feel “alive”. When my sister wanted to marry, I discovered how hard the process was for people from our situation, and the second reality hit me: I can't get married, and even if I wanted, it would have been very hard. Throughout the years, I fell pregnant by a guy I was dating back then, and I was pushed to abort my child, due to the situation I was living in, even though I truly wanted to keep my child. I felt no one understood me, I was in depression at all times. One of the most scarring situations was the fear of army checkpoints along the roads. I used to imagine that I would automatically be deported back to Sudan if they realized I was without papers. Hence I couldn't get out much, only to limited places which had no checkpoints. Regarding work, I used to work in secret of course, as a housekeeper sometimes, but always in the dark. Along the years, I was a victim of bullying and constant verbal abuse, I grew up without any confidence. Since I was a child, I used to hear “you don't deserve anything”, which broke my heart. I was a person who had ambitions, I dreamt to continue my education, I always compare myself to a bird without any wings in a cage, stuck and powerless, the suicidal thoughts were always present, they come and go.. What was harder is that I am living with my mom, and that she is getting older. I can't provide for her, I can't give her any insurance, always fearing hospitalization, always fearing needing money in case someone falls ill. My only hope was my faith in God, faith was the only thing that kept me going. I learned not to have ambitions, I learned to stop dreaming, and as a result I couldn't even build meaningful relationships, I always felt like an outsider. Even if I die, I don't have a place to be buried in, I don't belong anywhere. I got sexually abused several times, but feared to report it, because I was afraid to get deported if they found out I am without any papers. I also got physically and emotionally abused from family members, but never able to

report anything. Additionally, I remember clearly each time me and my mother would rent a house or would want to register any kind of goods, the owners would tell me to give them identification or to register things on my own name, seeing the fact my mother was an elderly woman. I would panic, and try to come up with lies, saying that my mother is always the one in charge... I always fear they will report me, or see me as a runaway refugee...I had to lie my whole life. Currently, me and my mother live in a rented house registered under the name of my mother, because I am not able to own, or to have anything in my name, we always fear that the landlord will kick us out if we are not able to provide the money, especially with the current economic situation, she can higher the price as much as she desires due to the currency fluctuations. I dont have the right to learn how to drive, which was a dream of mine. I am stuck in a country that doesn't feel like mine. I always dreamt that a country would “adopt” me, for me to work abroad, just to provide for my mother, whose own country is not providing anything for her. I am always afraid that my mother will die. Something important for you to know, when my mother was trying to get us residency permits, the authorities made my mother sign a declaration that states that she is the sponsor of me and my sister, and that if we are caught working in the country, my mother would be sent to jail, and I would be also jailed and deported to Sudan, no one knows what they would do to me before sending me to Sudan, abuse, rape... no one understands me, no one understands the fear of getting caught if they work- additionally, they would send the police to our houses to check if we are abiding by this law. Growing up, I was always angry at my mother. As a kid I would blame her for our situation. The family side of my mother, my aunts and cousins used to hate us, and always treated us like outsiders. I also remember that my boss at work (nursery) used to empathize with me, she saw my potential and that's why she protected me and kept me for years in her office, until the law came up that prohibited foreigners from working without residence permits and I had to leave. I used to beg for love, I always felt desperate, always longing for someone to understand me. At first I blamed God, not knowing why I was created, but at the end I witnessed God's love was the only thing that fulfilled me and noticed his hand was with me at each moment. My father was also in jail for a period of time due to some falsification of documents in Saudi arabia. Over the years, my mother tried to apply for us to receive residency permits which were given for 3 months, my sister was granted the permit by some luck, and I didn't, although we had the same exact case,

it broke my heart. Additionally, we had to pay for all the years that we lived in Lebanon without residence, and it was a huge amount. The reason for my document rejection was due to my father not legalizing my birth certificate when I was born, because he isn't Lebanese, he couldn't register me, I discovered that fact at 19 years old. And so for so many years, we collected the funds needed to hire a lawyer to resolve my case, imagine, after spending a huge amount of money, for 15 years, the lawyer never took us seriously, she never followed up on my case, always blaming it on the political situation in Lebanon and on legal courts being closed due to strikes and whatsoever. The second and third lawyer also acted the same, promising me to pursue my case, giving me hope, but then after a while, they would start stalling, giving random excuses each time. Imagine seeing Russians and Ukrainians women who married Lebanese men, having Lebanese citizenship, speaking a foreign language and me, born and raised in this country, speaking the language of the country, without any citizenship. Imagine asking for a permit to live in a country you were born in.. When my father was out of jail he came to Lebanon and applied for us to get passports in the Sudanese embassy of Beirut, and so I owned for the first time a document which says who I am. I am a Lebanese citizen, I was born in this land, I will almost be 50 years-old now, I can't vote, I can't do anything, I am treated as an alien, as an outsider, where is the justice? If I had documentation I would leave this country, especially during those times of war, Covid, economic crisis, we can't even live anymore. There is no longer a middle class in Lebanon, there is extreme poverty and richness. In Lebanon if you want to get around you need to know someone, you need to pay a lot of money, you even need to belong to a political party, for them to get your things going. I have a lot of health problems. I did several operations in public hospitals, but not one of them worked. I have to live in constant pain. (she teared up, paused for a bit). It all started when I went to a health facility and they told me I have endometriosis, and informed me that I was in need of operation, I told him my case that I had no papers, and the health practitioner said "I know a hospital that does those things secretly, but you have to stay with me", it didn't look like a hospital, it looked like a house, we gave him 500\$ in cash. The operation was done in a way which was highly unhygienic, everything was done in secret, the sheets were dirty and shattered, not professional at all, and the staff all treated me badly. The operation failed, and in the following years, the pain kept getting worse and another doctor checked on me and noticed that in fact the previous

doctor had done a very bad job, and that he didn't fix the problem, he even made it worse. Ever since, I endure pain in silence. For my final words, I want to declare that I am a human who doesn't know if she is a human, because a human has the right to live and dream, even animals have freedom, I don't even have freedom, all doors are closed. I am a prisoner of a law, I am a victim of the system, I am a person living dead. I pray that a miracle happens and the law would change. I am old now, I will not benefit anymore, but for the coming generations.. I can't even leave the country, I am forever stuck.. (teared up, end of conversation.) I pray someone takes my case, to write it, to voice my voiceless life.

### **Testimony 5- N.H, Sudanese-Lebanese Father**

My name is N.H., a 47 years old father born and raised in Lebanon. My mother is Lebanese and my father is Sudanese. I can say that I have witnessed all the periods of Lebanon, especially the Lebanese civil war for 15 years and everything after it from the taif agreement and such. I was never able to get citizenship from my mother, I have lived my whole life in Lebanon as a foreigner. And as foreigners we always worked indirectly, we all struggled in obtaining residency permits, we cannot access reputable schools, we cannot apply to have a driving license. God had mercy on us in 2005, a decree was passed by Mr. Kamil el Sayyed, God bless him for he has saved a lot of people with this decree, which states that children from Lebanese mothers are able to apply for a residency permit called "courtesy permits" in Lebanon for 3 years, and it was free of charge, and so I was able to get a permit in Lebanon. I consider myself lucky, some had it worse, some didn't speak of their situation, and some had no one to help them. I was able to go and work in the gulf countries, I got married to a Lebanese woman and we now have two beautiful boys who unfortunately are also without any Lebanese citizenship. I have now immigrated definitively to Canada, I do not want my kids to endure what I had to go through. Every time I would go to the Sudanese Embassy, I remember them looking at me weirdly. I was the only white-skinned man in an Embassy full of black-skinned individuals, I would face a lot of bullying from that, they would mock me at the embassy and not take me seriously. For a while, the embassy couldn't provide us with passports for long durations, and in order to renew our residence in Lebanon, we needed passports of five years minimum. Hence, we had to go to the Sudanese Embassy in Dubai, in Saudi

Arabia or in Sudan (where there is war), imagine applying for a visa, booking tickets and hotel, traveling to another country and spending a huge amount of money, just to renew our passports to be able to live in a country we are born in. Once my wife and my child traveled to Saudi Arabia to renew the passport of my son, upon arrival, my son was harassed, no one believed he was Sudanese, they thought we were faking it to receive the passport. My child was 11 years old, he was bullied by the authorities in the embassy, even the consul verbally abused my son. The authorities would always ask; “Why was he renewing passports in Saudi Arabia? How is he Sudanese?”. No one from my family lived in Sudan, it was just a citizenship passed from my father’s side, but even my father didn’t live in Sudan. And that is why I decided to leave Lebanon for good. I think I will receive Canadian citizenship before even receiving the citizenship of my own birthplace... I can’t imagine having my children grow up in a place full of corruption and discrimination. Personally, I don’t get saddened anymore, but my children always ask me, “why don’t we have normal passports like our cousins? Why is it more difficult for us?” I never knew how to fully explain to them the reality we are living in. I try to explain to them the law, and how the naturalization decree done in 1994 was very random and unorganized and so our family wasn’t able to be naturalized back then, but they never were able to comprehend. I forgot to mention that with the courtesy permit I had, I was legally not allowed to work in a professional field, I can’t be a lawyer, a doctor, or an architect. The priority and favoritism was always to the Lebanese citizens, I always felt limited, as if there are boundaries around me, not allowing me to be free. I consider myself lucky that I have been recruited by a company in Oman that overlooked those details. I was raised and nurtured in Lebanon, I know every bit of its history, why am I not a citizen? My mother’s family are all Lebanese, and most of them work in the government, but not one was able to provide me citizenship. Most Arab countries allow women to give their nationality, we are the only ones who can’t.. just for political interest. My cousins from my father’s side are also from a Lebanese mother and a Sudanese father. They had it worse than I did, I was able to escape, to travel, to find a way to survive, they couldn’t. I remember once when the mandatory military recruitment (service for the flag) took place during the war, I wasn’t recruited because of my situation, even though all of my neighbors, friends and cousins were taken, and that's when the people around us started questioning about us, treating us like foreigners, giving us weird stares, just for not having

the citizenship. I carry a passport which I don't belong to, I don't even know who the president of Sudan is, I don't know anything about their history, I usually google about the country if I want to know any information... I only carry the passport to be able to move around, it doesn't mean anything to me. After 47 years of hardships, leaving Lebanon was the only solution I had to be able to provide for my family. I have shared with you 1% of what people in my situation live, but so many others have it way worse. Most of us were raised without a father, our mothers and grandmothers raised us, and no one honors them. The woman does all of the hard work, and she can't even give her nationality. Thank God I didn't seek refuge in dark places, usually people around me with this situation usually end up wasting their lives with alcohol, drugs or stealing.. just to live. In 2019 there was the Lebanese revolution, I couldn't participate in the revolts, I wanted to, it is my right, I too have lost a lot of money due to the crisis, but I couldn't go to the streets and demand my rights, I'm not even Lebanese. I would have wished to continue my life in Lebanon, to raise my kids in my land, in my environment, to be fully Lebanese.. but it's too late now. The Lebanese identity is carved in me, its values, traditions, culture, all inside of my heart, but that doesn't grant me citizenship. We are limited citizens, living in the dark, all because of this law which renders your identity to nothing. I left Lebanon with a broken heart, to provide a better life for my children, for them to grow in a country which respects them, sees them for who they are, a country which doesn't discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, or skin color.. I do not want them to live what I have lived.

**Testimony 6, K.K, Palestinian-Lebanese Father of a now UNIPD Alumni**

My name is K.K, I was born in 1964 in Lebanon, my mother is Lebanese and my father is Palestinian. My family is originally Maronite Christian, and we used to live in a mostly Christian populated area called "Jal el dib" which was part of the "west Beirut" during the Lebanese civil war. As you know, Beirut was divided into two parts during the war, East Beirut which was mainly Muslim populated, and West Beirut, which was the Christian part of Beirut. Also you may know that "Jal el dib" was controlled by the Kateab political party, which was a party that refused and discriminated against the presence of the Palestinians in Lebanon. And so I grew up in a place which always rejected our existence, always being bullied for my Palestinian side, even though my mother was Lebanese. Hence

we moved to East Beirut, to a city called “Hamra”, where we were treated a bit better, as most Palestinians lived there, but still, my Muslim Palestinian friends used to always look at me weirdly, being Christian and Palestinian. I was constantly living in a dilemma. I was born and raised in Lebanon, but I am always seen as Palestinian, even though I have never been to Palestine. Regarding documentation, I used to hold the “blue card”, (I would call it a piece of carton) an identification card and a “brown travel document” which are documents only given to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. I was able to enter a private university (American University of Beirut) because my parents back then were financially capable of paying. In Lebanon, money is everything, if you are able to pay, there is no discrimination in education. I faced a conflict of identity during my younger years, when I used to meet Palestinians who lived in the refugee camps of Beirut, they would regard me as traitor, they used to hate on me, to judge me, because I used to live in West Beirut, and that I was Christian, and not living in a refugee camp like they were. They used to ask me, “in which camp are you in? the one in Dbayeh?” Because as you know, there is a huge refugee camp there. All I know is that I was born with a roof over my head. Over the years, I graduated with a Bachelor in Mathematics, and fortunately, I was recruited by a school in Lebanon as a math teacher. My case is very rare, usually Palestinians in Lebanon cannot work, our permits did not allow us to work any job, so we always worked “in black”, illegally. We could work basic jobs under the table, such as fishing and selling fish, wall painter, plumber, etc. if you have a degree in architecture you can’t become an architect, same thing for law and medicine, we would have to leave the country to be able to work in our professions. But technically we can’t leave for better job opportunities because Arab countries used to have mixed stances around Palestinian refugees, depending on the political interest of the country and the situation in the region. For example, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia accepted Palestinians on and off during the years based on the political situation, every country opened its border based on its “mood”. Furthermore, when I was working as a teacher, I always had to go the extra mile in everything that I do, I always had to be outstanding in my work, for them to disregard that I was Palestinian, I had to put in a lot of efforts, to be extraordinary, for the directors to allow me to stay and teach. If someone is Lebanese, they can work normally, not necessarily needing to prove themselves to stay, but if you are Palestinian, you have to make them forget who you are by being outstanding in your work. And that creates a lot

of challenges, not everyone is qualified to be outstanding, not everyone is an overachiever, hence so many Palestinians have to work basic jobs as I have stated. My whole environment would be constantly judging me, and I understand them, when I would meet someone who works a job that is not similar to their degree, they would criticize me, saying that it is because my mother is christian and Lebanese, that I was recruited, I understand them, I do, and I feel them. I am born from a Lebanese mother and I know that as a child, our origins are Lebanese. Our family name K. are from christian maronites origin and our grandparents have worked in Haifa before having borders between Lebanon and Palestine, and when Sykes Picot happened, the countries were divided, and before no one paid attention to the whole “citizenship” issue. In the 1948 crisis, my grandfather came back to Lebanon and did not seek to restore the citizenship, because he did not see the need of it, there was no need to prove your origin, because in 1948, all arab countries opened their borders for palestinian refugees and no one felt the need to focus on those matters. Of course it is all political, I don’t want to get into the details but in my opinion, it is the Americans who allowed the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to try to control the Lebanese grounds. That was the plan of Henry Kissinger, when he negotiated with the leader of PLO Yaser Aarafat, to give the Palestinians the south of Lebanon, as a free land instead of the lands in Israel, and leave Israel alone, and I guess the leader of the PLO was agreeing on the plan. Anyway, we always attempted to get our Lebanese citizenship, we had some papers from my grandfather, and at the same time my father died at a very young age at 38, I was only 5, and so we were constantly searching for proof that we were Lebanese, and so my mother was alone fighting to give us her citizenship, which did not work because as you know, the mother cannot grant citizenship to her children. So we started searching for old documents that proved that we have some kind of lebanese lineage from our great grandparents, that states that they were from the south of Lebanon, and find some documents that my great grandfather did the first communion or baptized or something like that, anything that proves paternal lineage. Hence, over the years we gathered those documents and seeked help from lawyers to present our case to the court, but as you know, lawyers used to profit alot from this situation, they were all corrupted. The lawyers would always tell us “pay us the money, and we will get your papers don’t worry”, mind you that no one helped us, time passed and one or two of the lawyers even died, and still not one lawyer was faithful to his job,



they profited from our situation, and even if our case reached the hands of a judge, they would automatically discriminate against us due to our palestinian background, we faced a lot of racism and that's a recurrent problem in Lebanon, the mentality is very wrong...especially because of the whole Taif Agreement and how the government is divided, the Lebanese president always feared naturalization, fearing that by granting naturalization to Palestinian refugees, the demographic balance in the country will change in favor of the muslim population, because christian palestinians are a very small minority. And so it was all a matter of sectarianism, no one really cared about the palestinian refugees. Additionally, my wife is Lebanese and christian and from a city called "Bikfaya", which was the hub of the Kataeb party -which as I mentioned hated the palestinians- and so even in my relationships I had to be outstanding in everything I do for someone to fall in love with me, and to disregard that I was palestinian. Thankfully my wife loved me as I am, but there were always problems with her parents and her brother. Her parents were always cautious because I was Palestinian, always asking her if I am treating her well, if I am not hurting her, etc. Her brother, on the other hand, never accepted me, and never welcomed me into the family. Here's a funny story, when we were returning from our honeymoon in Turkey, (I was able to travel with the brown travel document) , we were stopped in the Lebanese airport. The authorities informed my wife that she could enter Lebanon, but that I had to go back to Turkey. At first, I thought he was joking, but then he showed me a news report that said that the Prime Minister Rafik el Harriri just stated one hour ago that even Palestinians with a brown travel document, cannot enter Lebanon without a Visa, I couldn't believe it -Apparently, there was a regional conflict, where Muammar Al Gadafi, leader of Libya, for some reason threatened the Lebanese government that He will kick out the Palestinians from Libya and send them to Lebanon, and as a response, our Prime Minister took the decision of the whole Visa permission, we are all victims of a political game - So I had to take a flight back to Turkey and stay for a month waiting for someone to help me get a Visa to enter Lebanon, and that was after bribing a lot of authorities just to fasten the procedure. I was humiliated in front of my wife's family, who already judged me for being Palestinian. We got Lebanese citizenship a few years ago, at the time President Michel Aoun was in power. We knew a woman who had strong ties to the President, and she volunteered to help me. She requested all of my documentation, and amazingly, my naturalization application was

accepted that same day. This was mostly because my mother and wife are Lebanese Christian Maronites, and I didn't seem like a threat to the demographic balance of Lebanon. As a matter of fact, I was considered a welcome addition to the Christian Maronite community, which is currently a minority in the nation. As you can see, a human being is defined by just a piece of paper, a paper that is defined by a political game, we are all labeled, if you are a good citizen or a refugee. I know a lot of people whose fathers are from different countries, like Denmark, but whose mothers are from Lebanon. Their children were born in Lebanon, but they are only Danish citizens. However, they don't experience the same obstacles as Palestinians do. Unlike Palestinians, who are from a country that is fighting for its life, these people have the advantage of being from a stable, respectable nation. Individuals from wealthy nations frequently have it easier since they can afford to pay for the things they need. But it's a different story for those of us who come from war-torn nations. A large number of my acquaintances suffer from depression as a result of the challenges we encounter. Many of us have an identity crisis as children and wonder where we belong and who we are. As a result, we often grow up feeling torn between two different worlds. This has the power to deeply affect our minds and shape our entire lives; it's not just a passing phase. For instance, when my daughter was presenting the official state exams in the 9th grade, she didn't have any Lebanese ID, she was the only student holding the blue refugee card, and she always felt as an outsider, and sometimes bullied for being a Palestinian. I put in a lot of effort to explain to her that she was more than a mere paper, for her not to grow hate towards Lebanon...it was so hard to explain. My children grew up always worried on how to explain to their friends about our situation, even our neighbors rejected us for being Palestinian, and the whole environment around us hated the presence of Palestinians and Syrians in Lebanon. So our kids always used to hide and lie to their friends, fearing that they would be judged. But that all changed in one click, when we received the citizenship, imagine all gone, just because I am now holding the Lebanese citizenship, everyone around regards me as a "proper citizen". Regarding health matters, despite contributing to social security through my job, I was not eligible for hospitalization services because I am a Palestinian. I was contributing, but I couldn't get the benefits because of my nationality. Luckily, my wife was employed at the time and was able to register our children under her social security plan—one of the few rights available to Lebanese women. As final words, I can honestly

say thank God a million times. I don't know how it worked out at the end, but it did..  
thank God always.

### **Testimony 7, N.A, UNIPD Alumni, Egyptian-Lebanese**

My name is N.A, I'm a 27 years old engineer who recently graduated from the University of Padova. My mother is Lebanese and my Father is Egyptian. I was born in Egypt in a christian family, but we had to move to Lebanon when I was five years old. I would say my childhood was quite normal, I loved growing up in Lebanon, my father was financially stable, and so we were able to get registered in a very decent school in Lebanon. We lived in a city called "Zahle", a christian-majority area which was the city of my mother. The mother of my father was also Lebanese, but because of the law, my father only held Egyptian citizenship, and consequently, me too. As a kid, I don't really recall a huge discrimination at school, I can recall some events which marked me, for instance, when there would be a parents reunion at school, and my father would speak Egyptian, I would be a bit ashamed, but that wasn't such a big problem. One time a teacher openly discriminated against me in front of the whole class, we were all playing around, and she decided to shout at me particularly, and told me "if you are used to messing around in Egypt, you are in Lebanon now..", she once also told me, "what will you even achieve in life? you are only egyptian". You know Egyptians in Lebanon usually have mediocre jobs at gas stations, or house cleaning jobs, and so she regarded me in that particular stereotypical way. All of my friends would constantly mock me in school, joking about my Egyptian background, but I really didn't mind, I was a kid, I used to laugh with them. It wasn't until the formal state examinations that I really realized how serious my situation was. Because I am Egyptian, government-appointed professors regarded me differently, questioning and occasionally frisking me as if I were a threat. Processing these feelings was challenging, particularly for a student who was already under a lot of stress from exams. I arrived nervous for my math examination on the first day of my final state exams, and my Egyptian passport made the state officials notice me, so they singled me out. Rather than treating me like a worried student, they examined my dossier closely. My family name sounded muslim to them and that made them also suspicious. The stress of the tests itself added to the already challenging situation. In the end I disregarded them, and went to start my exam... they just did that to bother me. Additionally, every time me

and my father went to renew our residency permits (courtesy permits of 3 years), we would face a lot of discrimination, Egyptians are usually considered second-class citizens in Lebanon. The authorities would complicate our case, lying by telling us that X paper was missing.. At the end my father would shout at them, bribe them, and they would eventually provide us with the permits. I never got to hold the Lebanese citizenship, 15 years of living in Lebanon, it was my life dream to be considered Lebanese. My father obliged me to leave Lebanon at 18 and to continue my studies in Egypt. I was devastated, he always told me that he didn't want me to end up like him, with no future in Lebanon, I couldn't understand that back then. My father owned a furniture gallery, but he was prohibited to own property in Lebanon since he was not a citizen. For a while, the municipality only allowed him to run the company through bribes. He had an incredibly hard time getting by in Lebanon; he was not allowed to legally own anything, not even our house, which had to be registered in my mother's name. One of the most traumatic experiences happened to me when I used to return to Lebanon for vacation. My residency permit had expired, but Egyptian officials informed me at the airport that it would not be an issue, and that I could receive a tourist visa upon arrival in Lebanon. However, when I arrived, the Lebanese authorities treated me like a criminal. They couldn't believe an Egyptian man could speak Lebanese and suspected I was in the country illegally. Despite my explanation that my mother was Lebanese, they placed me in a room with illegal immigrants from India, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia. I kept telling them that my mother is Lebanese and that I have every right to enter my home country. I was then brought before the airport police director for interrogation. I said again, "I've spent my entire life here; I'm just visiting my family and friends." "This is my home." I also showed him images of my home, but this only made him more suspicious. I told him I had cash and completed all of the conditions for the visa on arrival, but he refused to believe me and continued to treat me as if I were less than human. I became so irritated and upset that I began crying, shouting, and swearing in Lebanese, asking them to understand my innocence. In the end, I had no choice except to bribe them with \$100 to obtain a 14-day visa. I just wanted to see my family and go home. I never went back to Lebanon after this experience, I felt like a foreigner in my own country, I grew up here, all of my memories were made here. After graduating from Egypt, I moved to Padova where I did a Masters in Engineering, and I am now fully working in Italy. Imagine 12 years of repeatedly applying for naturalization

with no results. We spent a fortune on lawyers, but none of them were truly helpful—they were all corrupt, taking advantage of our desperation to fill their wallets. No one resolved our problem. My father once came home with the news that our case might finally be taken into consideration. I was overjoyed—it had always been my goal to be Lebanese. However, no resolution was reached. When I was in 11th grade, my father decided we needed to return to Egypt. I was devastated and fought hard to remain in Lebanon. He would always tell me that I didn't understand, and that I was only happy in Lebanon because we were financially stable. If we had been poor, I would not have been able to go to school. Looking back, I realized what my father meant, I would have treated my children the same way. In Lebanon, if you don't have money or Lebanese citizenship, you are doomed. We were very lucky. As a child, I recall having a neighbor who despised me—a very racist man. Every time he saw me, he'd throw me off my bike and spit on me. When we played in the neighborhood, he would single me out, yelling that I didn't belong, telling me to return to Egypt, and cursing Egyptians. This is the reality of the majority of foreigners in Lebanon, particularly Egyptians, Syrians, and Palestinians, who are regarded as lesser human beings. I also faced discrimination at road checkpoints, seeing the fact that I don't hold the Lebanese citizenship, I can't have a Lebanese driving license, hence I transformed my Egyptian driving license to an international one. Every time I passed a checkpoint, the officials would pull me over, inspect the car, and treat me as if I were a criminal. When I drove my mother's car, they occasionally accused me of stealing it, and refused to accept she was Lebanese, or thought I was an illegal in the nation. I've always wanted to be Lebanese—to marry a Lebanese woman and have a family in the nation I grew up and loved. But now I can't imagine it. How could I marry a Lebanese woman and raise children who would battle with their identity? I couldn't...My friends were my biggest supporters; they embraced me, loved me for who I am, and always protected me. They were the best support system. I hope to return to Lebanon someday, but it will always be a dream. I've decided to pursue my future abroad because Lebanon will never fully accept me.

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