LOST HOPE, LOST LIVES: INSIGHTS INTO LEBANESE IRREGULAR MIGRATION

IOM UN MIGRATION

Fair Futures

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

In the context of a worsening economic, political and security situation, Lebanon is experiencing one of the largest waves of outward migration in its history. Alongside refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and the Palestinian Territories, there are indications that increasing numbers of Lebanese nationals are attempting to leave Lebanon, using the services of migrant smugglers to secure passage by sea to Europe. Tragically, at least three voyages in 2022 resulted in widespread loss of life, with hundreds of people drowning at sea.

Through empirical research undertaken during February and March 2023, this project has generated new insights into the irregular migration intentions of Lebanese nationals, with a particular focus on the situation in Tripoli and Akkar. The findings are relevant to crafting strategies to prevent and respond to irregular migration by sea by Lebanese nationals.

UNDERSTANDING THE PARAMETERS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION INTENT THROUGH EXISTING DATA

This project commenced with a rapid but detailed examination of existing literature and survey data to extract insights on the shifting nature and scope of irregular migration intention in Lebanon. This included survey data that had been collected by the Arab Barometer, in two waves, 2018–2019 and again in 2021–2022. While the Arab Barometer is a general survey, designed to solicit feedback on multiple dimensions of economic, social and political life in the Middle East and North Africa, it did include two questions on migration intent. Statistical analysis of the results greatly informed the research, enabling it to identify priority geographies, people and research questions, and to inform the development of the research methods and instruments that were used in this project.

Analysis of results from the Arab Barometer has confirmed that there has been a marked increase in willingness to migrate irregularly from Lebanon in recent years. In the 2018–2019 survey wave, when respondents were asked about their willingness to travel "without papers", 3 per cent of the population was willing to consider this. In the 2021–2022 wave of the same survey, willingness to migrate without papers had more than doubled, to 7 per cent of the population.

Arab Barometer results confirmed that willingness to migrate irregularly was highest in the northern areas: Baalbek (highest, with over 15% of the population willing to leave

without papers); the North (10%); and Akkar (8%). Similarly, the cohorts of those willing to migrate irregularly differed from those only willing to migrate regularly, with age, level of education and income level being important differentiating features. The populations at highest risk of migrating irregularly were the young (under 35 years old), unmarried men, those without university qualifications and those from rural rather than urban areas. While this was the highest risk group, the situation of young women was also significant, as the proportion of young women willing to consider irregular migration had more than tripled since 2019.

The analysis suggested there are important trends that need to be further examined, regarding the willingness of people to travel irregularly with children. While data on travel history or intentions were not collected by the Arab Barometer, analysis of demographic data collected on participants confirmed there had been growth in the willingness of parents with children to migrate irregularly. Comparing the 2018–2019 wave to the 2021–2022 wave, the proportion of people 35–50 years old who said they would be willing to migrate "without papers" rose from 1.5 per cent to almost 6 per cent. Within this cohort, around 81 per cent had children. In other words, while it is likely that smaller numbers in the age group of 35–50 years old may be willing to migrate irregularly compared with younger age groups, it is possible that when older Lebanese do move, they move with their families. Therefore, any increase in the proportion of these families considering irregular migration has the potential to magnify the humanitarian risks involved. The risk of smuggling vessels including whole families with children was also underscored by the composition of those on board the April and September 2022 maritime disasters.

NARROWING IN ON THE SITUATION IN THE NORTH (AKKAR AND TRIPOLI)

As reliable, high-quality information was already available to indicate the prevalence of irregular migration intention across Lebanon, the current research has sought to build on this by seeking deeper insights into the nature and mechanics of migrant smuggling in high-risk locations. With a short time to complete the research (three months, start to finish), this was felt to be the most appropriate way to secure actionable insights to inform programming in a relatively short period.

Using both focus groups with prospective irregular migrants and neighbourhood surveys in selected areas, this project sought to better understand irregular migration intention in areas that were indicated by the pre-existing data as being "high risk". Therefore, data collection focused on the North and Akkar. While Baalbek was clearly indicated as the highest risk area within Lebanon for irregular migration, it was not possible to undertake research there due to safety and access reasons. Ten neighbourhoods were chosen within Tripoli, Akkar and Beirut, based on IOM observations on prior smuggling cases and perceived levels of emigration.

Four focus groups were conducted (with residents of Mina Jardin and Bebnine), providing rich insights into people's intentions, their mindsets and influences on their decision-making. Data were collected through a survey of 954 men and women in the age group of 18–50 years old in the Beirut, Tripoli and Bebnine districts. While the surveys provided broadscale insights, the focus groups provided much richer explanations of the way people were thinking and the choices they were making.

IRREGULAR MIGRATION INTENT IN SURVEYED NEIGHBOURHOODS

More than three quarters of those who agreed to be surveyed indicated they were considering leaving Lebanon (754 respondents, or 78%),[1] and one quarter said they were also willing to consider migrating irregularly. The preferred transport mode was overwhelmingly travel by sea, for respondents with and without children. These rates of irregular migration are higher than those reported in the Arab Barometer (38% had thought about leaving Lebanon; 7% would consider irregular migration).[2] This is likely a result of the more targeted design of the survey, which was framed as a survey on migration intent and deliberately targeted to areas thought to have a high prevalence of irregular migration intent.

Migration propensity was highest in Akkar and Tripoli districts, with approximately 84 per cent of survey respondents saying they were considering leaving Lebanon and 41 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively, saying they would leave through irregular channels.

The group considering migration was significantly younger than those not considering migration (32.1 ± 0.9 years versus 36.1 ± 1.5 years), and were predominately male (70%). Half of respondents considering migration had children in Lebanon, and one third of those who were actively planning to leave by an irregular channel were planning to travel with children. While the main reasons given for wanting to leave Lebanon were economic (such as lack of livelihood, or debt) respondents with children, in particular, were more likely to cite access to health and education services as important drivers, alongside conflict and security.

Information on migration options and paths was mostly obtained through informal channels – principally friends and family in Lebanon. Of those considering irregular migration, 55 per cent had begun actively making plans, and 44 per cent of this cohort planned to leave within six months. Of those who had found smugglers, 72 per cent planned to leave within six months. Italy was the most popular destination, but Germany (via Türkiye, Italy and Greece) was also cited by a large proportion of prospective migrants, especially those with children.

Modelling the choice between regular and irregular migration as a logistic regression (modelling a binary choice) found that, while age was a weak predictor (all prospective migrants were generally younger than non-migrants), men were more likely to migrate irregularly. Other factors that increased the likelihood of a respondent choosing irregular migration were lack of livelihood and having children. The latter factor, together with reasons cited by individuals with children for wanting to leave Lebanon (such as education and health care) suggests that the urgency felt by many prospective migrants is driven by the impact of the current situation in Lebanon on their children. Overall, given that those without children considering migration tend to be younger individuals, there is a strong theme of feeling that there is no future in Lebanon for the younger generation.

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1   Question: "Are you considering leaving Lebanon?"
2   Question: "Earlier in our interview, you said you are considering leaving Lebanon. Are you willing to leave Lebanon 'without papers'?"

`WHAT WILL CHANGE BEHAVIOUR?

Analysis of survey data and focus groups suggests that many of those looking to migrate irregularly are being driven by an inability to meet practical needs locally, not by any preference to leave Lebanon. It is likely that interventions focusing very locally on improving livelihoods, decent work, health care and education will directly address the pressure people are feeling, and influence the decisions they are making. While for some people there may be one single dominant factor, it is likely that for many, a portfolio of interventions across financial, medical, education and practical needs, such as safe housing, will be influential.

It is unclear that simply sharing information about the harsh realities of irregular migration will change behaviour. Given the awareness of the risks involved in attempting irregular migration, particularly by those who have already tried before, it is possible that efforts to communicate the high risk will cause at least some of this group to disengage from organizations associated with these messages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Address unmet needs locally

The research suggests that many Lebanese nationals who plan to migrate irregularly will remain in place, if they have some hope of solving their problems locally and safely. Consideration should be given to responding to their unmet needs, through the following:

- **Case management and referrals:** To support people to work through the practical issues they are trying to address under conditions of extreme stress, and to better link individuals to the wider network of services that may be available. This will enable unmet needs to be identified and communicated to local service providers and to the international community.
- **Medical care, including specialist care:** There is a need to better map the extent and demand on existing medical services, and to find creative ways – whether through tele-health, support for travel costs or other means – to provide critical health care, including specialist medical care, to people who are experiencing extreme distress.
- **Education:** Examining ways that education pathways can be reopened for those affected by rising fuel prices, and unable to access education due to cost of transport. Examining ways that existing education services can be bolstered and supported locally in Tripoli and Akkar.
- **Mental health and psychosocial support for vulnerable Lebanese in distress:** Including for those who have attempted irregular migration before.
- **Legal counselling:** For those needing support to advocate for their own legal rights, including to access travel documents such as passports.
- **Migration counselling:** To enable people who may have the opportunity to travel regularly to do so without engaging the services of costly rent-seeking third parties.
- **Peer-to-peer counselling on migration:** So people can talk with peers about their migration concerns, safely and without judgement.
- **Programmes directed at enabling decent work:** Income provided in United States dollars, given the current fluctuations, and sufficient to enable discretionary spending.
- **Financial counselling:** With direct links to financial support for those experiencing debt and financial distress.

- **Support to communities in high-risk areas:** Includes through municipalities, to facilitate access to services and revitalize the local economy, in coordination with existing interventions carried out under the Emergency Response Plan, the Lebanon Crisis Recovery Plan and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Recommendation 2: Provide wrap-around services in community settings

Given the many different dimensions to people's unmet needs, and the feeling of hopelessness that many vulnerable Lebanese are feeling, consideration should be given to ensuring that individual case management and service delivery are embedded within broader efforts to strengthen social capital and community ties. For example, this could involve efforts focused around capacitating:

- A central, safe place where people feel valued and supported;
- Small incentives to attend, including support for travel costs or food to take home;
- Case management to help people solve their own problems locally;
- Trusted sources of information on regular migration and documents;
- Having safe and judgement-free conversations with peer-to-peer counsellors.
- Financial counselling and low-cost loans.

This will also enable strong coordination across the international community, seeking to leverage existing multisectoral efforts.

Recommendation 3: Increase the options available to vulnerable people, to enable them to make safer choices

Currently, vulnerable Lebanese people are making impossible choices – between remaining in unbearable situations of hardship, or leaving irregularly with the prospect of drowning at sea. Rather than focusing on communicating the risk of irregular migration (which is already known), there is a need to increase the options that people have available to them, so they can make safer choices. This could include the following:

- Stay in place, but with realistic hope that even small changes will occur across a portfolio of basic needs, finances, medical/health needs and education. This will require implementation of Recommendation 1.
- Be supported to migrate regularly, with external support to assess options, secure travel documents and navigate complex migration processes. This will require implementation of Recommendation 4.
- Stay in place in the short-to-medium term while getting certification or training for skills in demand in other countries, as part of a medium-term, more realistic path to regular migration. This will require implementation of Recommendation 4.

Recommendation 4: Enable safe labour migration

There is a need to ensure that trusted, free migration support services are available to Lebanese nationals looking to migrate for work or study. Without these being provided, it is inevitable that unscrupulous rent-seekers will move in to fill the gap in the market, greatly increasing the risk and cost associated even with regular migration.

There is a need to map existing regular migration channels for Lebanese nationals, and to identify the barriers that are preventing access to these regular migration pathways. This information needs to be brought together alongside identification of market needs in destination countries that could be met by the Lebanese workforce. The international community can provide support by facilitating bilateral dialogue and cooperation between the Government of Lebanon and migration authorities in targeted countries, to smooth existing pathways, and enable new pathways for labour migration.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that search-and-rescue, disembarkation and longer-term case management is available for survivors of failed irregular migration attempts

There is an urgent need to ensure that local communities and State authorities are equipped to respond to the need for maritime search and rescue operations, alongside disembarkation and postdisembarkation assistance to migrants and refugees. This needs to include the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities' General Security Directorate and the Civil Defence Directorate.

There is a need to ensure that longer-term case management and specialized support are available to those in the most vulnerable situations, such as shipwreck survivors and families of shipwreck victims, victims of trafficking, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Local service providers and national protection authorities should also be supported, to ensure that migrants who need follow-up protection and assistance after rescue or upon return are referred in a timely manner to appropriate support services.

Recommendation 6: Ground responses in data and build the picture of "what works" to prevent irregular migration

Knowledge about "what works" to prevent irregular migration is surprisingly scarce globally. Going forward, efforts to prevent irregular migration in Lebanon will greatly benefit from being informed by research and data analytical support. For example, small, quick surveys are useful to ensure resources actually respond to need. Research capacity is also vital to ensure that efforts to prevent irregular migration are tracked, so impact over time can be understood. This will provide valuable insights for the international community about "what works" to prevent irregular migration.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

In the context of a worsening economic, political and security situation, Lebanon is experiencing one of the largest waves of outward migration in history. Alongside refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic and the Palestinian Territories, increasing numbers of Lebanese nationals are attempting to leave Lebanon, using the services of migrant smugglers to secure passage by sea to Europe. Tragically, a least three voyages in 2022 resulted in widespread loss of life, with hundreds of migrants drowning at sea.[3]

There is an urgent need to develop effective strategies to ensure that emigration by Lebanese people is safe wherever possible, and in particular that they are not risking their lives at sea aboard smuggling vessels. Following discussions with IOM, the Government of the United Kingdom provided funding for research to better understand the emerging reality of irregular migration of Lebanese nationals. This report summarizes key findings from that research.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research is focused on illuminating the following:

1. Irregular migration intentions of Lebanese nationals;
2. Awareness of regular migration pathways for Lebanese nationals who may be considering irregular migration;
3. Decision-making processes and factors linked to irregular migration.

In particular, IOM sought to understand who are the key populations of concern, and also modifiable determinants that might support programming.

The research process executed for this project was designed after a review of existing research literature, a statistical analysis of existing data (including recent data on irregular migration intent), and a series of key informant interviews. Results from these efforts were written up into a series of documents, which are attached to this report.[4]

Following the literature review, the three key questions were further parsed into subquestions, some of which could be answered by focus group discussions, and some of which were better suited to be answered through a survey process (Table 1).

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3   Al Jazeera, "Death toll from Lebanon asylum seeker boat tragedy rises to 94", 24 September 2022, available at www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/24/death-toll-from-lebanon-migrant-shipwreck-rises-to-89; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "UNHCR, IOM: Shipwreck tragedy off the Lebanese coast underscores need for continuing support to Lebanon", 24 April 2022, available at www.unhcr.org/au/news/news-releases/unhcr-iom-shipwreck-tragedy-lebanese-coast-underscores-need-continuing-support.
4   Fiona David, with statistical analysis by David Tickler, Inception Report. Annexes to this report are available upon request.

Table 1. Research questions with subquestions

Central question	Associated subquestions
What are irregular migration intentions among Lebanese nationals?	What proportion of the overall population is thinking of migrating irregularly? Which groups are at highest risk of migrating irregularly? What are the key characteristics of these groups? How are they different from/similar to one another?
What are key drivers of irregular migration for Lebanese nationals?	What factors are relevant to being open to considering irregular migration? What are the differences between people who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly and those who say they are not willing?
	Of those who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly: • How advanced is their planning and preparation? • What are the key steps involved in shifting from having a mere "thought" about irregularly migrating versus "being logistically ready" to irregularly migrate? What are the steps in between?
Among those who are intending to migrate irregularly, what is their awareness of regular migration pathways?	Of those who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly: • Are they considering regular options? Why/why not?
What are the decision-making processes and factors linked to irregular migration?	Of those who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly and a level of advanced planning: • What information sources are they consulting? • Which information sources are most trusted? • What are the roles of community, family, friends and networks? • Who is involved in the decision-making process? • Who controls or makes the final decision? • Are decisions being made alone or together with others? Of those who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly, what would influence these intended irregular migrants to consider staying or going regularly?

Instruments were designed for both the focus group and the survey, to provide maximum insights into answering these questions.[5] Where high-quality, reliable information was already available from prior research, these questions were not re-examined.

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5   Copies of the Research Protocol for the Focus Group and Survey Questions are available upon request.

Focus groups

Data collection commenced with two focus group discussions (one with females, one with males) with residents of Tripoli (Mina Jardin) who had been identified through trusted sources as "looking to migrate irregularly". The focus groups that eventuated included a mix of participants who were definitely leaving, some who were actively making plans, and some who had thought about irregular migration in a general sense but had no firm intention. These discussions provided rapid insights into some of the features of key populations of concern, drivers of irregular migration that should be explored, and early insights into what it would take to prevent Lebanese nationals from seeking to engage smugglers to leave the country. As the initial two focus groups proved to be informative, a further set of two focus groups was undertaken, this time with residents from Akkar (Bebnine) who again had been identified through sources as likely to be "looking to migrate irregularly".

Surveys

Alongside the focus groups, a survey was designed and deployed in 10 neighbourhoods across three governorates, Akkar, the North and Beirut. As the intention of the survey was to better understand drivers and mechanisms of irregular migration decision-making (rather than mapping prevalence), higher risk areas were targeted for the surveys. With only a two-week window for the surveys to be undertaken, this was thought to be a way of getting a maximum strike rate for those considering irregular migration, within the short amount of time available.

Drawing on data from surveys undertaken prior to this project, the research identified key governorates, and neighbourhoods within each of these, that were likely to be particularly at risk of irregular migration – Baalbek, Akkar and the North.[6] For access and security reasons, it was not feasible to undertake household surveys in Baalbek. Accordingly, the next two highest risk governorates, Akkar and the North, were selected as the main focus, with a smaller number undertaken in Beirut to enable some comparison.

Within Akkar, the North and Beirut, neighbourhoods were selected based on review of IOM data compiled through the Migrant Presence Monitoring programme. Neighbourhoods within the North and Akkar were selected based on their high figures of Lebanese nationals leaving irregularly, and Beirut neighbourhoods on their high outflows reported. The outflows reported within Beirut would allow comparison and understanding on why, in Beirut, populations tend to leave regularly, compared with the North and Akkar, where Lebanese nationals are reported to leave irregularly. The neighbourhoods were mapped during the Migrant Presence Monitoring 2022[7] exercise, and were used as the clusters for this activity. IOM supported the creation of these maps, identifying buildings within the neighbourhoods, which allowed field teams to track their route and progress within these clusters.

The survey sought to understand the likely scale of irregular migration intent in these neighbourhoods, alongside information that would shed light on who is involved in decision-making, degree of planning and commitment to action, and the logistics of smuggling. Information was also sought through the survey about drivers of irregular migration, and factors that would need to change for a person to change their course of action.

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6   Based on statistical analysis of Arab Barometer datasets from Wave V and Wave VII.
7   International Organization for Migration (IOM), Migrant Presence Monitoring Report (Lebanon, IOM, 2022).

Table 2. Survey structure by district, cadastre and neighbourhood, showing neighbourhood population sizes and corresponding unadjusted and weighted surveyed populations [a]

District	Cadastre	Neighbourhood	Population	Survey population		Considering		Women as a percentage of…	
				Number	Weighted	Regular + irregular	Irregular	…considering migration	…willing to migrate irregularly
Akkar	Bebnine	Al aabde	3 000	94	18.3	82%	45%	4%	5%
Akkar	Bebnine	Al bahsa	3 200	95	19.5	91%	47%	28%	20%
Akkar	Bebnine	Al ftouneh	4 300	94	26.2	76%	33%	51%	32%
Akkar	Bebnine	Az zaroub	5 000	97	30.5	89%	40%	23%	21%
Beirut	Mazraa fonciére	Ras El-Nabaa	20 000	96	122.0	56%	5%	37%	20%
Beirut	Mazraa fonciére	Tariq El-Jdideh	19 895	96	121.4	64%	9%	21%	33%
Tripoli	Mina Jardin	Mina Jardin	32 000	96	195.2	77%	31%	42%	40%
Tripoli	Trablous El-Haddadine, El-Hadid, El-Mharta	Hay el Amerkan	45 000	96	274.5	91%	36%	10%	6%
Tripoli	Trablous El-Qobbe	Hay el Amerkan	21 000	96	128.1	79%	10%	62%	50%
Tripoli	Trablous Es-Souayqa	As souaiqa	3 000	94	18.3	77%	30%	39%	18%

Note: [a] Percentage of all respondents indicating that they were considering leaving Lebanon ("Are you considering leaving Lebanon?") and indicating that they would consider doing this without papers ("Are you willing to leave Lebanon 'without papers'?") are shown, along with the percentage of women in each of those subgroups.
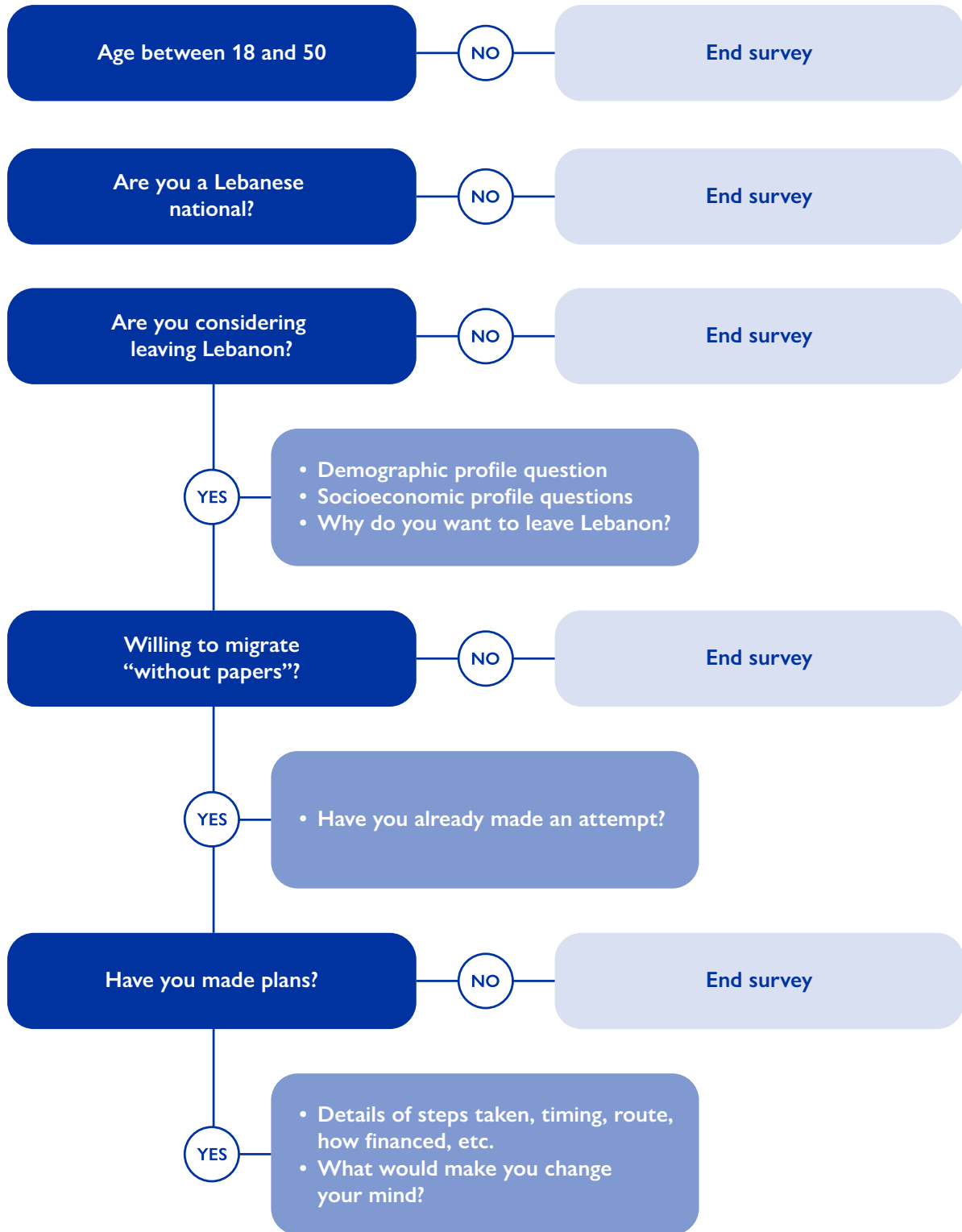
Survey design

A total of 954 surveys were administered across 10 neighbourhoods in three governorates: Akkar governorate (Akkar district, four neighbourhoods), Beirut governorate (Beirut District, two neighbourhoods) and the North governorate (Tripoli district, four neighbourhoods). The districts were not chosen randomly, but on the basis of risk – propensity to migrate, identified using the Arab Barometer survey data. The North and Akkar were both indicated as high-risk areas in the statistical analysis of the Arab Barometer; however, given that it was not feasible to survey the high-risk area of Baalbek, for security and access reasons, Beirut was included as a third location to provide a contrast, given the urban setting. Table 2 notes the geography of the areas that were surveyed, sample size and brief results.

An average of 95 surveys were conducted in each neighbourhood, with respondent likelihood weightings used to correct reweight sample sizes relative to the neighbourhood populations surveyed (Table 2).[8] The survey also included a number of filtering questions, the purpose of which was to limit subsequent questioning to respondents with particular characteristics (Figure 1).

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8   All percentages reported are weight-adjusted where relevant (when averaging across neighbourhoods, cadastres or districts), unless otherwise stated.

Figure 1. Questionnaire flow for all participants agreeing to the survey

Age between 18 and 50	NO	End survey
Are you a Lebanese national?	NO	End survey
Are you considering leaving Lebanon?	NO	End survey

YES
- **Demographic profile question**
- **Socioeconomic profile questions**
- **Why do you want to leave Lebanon?**

Willing to migrate "without papers"?	NO	End survey

YES
- **Have you already made an attempt?**

Have you made plans?	NO	End survey

YES
- **Details of steps taken, timing, route, how financed, etc.**
- **What would make you change your mind?**

Structure of this report

Findings from the research are presented thematically in this report, grouped around the research questions (see Table 1). Where possible, findings draw on both the survey data and the focus groups. While the survey data provide the most broadscale insights into the current situation, the focus group discussions help to explain the survey data and provide insight into the realities of people's lives and the pressures they are facing. In this report, selected quotes from the focus group discussions are presented alongside the survey data to help illustrate and explain patterns in the data.[9]

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9   While focus groups were conducted in Arabic, transcripts were written contemporaneously by bilingual Arabic–English speakers in Arabic, and then translated into English. The English versions of the transcripts of the focus groups were coded within NVivo to identify information on relevance to research questions.

FINDINGS

PART 2

WHAT ARE THE IRREGULAR MIGRATION INTENTIONS OF LEBANESE NATIONALS?

Central question	Associated subquestions
What are irregular migration intentions among Lebanese nationals?	What proportion of the overall population is thinking of migrating irregularly? Which groups are at highest risk of migrating irregularly? What are the key characteristics of these groups? How are they different from/similar to one another?

What proportion of the overall Lebanese population is thinking of migrating irregularly?

Data from previous rounds of the Arab Barometer provide useful insights into the geographies and demographics of those most likely to migrate irregularly across Lebanon. The Arab Barometer datasets, previously referred to, were captured first in 2018–2019 and then again in 2021–2022, and were statistically analysed for this research project.

The Arab Barometer data on "Have you ever thought about migrating?" provides a useful, if imperfect, guide to current intention to migrate among Lebanese nationals. Data from the 2018–2019 wave indicated that 26 per cent of the population had "ever thought about migrating". For the 2021–2022 wave, this increased to 38 per cent. This group needs support to find regular migration pathways where available. No further testing is required to make that assertion.

The Arab Barometer data on willingness to irregularly migrate clearly show a large rise in willingness to consider irregular migration. In the 2018–2019 survey wave, when asked about willingness to travel without papers, the equivalent of 3 per cent of the population was willing to consider this. In the 2021–2022 wave, this had more than doubled, to 7 per cent of the population. Put differently, this represents an increase from 12 per cent to 19 per cent of potential migrants being willing to consider irregular migration.

Which groups are at highest risk of migrating irregularly? What are their key characteristics?

Statistical analysis of Arab Barometer data suggests that willingness to migrate irregularly is not evenly distributed throughout Lebanon. Instead, it is highest in the following locations: Baalbek (highest, with over 15% of the population willing to leave without papers); North (10%); and Akkar (8%).

The population at highest risk of migrating irregularly is young (under 35), unmarried men, without university qualifications and from rural rather than urban areas. Financial hardship and pessimism about the economy were also significant factors. While this is the highest risk group, the situation of young women was notable. While the proportion of young men willing to migrate irregularly has doubled since the 2018–2019 survey, the proportion of young women willing to consider irregular migration has more than tripled since 2019.

The Arab Barometer data also indicate important trends regarding parents of children and willingness to migrate irregularly. Comparing the 2018–2019 wave to the 2021–2022 wave, the proportion of people 35–50 years old who said they would be willing to migrate without papers rose from 1.5 per cent to almost 6 per cent. Within this cohort, around 81 per cent have children. It is likely that, while fewer people in this age group may be willing to migrate irregularly than those in younger age groups, it is possible that when they move, they move with their families. Therefore, any increase in the proportion of these families considering irregular migration will likely magnify the humanitarian risks involved. The risk of smuggling vessels including whole families with children was also underscored by the composition of those on board the April and September 2022 maritime disasters.

Overall migration propensity in surveyed areas

Of the 954 completed surveys, 744 (78%) of respondents indicated that they were considering migrating out of Lebanon, with 32 per cent of this group (n = 225) willing to migrate through irregular channels (to "leave without papers" – see Figure 2). While the proportion of men and women in the population who are not considering migration is unknown,[10] 70 per cent of those considering migration, and 78 per cent of those willing to migrate irregularly, are men. Of those willing to leave without papers, 55 per cent have begun making plans, and 48 per cent are planning to use a smuggler for the journey (Figure 2).[11]

Figure 2: Responses to the main migration-related questions in survey, with counts adjusted for survey weights
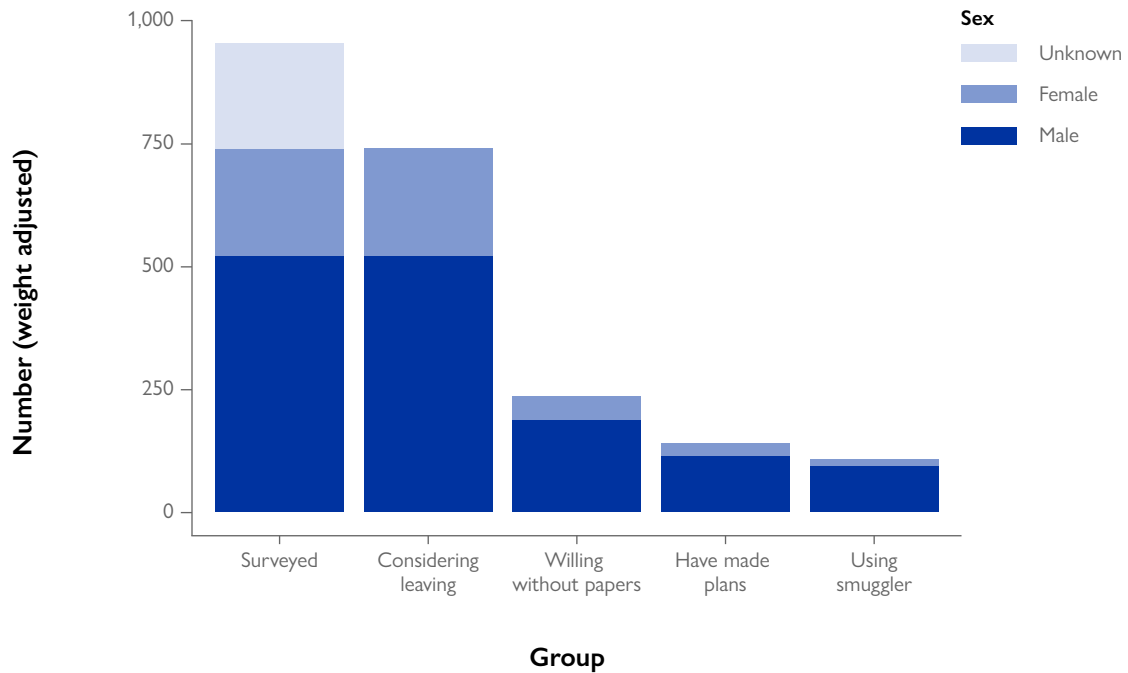
Migration propensity by surveyed neighbourhood

Among the surveyed populations, willingness to migrate was highest in Akkar and Tripoli (approximately 84%) and lowest in Beirut (approximately 60%). Survey sample sizes were not equally proportional to the populations sampled in the different districts (Table 2). Using survey sample weights to adjust for the population composition and size, Tripoli district likely contains the highest numbers of prospective migrants (Figure 3).

Willingness to migrate irregularly was highest in Akkar district (40% of respondents), followed by Tripoli (30%) and Beirut (7%). While irregular migration prevalence was highest in Akkar, Tripoli, with the larger population, still contains the highest number of potential irregular migrants, after adjusting for survey weights (Figure 3).

If the survey samples are assumed to be representative of the population of each neighbourhood in the qualifying age group (18–50 year-olds, who are approximately 40% of those populations; Supplementary Table 1), and who already had expressed an interest in migration in the 2022 Arab Barometer (44–66%; Supplementary Table 2), the sample statistics imply that a total of approximately 9,500 Lebanese nationals could be considering irregular migration out of the surveyed neighbourhoods, with 60 per cent of these actively making plans.

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10 Demographic data: while respondent age was a screening question, and so recorded for all surveys, respondents who were not considering leaving Lebanon were not questioned further, and no additional data are available.

11 The relevant questions asked in the survey were "Have you already made 'concrete plans' to leave Lebanon?" and "Are you using a smuggler?". These questions were only asked of those respondents who had indicated both intention to migrate and willingness to do so irregularly.

Figure 3: Weight-corrected proportion of total survey population answering yes or no to the question "Are you considering leaving Lebanon?" and the follow up question "Would you be willing to migrate without papers?", by district and neighbourhood [a]
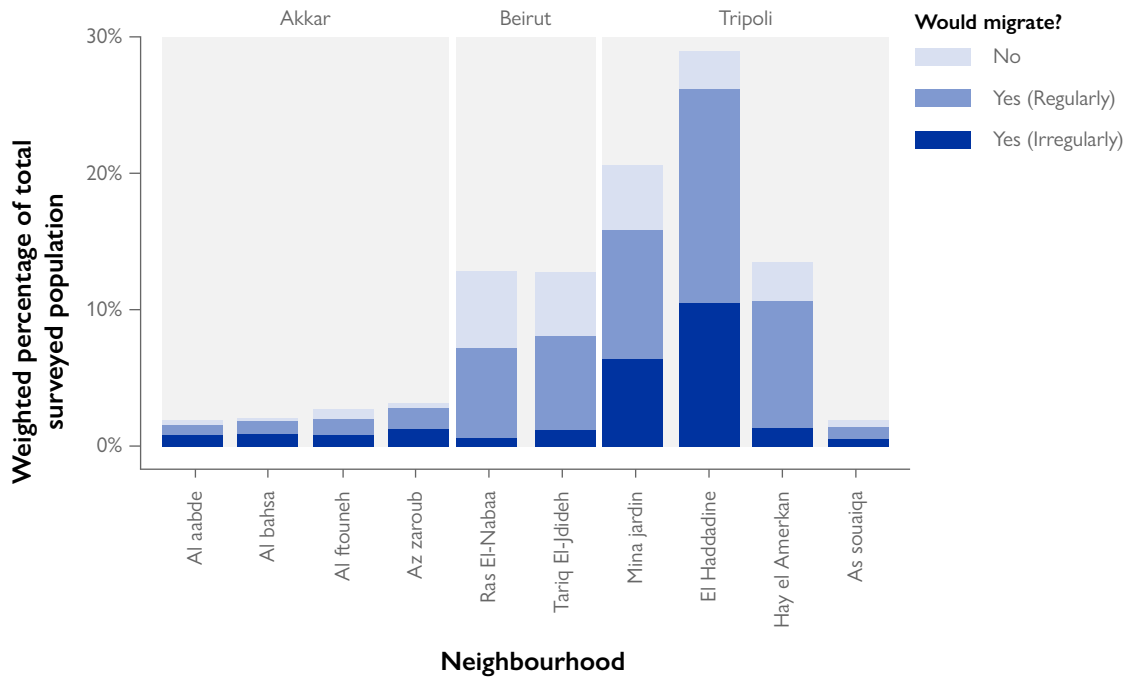

Note: [a] Bar heights reflect the estimated proportion of the total surveyed population across all districts, corrected for the population sizes of the individual neighbourhoods relative to survey sample sizes (approximately 95 individuals in each neighbourhood).

The sex composition of the respondents considering migration differed between neighbourhoods (Table 2). On average, 30 per cent of those considering migration were female (Figure 2), but this varied between 4 per cent (in Al Aabde in Akkar) and 62 per cent (in Hay el Amerkan in Tripoli). Al Fatouneh (Akkar) and Mina Jardin (Tripoli) also had high proportions of women considering migration (51% and 42%, respectively, Table 2). Of those considering irregular migration, the proportion of women averaged 22 per cent, but was as high as 50 per cent in Hay el Amerkan (Tripoli, Table 2).

Demographics of prospective migrants in surveyed neighbourhoods

The age distribution of the group considering migration (n = 744) was skewed significantly younger than that of the non-migrating group, with a mean age of 32 years (median 31 years), compared with 36 years (median 37 years) for the "no" group (Figure 4). Within the group considering leaving Lebanon, there was no statistical difference in the mean ages between the group not considering irregular migration and the group considering irregular migration.

Figure 4: Probability density of respondent age, by migration (no intent to migrate, considering regular migration, considering irregular migration)[a]
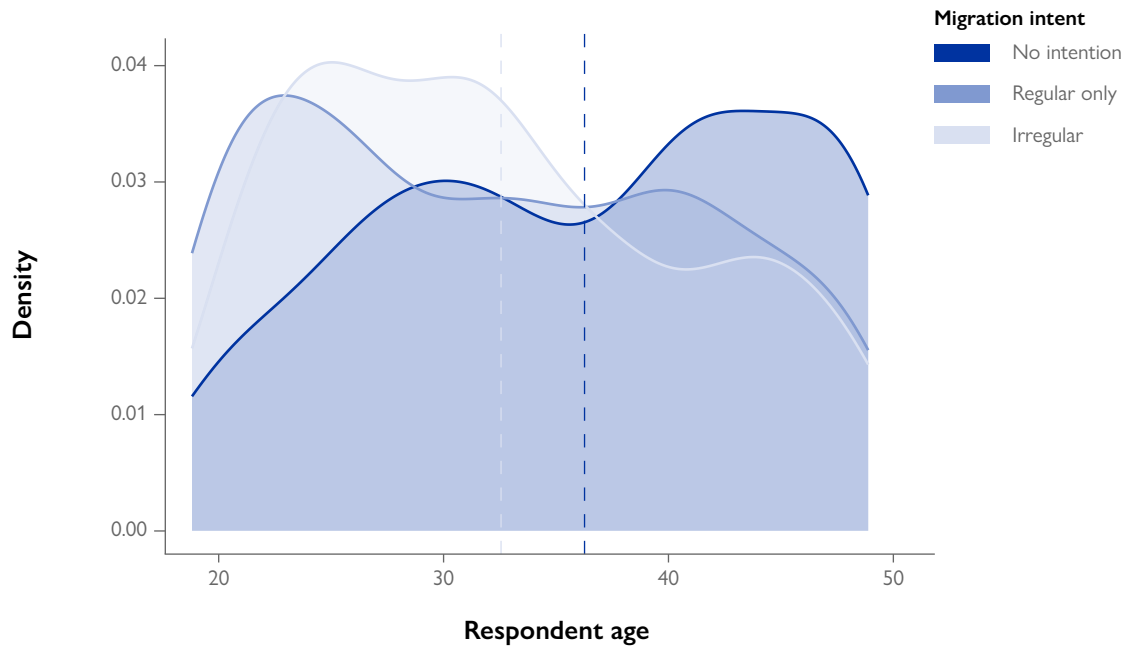
Note: [a] Mean ages of the non-migrating (vertical green dashed line) and migrating samples (vertical red dashed line) are significantly different at the 95 per cent confidence level.

Of the respondents considering migration, the men were younger on average than the women, with a median age of 31 years old, and 32 per cent of the male group under 25. The median age of the women was 32, with 27 per cent under 25 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Age distribution by sex among respondents indicating they are considering migrating
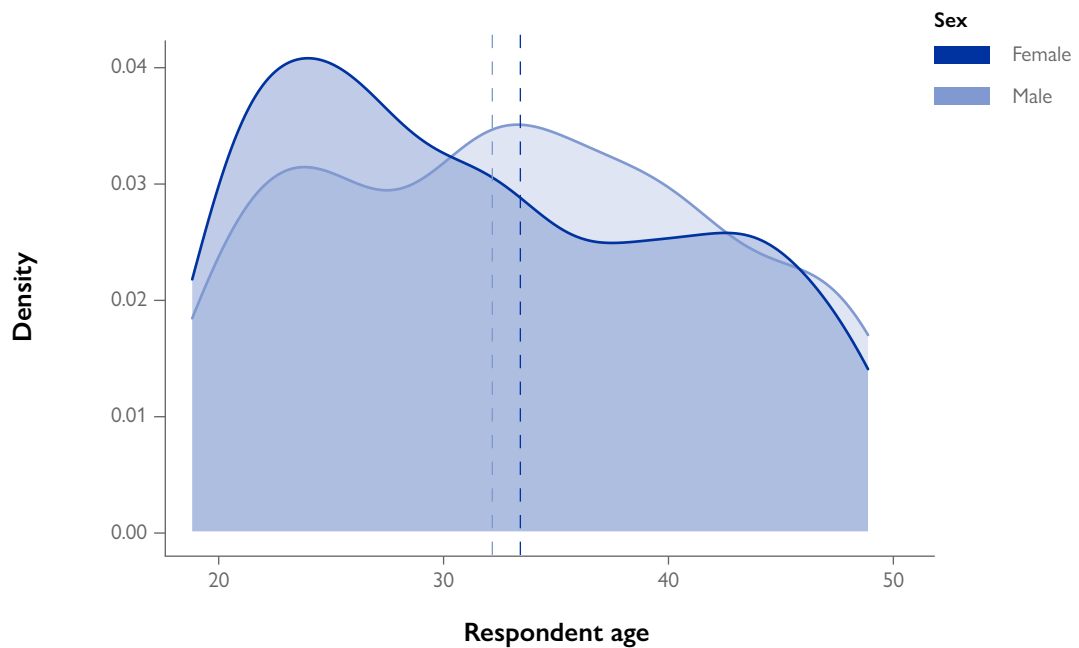
Of those considering leaving Lebanon, women were more likely to have children (66%, versus 45% for men), and older individuals of both sexes were more likely to have children (Figure 6). Over 50 per cent of respondents considering migrating out of Lebanon had children in Lebanon. The same was true of those considering irregular migration.

Figure 6. Predicted probability (y axis, 0 = no probability to 1 = certainty) of a respondent considering migration having children, by age and sex[a]
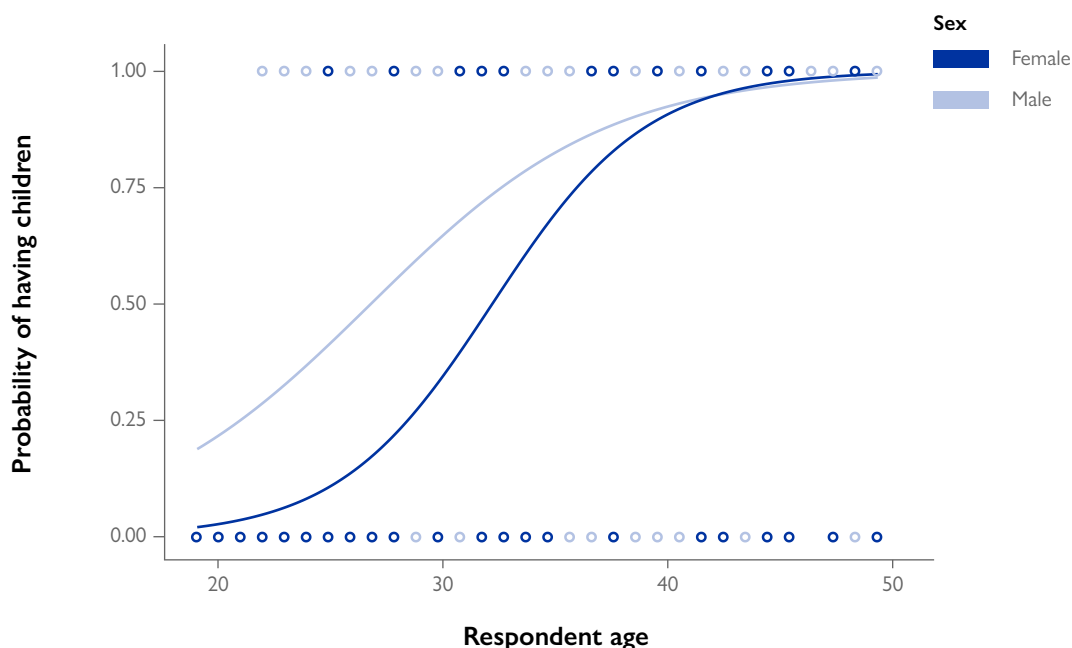
Note: [a] Predicted curve from a logistic regression of "having children" (1 = yes, 0 = no) on age, sex and the interaction between those predictors. Circles at 0 and 1 indicate data used for model training (pink = female respondents, blue = male respondents).

WHAT ARE THE KEY DRIVERS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION FOR LEBANESE NATIONALS?

| Central question	Associated subquestions
What are key drivers of irregular migration for Lebanese nationals?	What factors are relevant to being open to considering irregular migration? What are the differences between people who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly and those who say they are not willing?
	Of those who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly: • How advanced is their planning and preparation? • What are the key steps involved in shifting from having a mere "thought" about irregularly migrating versus "being logistically ready" to irregularly migrate? What are the steps in between?

Overall drivers of migration from the Arab Barometer

Analysis of the 2022 Arab Barometer datasets for Lebanon found unemployment, the economic situation, financial difficulty and corruption to be the strongest drivers of people's interest in leaving Lebanon. Having a university education also had a positive influence on regular migration.

Drivers of irregular migration in high-risk neighbourhoods

The most common reason for leaving Lebanon cited by those considering migration in the survey of high-risk neighbourhoods was a lack of jobs or livelihoods, most commonly mentioned alongside concerns over debt and desires for higher salaries. However, issues relating to security (conflict) and basic services (health care and education) also rated high (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Proportion of respondents considering migration, by their primary and secondary reasons for leaving Lebanon[a]
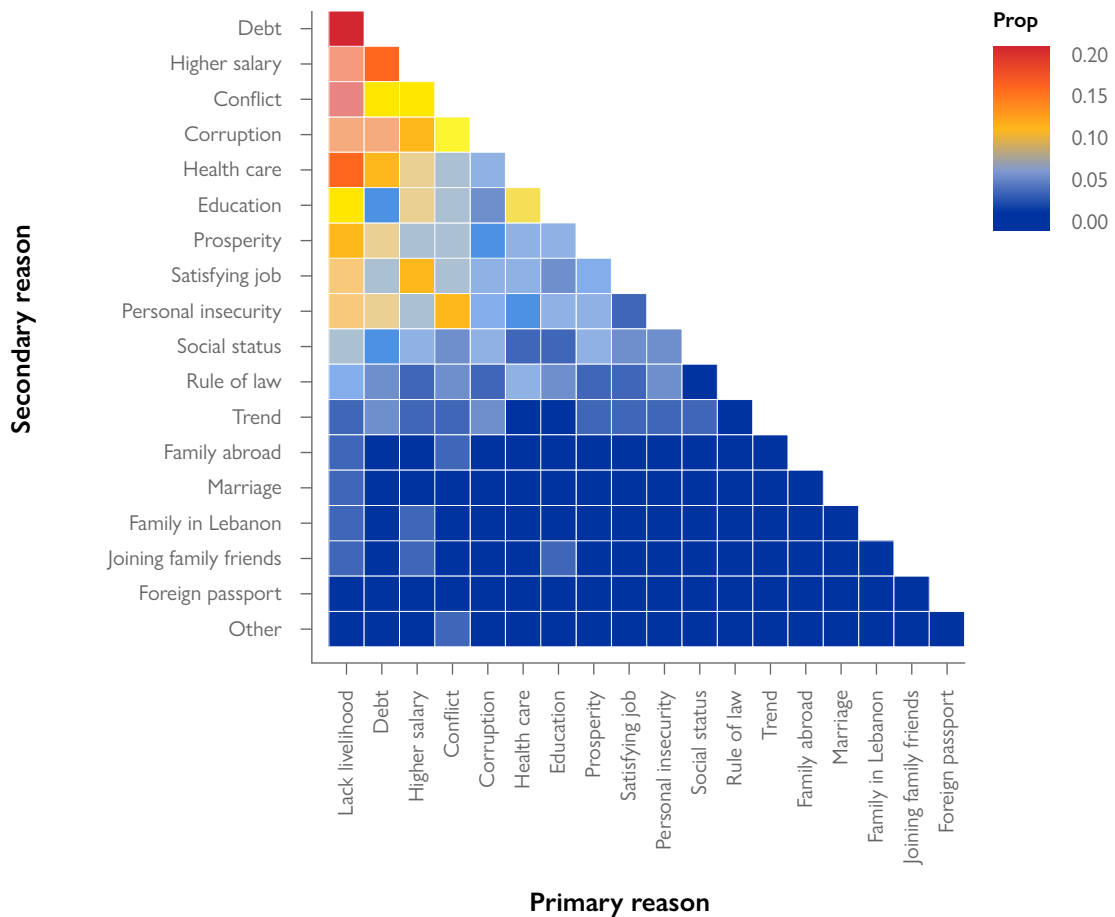
Note: [a] Reasons given are ranked in order of their overall prevalence in the responses, such that the top left of the figure shows the most commonly cited combinations of reasons, and vice versa in the bottom right corner.

The focus group discussions helped to shed light on the reality of people's day-to-day living situations, with runaway inflation and the "dollarization" of the economy. (That is, goods and services are increasingly traded in US dollars, while day wages remain paid in the ever-devaluing Lebanese pound.) Participants described situations where they or a member of their family have jobs, but their wages are simply not enough to keep up with rising daily inflation:

"I am a taxi driver. Yesterday I earned 1,150,000 Lebanese pounds (LL) and I paid for fuel 1,400,000 LL. Each one of us should have 1,000 jobs to live. I have three kids and my wife is pregnant. Schools are closed since a month, no hospitals. We're dying slowly, so for sure I'm traveling to help my kids have a future. I can't see any other solution. If there was, I would stay." (Male, 34, Tripoli)

Another participant noted:

"I'm a mom of six kids. I'm separated from my husband. I don't work. I want to leave because the economic situation is unreal… In Lebanon we hear problems and criminal cases. I have one kid who is currently working as a barber (daily worker). He's the only breadwinner. We only eat bread and potatoes every day." (Female, 50, Akkar)

Conflict stands out as the highest rated non-economic reason to leave. Focus group discussions suggest there are two ways that "conflict" could be interpreted. First, participants in focus groups referred to increasing lawlessness, crime and threats to personal safety in their neighbourhoods:

"Sometimes my son goes to work at night. I wait for him and cannot sleep until he comes back because I know that our surrounding is not safe." (Female, 50, Akkar)

Another said:

"It's starting to be very unsafe in our surroundings." (Female, 35, Tripoli)

It is likely that interpreting conflict to refer to concern about personal safety is the strongest interpretation, given "personal safety" was frequently given as a reason that would encourage people to remain (discussed in the section below on "Reasons to stay").

Participants in focus groups also referred to tensions with the local Syrian population, and a perception of unfairness in distribution of resources. This was particularly strong around access to health care and education for children. At least some of this also appeared to be related to a perception of Syrians as involved in criminality:

*"Syrians also are a danger for us." (Female, 58, Tripoli)*

Another commented:

"Most of the crimes are caused by Syrians." (Female, 35, Tripoli)

Reasons to migrate by sex and family status

In the survey data, there was little difference between men and women as to the reasons given for wanting to leave Lebanon, with economic reasons (Livelihood and Debt) the top two reasons for both sex groups. Women, however, were more likely than men to cite conflict (a push factor) and education (a pull factor) as reasons to leave (Figure 8)

Figure 8. Reasons to leave Lebanon by sex
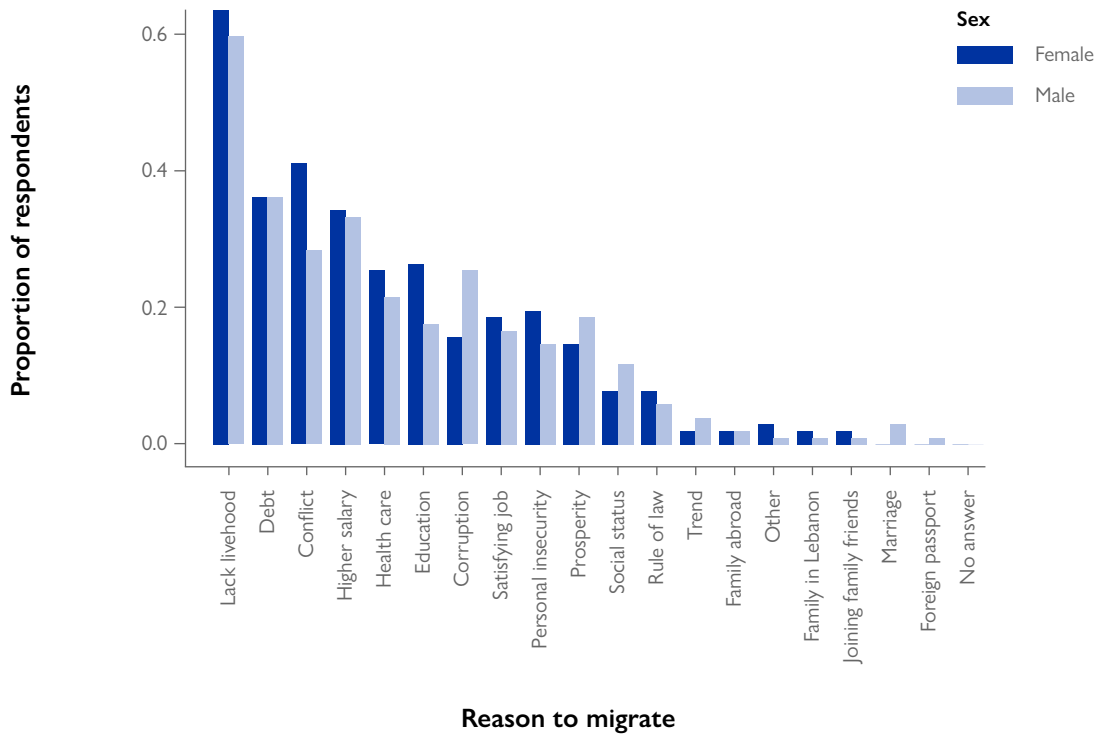
Those with children were also more likely to cite a range of reasons for wanting to leave Lebanon beyond pure economic hardship. While a lack of livelihood was the most often cited reason in both groups, parents also shared concerns over conflict, health care and education (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Reasons to leave Lebanon among respondents with and without children
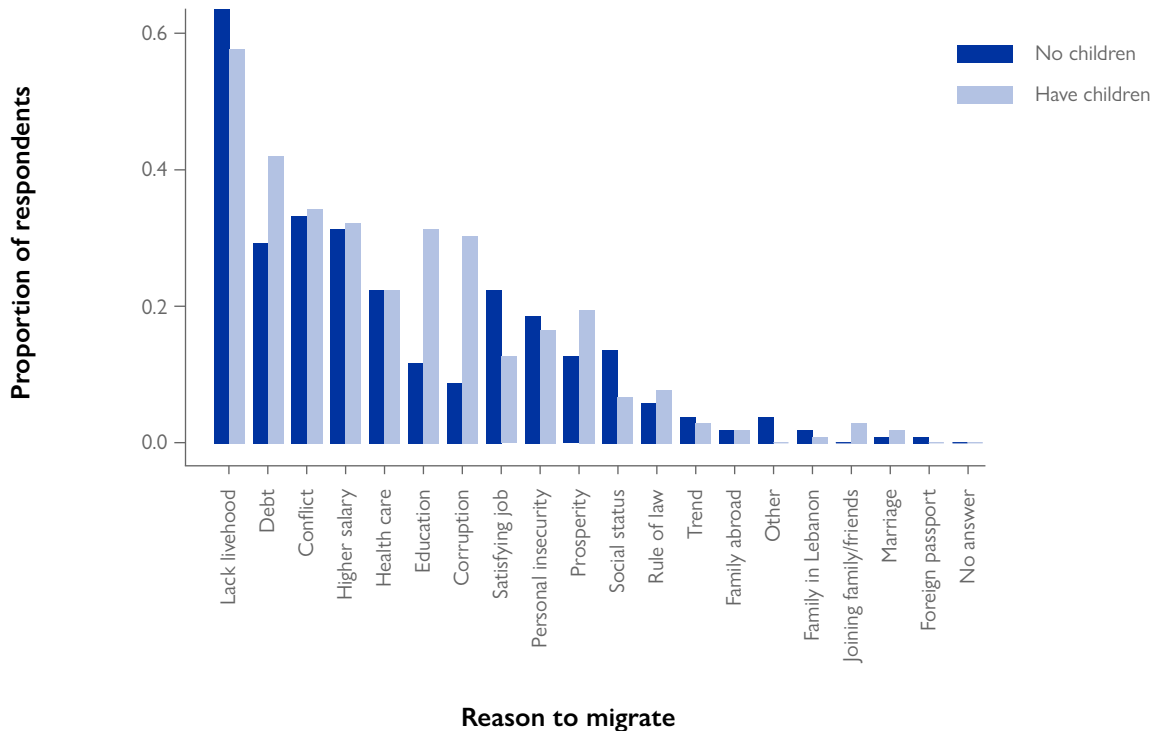
The highly gendered nature of the division of labour involved in organizing irregular migration was clear in the four focus group discussions. For example, it was apparent that, within married relationships, the husband was responsible for logistics of the smuggling and migration process, whereas the wife was responsible for domestic matters, primarily the health and education of children:
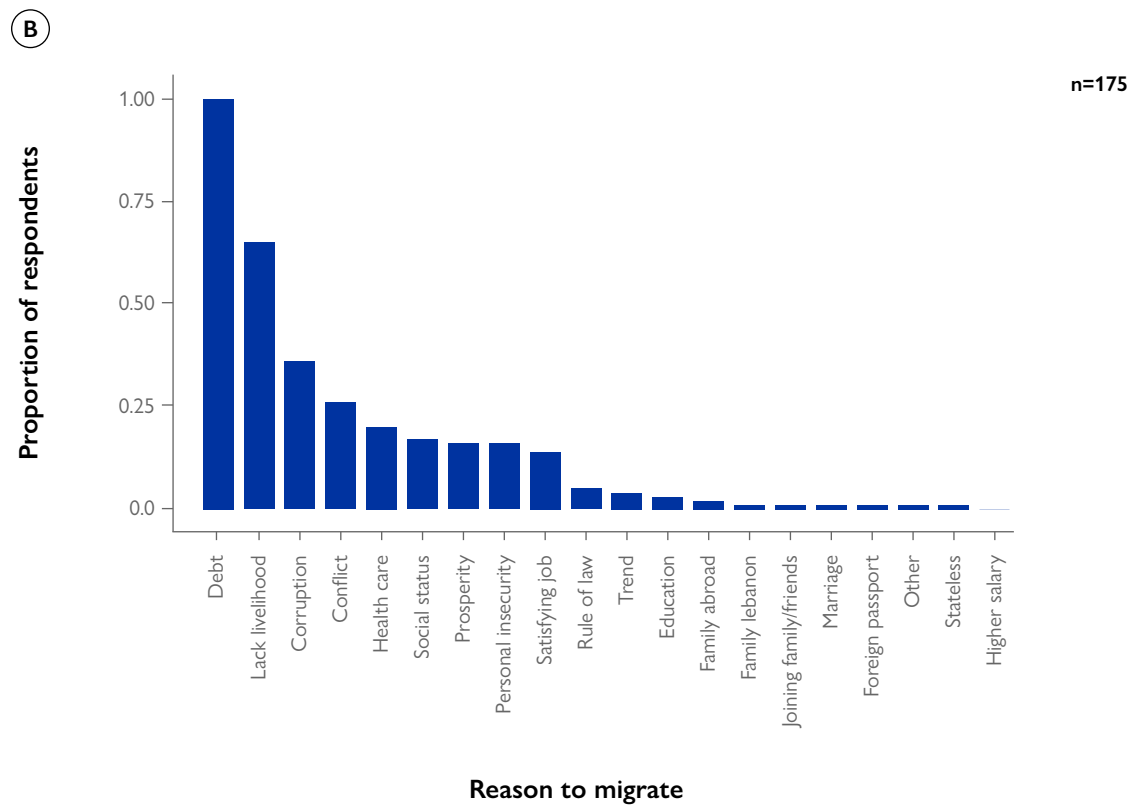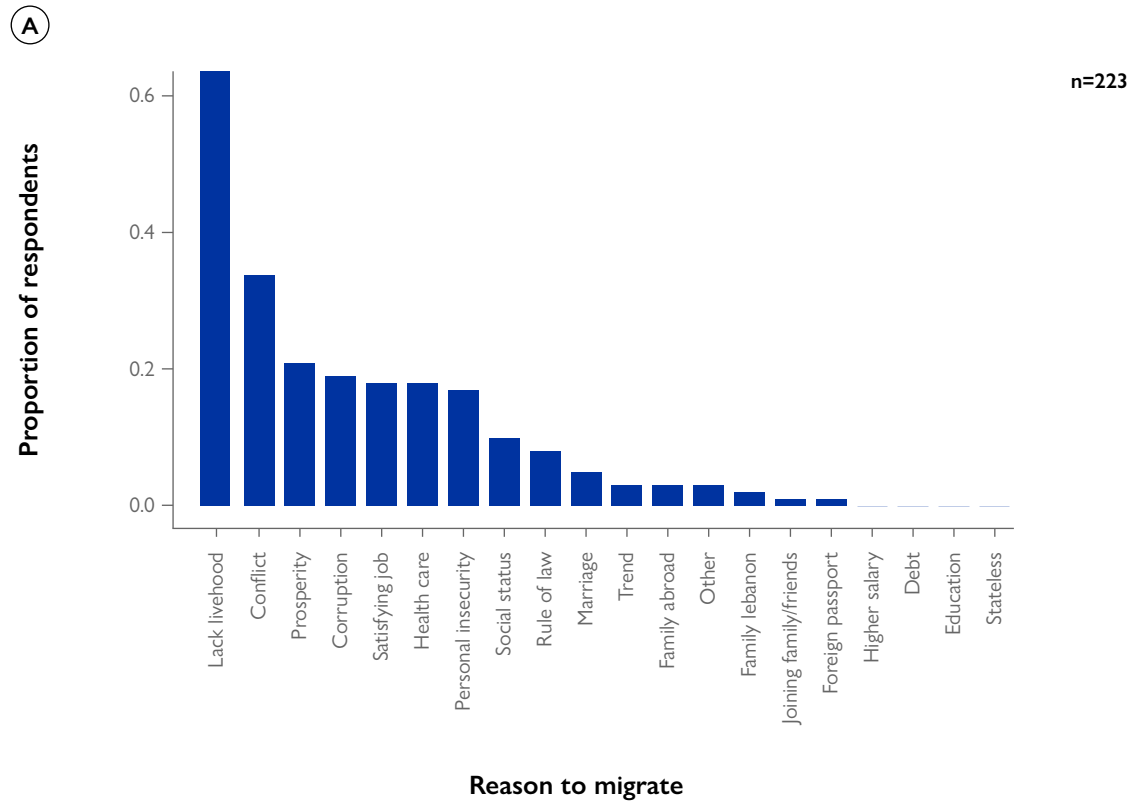
> *"We go to Greece first and then we continue our trip. It's the safest way. Men are taking care of all of this. It's not our job to do so. We're just waiting for the weather to become better." (Female, 26, Tripoli)*

Given the gendered division of labour in organizing a smuggling journey, it is likely that each partner (particularly women) in a married relationship may have little specific information about the details of what has been agreed or organized.

Identifying different cohorts within those looking to migrate irregularly

A statistical process was used to group respondents based on their combined reasons for leaving. This "clustering" of people by their various reasons to leave suggests there are different cohorts, some of whom are leaving mainly to escape their economic situations (Livelihood and Debt as the main reasons), whereas another group is looking to leave for more aspirational reasons (Higher salary and Education) (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Reasons to leave Lebanon among different groups of prospective emigrants[a]

Ⓒ

n=123

Proportion of respondents (y-axis)

Reason to migrate (x-axis)

Ⓓ

n=225

Proportion of respondents (y-axis)

Reason to migrate (x-axis)
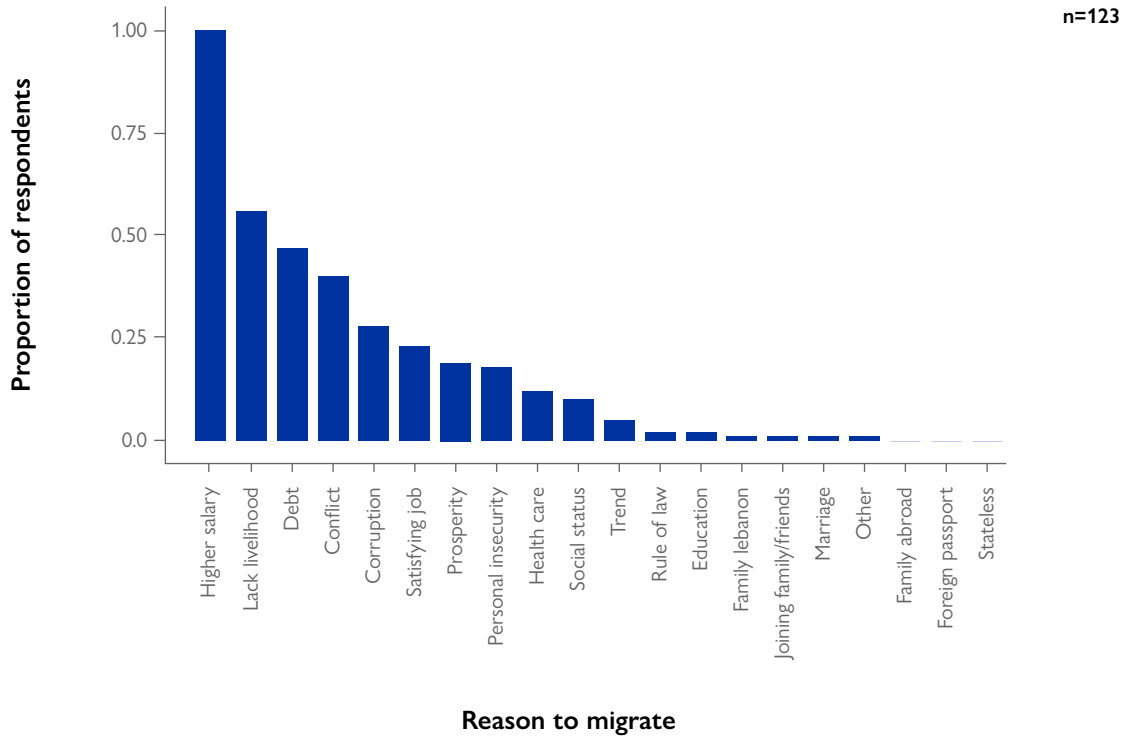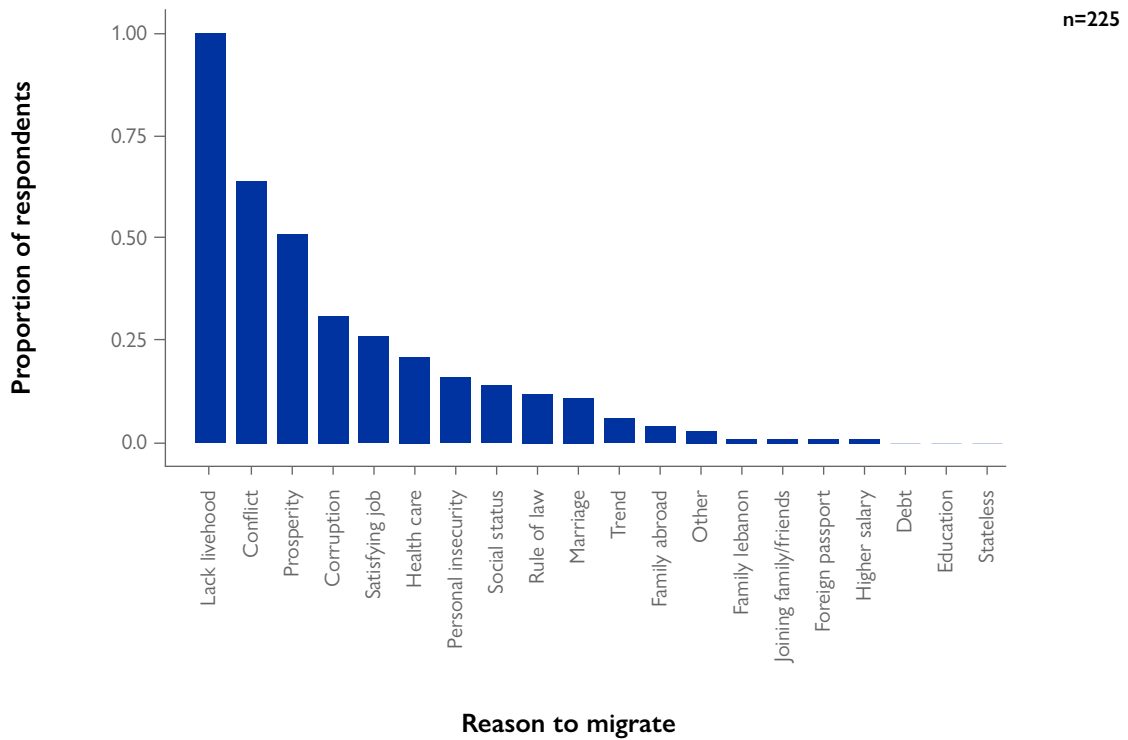
Note: [a] Groups were identified using k-means cluster analysis on the similarity of their reasons to leave among the 744 respondents answering yes to the migration intent question. Cluster A: Livelihood; Cluster B: Debt; Cluster C: Seeking higher salary; Cluster D: Education.

The focus group discussions help to illustrate the characteristics, concerns and mindsets of people in these clusters. The following is potentially an illustration of **Cluster A (Livelihood, Prosperity and Conflict)**:

"Sometimes my son goes to work at night, I wait for him and cannot sleep until he comes back because I know that our surrounding is not safe. One year ago, my children and I took the decision of leaving Lebanon in an irregular way. They influenced me because they want to look for a better future. We might die but that's okay." (Female, 50, Akkar)

The following quotes perhaps illustrate the reality of those in **Cluster B**, concerned with a combination of **Debt, Livelihood and Corruption**:

"We can't get a passport. We can't even afford its price. We have bad education. We can't establish anything. Neither can we invest in something. Our only option is to migrate. Everyone living abroad is encouraging us to leave. We are already dead. My parents cannot take the responsibility to migrate in an irregular way because my brother is young and he should be mature enough to take the decision himself. Though I'm leaving with my uncle. I'm taking courses in makeup and I will travel to establish something abroad." (Female, 22, Akkar)

"Lebanon has lost its meaning. If you have someone who is powerful and has your back, you can live here peacefully. Everything is extremely expensive, the diesel, the schools and the medications… We cannot develop any idea because we don't have the support of the Government. I travelled to Denmark. There, the Government is ready to help you and give you a loan within five days." (Male, 46, Akkar)

The following potentially illustrates those in **Cluster C (Higher Salary, Livelihood and Debt)**:

"As young Lebanese men, our only dream is being able to buy a house and have a family." (Male, 21, Tripoli)

"If I wasn't living in a rented house I wouldn't think of leaving, because I wouldn't have to think every month how am I going make it and save USD 50 to pay for the rent." (Male, 25, Tripoli)

"We don't have money even to buy a pack of cigarettes. I can't buy a house and get married." (Male, 25, Tripoli)

"I have to pay my debts. If I could find a job so I can live and help my parents, then I would never think of travelling and put myself in danger." (Male, 21, Tripoli)

The following quotes from focus group discussions potentially illustrate the concerns of those in **Cluster D (Health, Livelihood and Education)**:

"For me I only think about my kids' education and future in this country. Private schools are dollarized and public schools are closed now. This is their fourth year without going to school, so recently I decided to travel in an irregular way." (Female, 35, Tripoli)

"At first my husband was going alone, but I told him that our main goal for leaving is our daughter, so we decided to go all together. When we just think that our daughter has a chance to heal, we forget all the challenges that we're going to face. Traveling in a regular way costs so much." (Female, 26, Tripoli)

"My kids still don't know about anything, and if my brother didn't die, I wouldn't be here now. And of course I know that we're not going to live our best lives when we arrive, but I'm ready for everything when it comes to building a future for my kids." (Male, 34, Tripoli)

"The reason why we want to migrate is that my son is a first-year student at uni. He has very good grades but they didn't accept him to pursue his studies in the engineering field. The uni obliged him to apply and pursue his studies to become a teacher. He cries every day and wishes that he didn't succeed and didn't have good grades. He loves to be educated and to learn, but unfortunately, I can't do anything. I told him that I'm ready to post a status on Facebook stating that I want to sell my organs so that I can pay for his university. I used to help women in the house cleaning just to buy bread for my family, but it's just not enough and can never be enough." (Female, 45, Akkar)

"I'm an 18-year-old last school year student. There is no future for me here. I'm not getting a good education. My friend travelled irregularly. He is now very happy and he has everything he desires. If I get an education here, I will stay home and do nothing after graduating." (Male, 18, Akkar)

## Level of readiness is highest for those who have tried before

The literature review undertaken for this project drew attention to the reality that there is typically a wide gap between "thinking" about irregularly migrating and the "actions" involved in actually doing it.[12] Accordingly, surveys that measure only intention to migrate irregularly may be poor predictors of future migration. This research underscored the importance of collecting data in this survey, not just on irregular migration intention but also practical steps taken in readiness for leaving.

The survey data indicate that, of respondents who indicated a willingness to migrate irregularly, only a smaller subset have taken concrete steps in this direction. Analysis of the data suggests the level of readiness to migrate irregularly differs significantly, according to whether or not a person has previously attempted irregular migration. Survey data suggest that the group that is most ready is those who have attempted irregular migration before. This group has already begun taking a series of concrete steps, including finding a smuggler and saving money to pay for fees (Figure 11). Notably, few in this subgroup had started visa processes.

Of those saying that they were thinking of leaving Lebanon and were willing to do so without papers (n = 274), 60 per cent said that they had started making plans (with equal proportions for both men and women). One quarter of those considering irregular migration had made a previous attempt (n = 69). The proportion of those with a previous attempt who were actively planning to leave was 95 per cent, compared with 42 per cent of the "first timers".

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12   Aslany, M, J. Carling, M.B., Mjelva, T. Sommerfelt, Systematic review of determinants of migration aspirations, QuantMig Project Deliverable D2.2 (University of Southampton, 2021). See also Czaika, Bijak and Prike, "Migration Decision-Making and its Key Dimensions", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 697(1):15–31 (2021).

**Figure 11. Steps taken by respondents considering irregular migration out of Lebanon
– those who have made prior attempts and those who have not[a]**
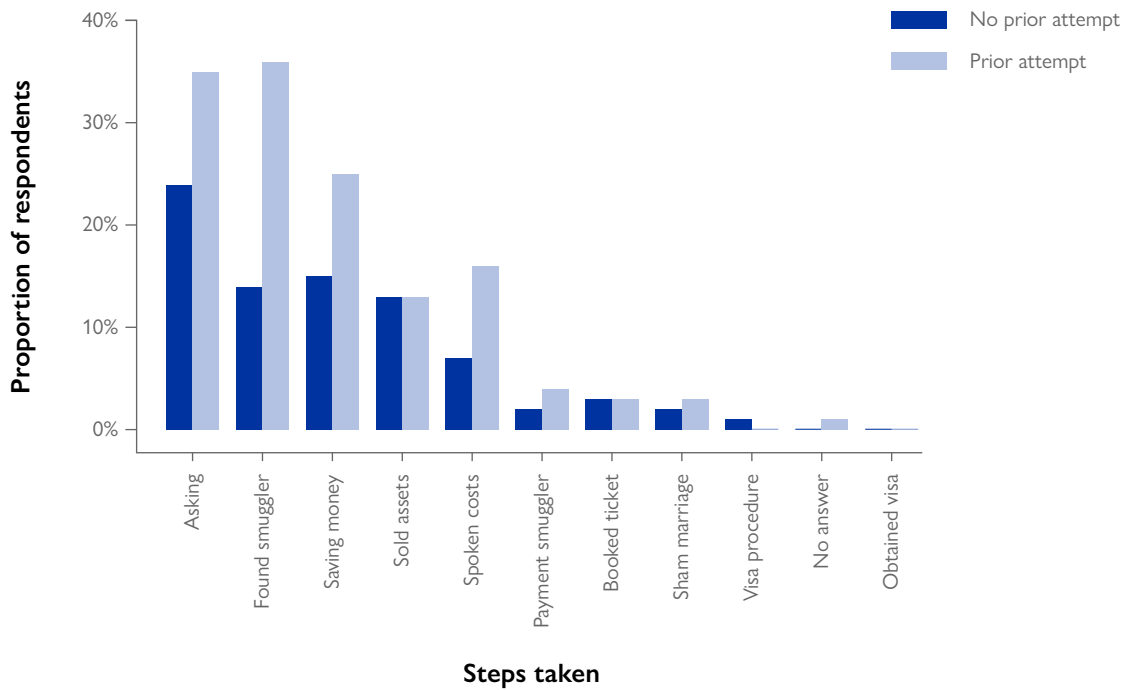
Note: [a] Bar heights indicate the prevalence of responses within each group.

These survey findings are consistent with information from the focus groups, which confirmed that the participants who had already made multiple attempts were the most advanced in their planning for further attempts at irregular migration:

"The first time, the trafficker led us and told us how things should go. We went six times with a trafficker, then we started going alone… We always have to take diesel, engines and dates with us. We do boat maintenance as well." (Male, 21, Tripoli – 10 prior attempts)

The focus groups suggest that those with particular skills, including the ability to captain a boat, provide mechanical services, and nurses may also be among the earliest leavers, as their skills are in demand:

"I'm leaving on the first of April. I won't pay because I will be responsible to do the mechanics of the boat. At least I know that my family will be safe with me on the boat. First, we are travelling to Italy and then we will go straight to Denmark. I know the captain of the boat. He's great. He takes USD 25,000 once the boat reaches the country of destination." (Male, 46, Akkar)

"First timers" are less prepared and may have taken few if any steps

For those willing to migrate irregularly but who have no prior experience of having done so, their level of preparation is not as advanced. This group has mainly begun talking with family and friends (Figure 11).

This was consistent with insights from the focus group discussions, which suggest different levels of preparation depending on the complexity of a person's situation. For example:

> *"I still haven't asked about all the procedures I have to follow for travelling. I'm married to two women. I have to sell everything and make sure that the money we have is enough." (Male, 34, Tripoli)*

From thinking to acting on irregular migration

Information from focus groups, together with information from the surveys, provides some insight into the steps between having a mere thought about irregularly migrating and being logistically ready. It seems that key steps include the following:

*   exhaust options locally;
*   talk to family and friends locally;
*   contact a smuggler (either through known contacts or referrals by reputation);
*   save money to cover fees;
*   sell assets;
*   pay a deposit;
*   be ready to go when the smuggler says the time is right.

When are departures expected to start?

Of the 274 people who were willing to migrate without papers (irregularly), 55 per cent had made plans, 45 per cent had not.13 Of those without plans, only 6 per cent thought they would leave within six months. Of those with plans, on average 44 per cent thought they would leave within six months and 19 per cent within three months (Figure 12).

Of those with plans who had contacted a smuggler (that is, they had found and/or paid someone to organize the travel, n = 59), 72 per cent thought they would leave within six months and 40 per cent within three months (Figure 12).

13   Respondents considered to have made no plans if steps taken = "don't know", "NA" or declined to answer.

Figure 12. Time frame of plans to leave Lebanon, among those considering irregular migration, by planning stage [a]
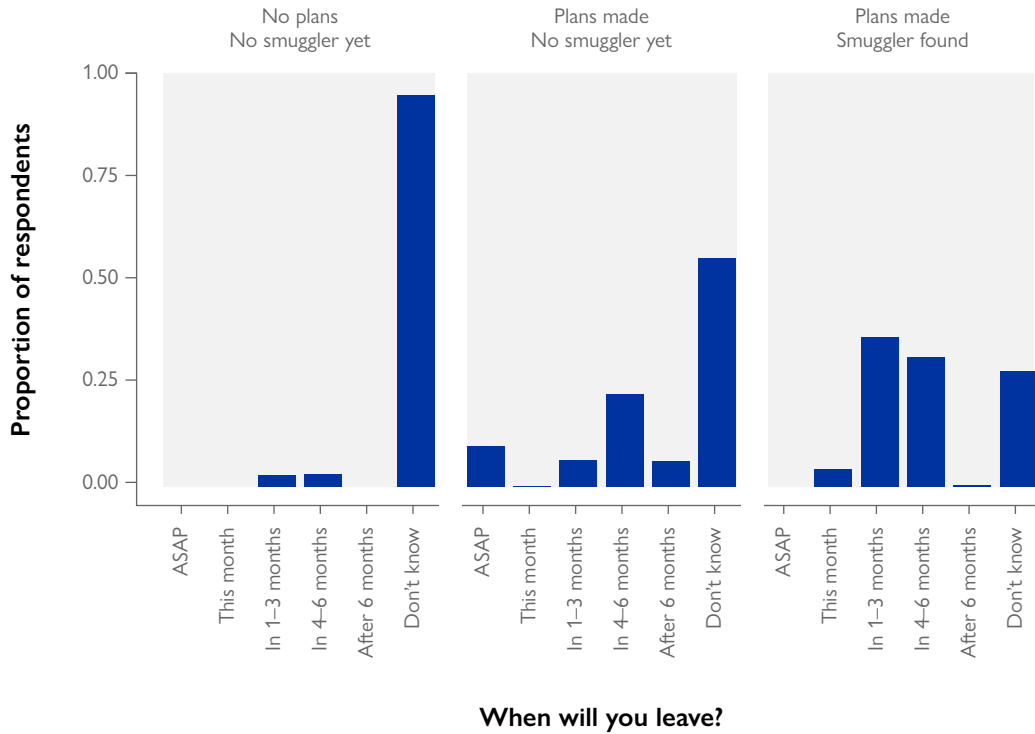
Note: [a] Prospective irregular migrants are split by whether or not they have begun making plans, and if planning has begun, by whether they have found a smuggler for the trip.

It is likely that smuggling boats will attempt to leave Lebanon again by sea, as soon as weather conditions allow. The factors that determine which people will be on board will include individual skills (for example, preference given to those able to captain a boat, or be a mechanic or nurse on board) and each person's ability to raise funds in time. As noted in focus groups, this is likely to be from April 2023 onwards.

Illustrative quotes from focus group participants include the following:

City	Sex	Age	Comment
Tripoli	Female	35	We're waiting for the final consent to buy everything and we're waiting for the weather to become better.
Tripoli	Male	34	If the weather was better, I wouldn't be here now.
Akkar	Male	48	We are leaving in April–May, all my family agreed.
Akkar	Male	46	I'm leaving on the first of April.
Akkar	Male	23	We already have everything set up, we have contacted the smuggler and we're leaving – there is no going back.
Akkar	Female	32	We are waiting for summer.
Akkar	Female	20	I know that whenever my parents tell me let's go, I will go. They decide but I know that we are going once the weather gets better.

Will people travel alone or with family?

Of the people who stated that they had begun making plans, and taking detailed steps, 63 per cent plan to travel in a group (with parents, spouse, children), 33 per cent with children. There was no difference in these ratios between those who had found a smuggler and those who had not.

Focus group discussions suggest that the reasons people are deciding to travel with children reflects their reason for leaving in the first place:

"When my daughter was younger, her doctor told us that maybe there's a medication that will help her heal but we just waited for the results of the test to make sure that this medication matches her illness. We recently found out that that it didn't match. It was our last hope and this made us more desperate. The doctor also told us that we have to take her to France or to Canada. At least in these countries I will never be worried about my daughter's treatment fees, and this is our biggest motivation. If my daughter was not sick, we would never think of leaving or at least we would choose that only my husband leave, without us." (Female, 26, Tripoli)

"We will leave with the children of course." (Female, 32, Akkar)

"For me, there is no difference between the boat and the plane. When we were single, we used to worry only about our cigarette packs, but now that we're married and have kids, we have a lot of responsibilities. My wife agrees with me that we should migrate irregularly with our daughter." (Male, 23, Akkar)

Another noted that, while a single man may be abused on arrival, families with children will receive better treatment:

"If we go as a family, it's way easier because we will have our wives and our kids and they cannot mistreat us, but if I go alone as a single man, they will mistreat me and will put me in jail." (Male, 43, Akkar)

Destination

Overall, respondents named Italy as the preferred destination country, followed by Germany. However, the situation is slightly different for those with children. For respondents with children, Italy and then Germany were named in similar proportions (with Italy slightly ahead), with a longer list of alternative destinations. This may reflect stronger family networks for these people, meaning that their destinations are influenced by having contacts in the destination countries.

Figure 13. Destination countries identified by respondents considering irregular migration – those with and without children
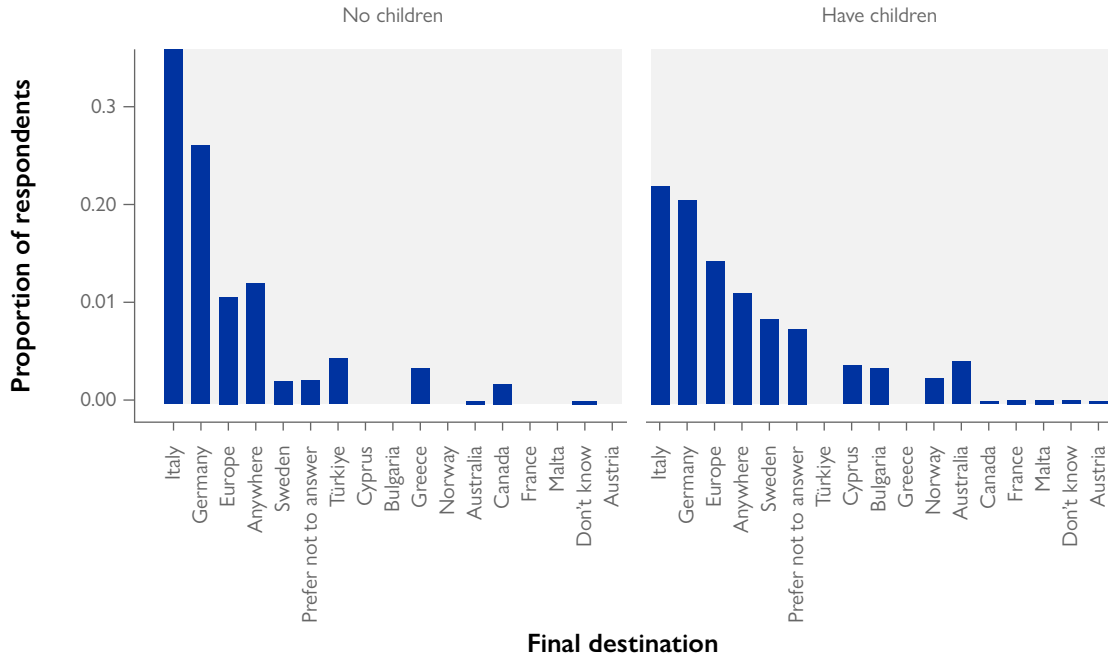
Transit route

There were some differences in preferred transit routes between those with and without children. Respondents without children named Türkiye and then Greece as their main transit countries, with Italy in third place (Figure 14). For respondents with children, Italy was named as the main transit country. Given this group also indicated Italy and Germany as destinations, this may reflect them seeking first to get to Italy, then moving onwards to Germany. This is strongly suggested by the heat map in Figure 15, which shows that the most popular multistage transit route was Germany via Türkiye, Italy or Greece. The majority of groups planned to travel by boat, with 75 per cent of those without children and 78 per cent of those with children using this option (Figure 16).

Figure 14. Transit countries identified by respondents considering irregular migration – those with and without children
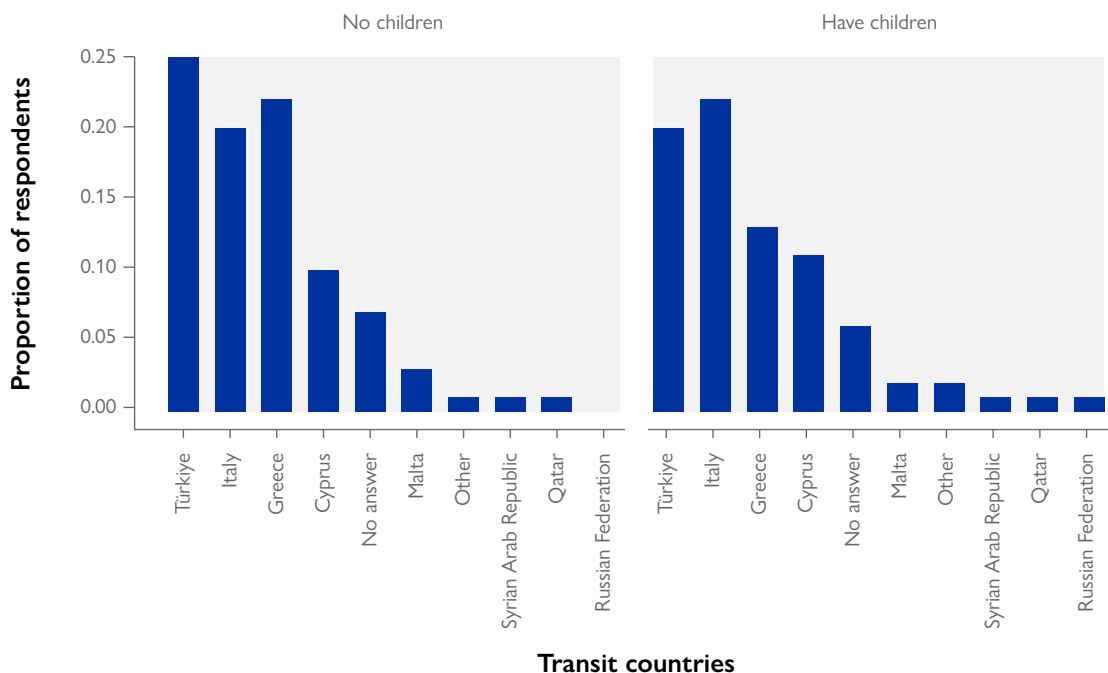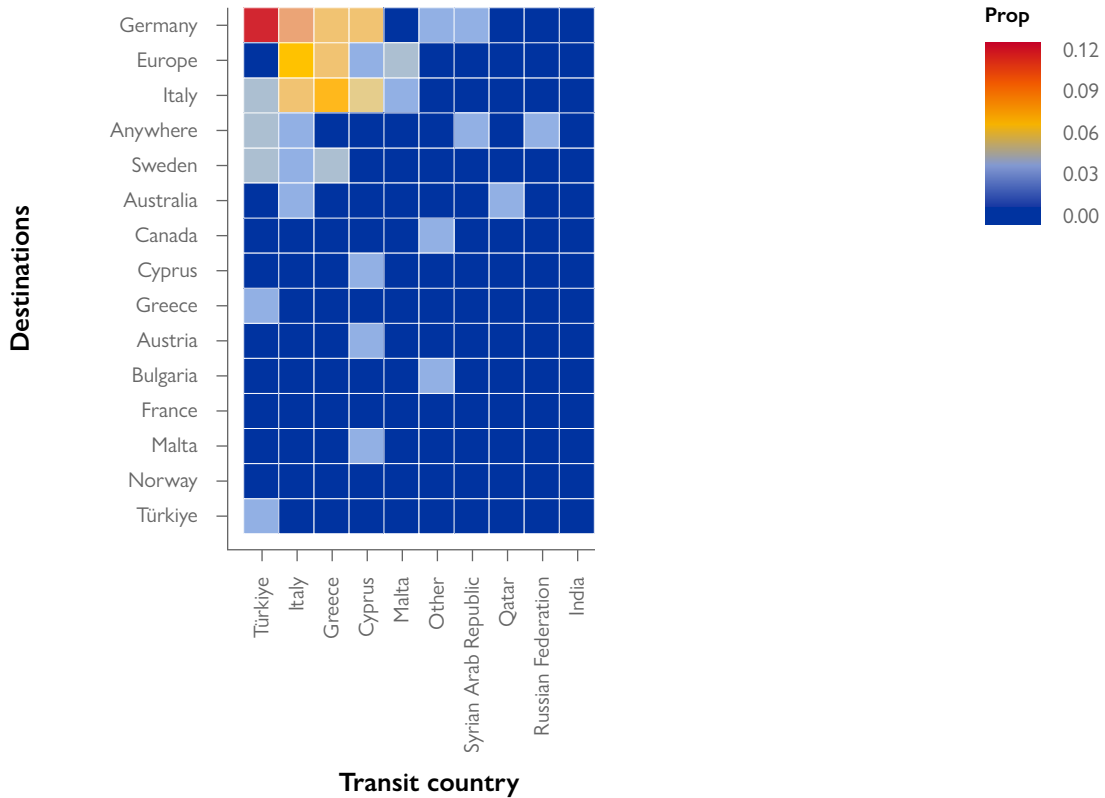
Figure 15. Overlap between destination and transit places identified by those considering irregular migration

These findings are consistent with the destinations of choice noted in the focus groups, with Germany standing out as the preferred destination for people with children:

"I think our main goal is to go to Germany." (Female, 35, Tripoli)

"We are going to Italy. Once arrived there, they ask us where do we want to go and they just let us reach there. The smuggler will take us to Italy and there, the non-governmental organization will take us." (Female, 18, Akkar)

"I will go to Italy, and then from Italy to Germany. My brother and my sister are there already. My sister who lives in Germany now is very happy. She has a house and her children are working." (Female, 50, Akkar)

"In Italy, they don't pay for us, but in Germany they give 380 euros, they rent us a house and put children in schools." (Male, 43, Akkar)

Mode of travel

In terms of how people are planning to travel to these countries, the survey suggests that travel by boat is far and away the most likely means of travel (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Transport mode for irregular migration – those with and without children
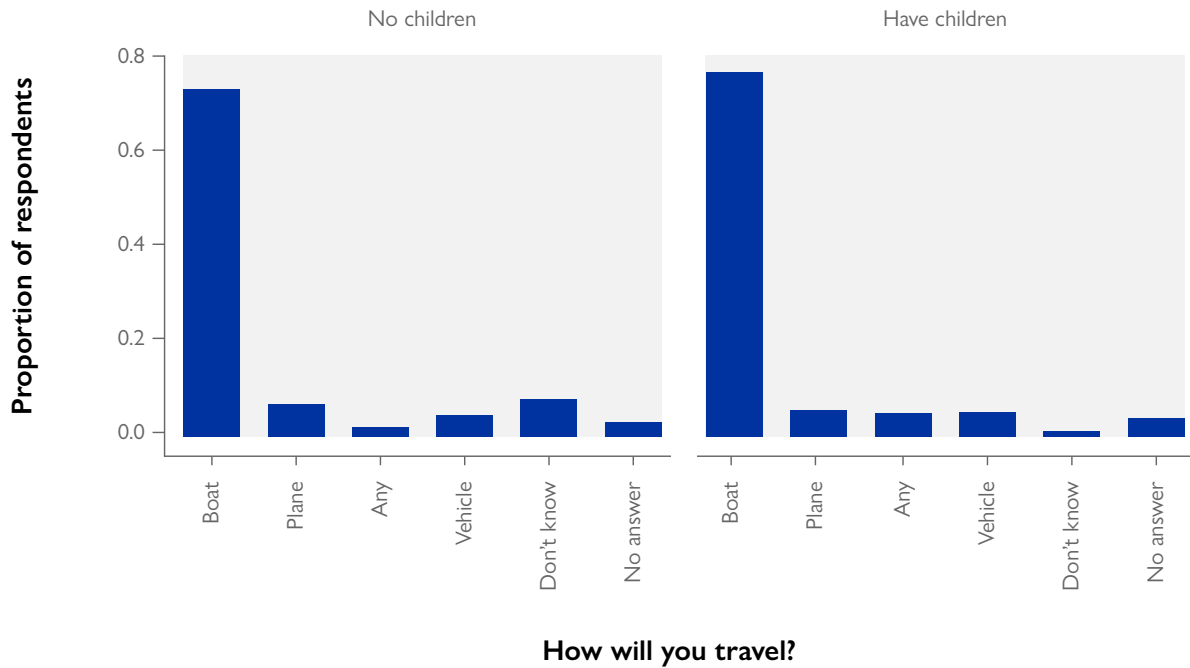
These findings are consistent with observations from the focus group discussions. In terms of the decision of whether to travel by boat or plane, there was virtually no discussion in focus groups of travel by any means other than by boat being feasible. This seemed to reflect familiarity with travel by sea:

"I can get a fluka [small boat] now and act as if I'm going to the 'jaziret al araneb' [Al Arban Island] and in that way no one can intercept me because I would be going in a regular way and then I would continue to. But the thing is, I don't know the road. In these days, we're seeing people who are sleeping in the port and waiting for a boat to depart. They just get in the crowd and leave." (Male, 43, Akkar)

IS CONSIDERATION BEING GIVEN TO REGULAR MIGRATION PATHWAYS?

Central question	Associated subquestions
Among those who are intending to migrate irregularly, what is their awareness of regular migration pathways?	Of those who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly: • Are they considering regular options? Why/why not?

Is regular migration being considered as an option?

As noted above, of those who are planning to travel irregularly, only a very small proportion had taken steps that involved a visa process (Figure 11). Focus groups suggest that of those who are considering travelling irregularly, regular migration is not considered a realistic option. This reflects concerns about cost, both to cover the cost of regular travel but also application fees and guarantee requirements, and uncertainty about success:

> *"If we want to migrate regularly, they will ask for a guarantor and a bank account with minimum USD 25,000, which is something that is impossible to have." (Female, 45, Akkar)*

> *"I know someone that tried to travel to Canada and it costs USD 20,000 per person. She's right! The ticket itself costs so much." (Female, 35, Tripoli)*

Regular migration seemed to have also been discounted by some participants, on the basis that regular travel is in effect high-risk in another sense, that one may fail to get a visa:

> *"My sister's husband applied abroad and he wanted to go in a regular way, but he got refused and this is why he went irregularly." (Female, 45, Akkar)*

The view was also expressed by several participants that if they travel regularly, they will be unassisted and have no one to support them on arrival:

> *"My sister lives in Australia. She told me to move to Australia as well. I asked and I knew that it costs USD 15,000 so it's impossible for me, and when I go in an irregular way, when I arrive, the country is going to take care of me and my needs, while if I go regularly, I won't have anyone to help me." (Female, 35, Tripoli)*

> *"If we travel in an irregular way, they will afford us a place to stay, they will give us a monthly salary, they will afford us everything we need, and all this is for free. But, when we travel regularly, we will pay a lot and I might not get the visa. And if I got the visa, nothing is promised there. I might go and fail." (Female, 22, Akkar)*

Are people aware of the risks involved in irregular migration?

Focus groups clearly showed that at least some of those contemplating irregular migration were aware of the risks they were facing, as they had prior experience of multiple attempts.

The male focus group in Tripoli included a group of four young men, who are friends, who have together and separately made repeated attempts to migrate irregularly. All have experience working at sea. They described having experienced theft, beatings, torture, near drowning and abuse in prior irregular migration attempts. One member of this group, who had made seven prior attempts at irregular migration by sea, described a situation he had experienced:

"We were 13 men and there were also kids and 23 women on the boat. They caught us in Greece and they started to hit us, they left us without food and without water, we were begging them to bring food for kids. After 24 hours they took everything we had and they left us, we almost died and the kids almost drowned." (Male, 24, Tripoli)

One young man had made 10 prior attempts to irregularly migrate. He described horrific experiences both on his various journeys and also once in the transit countries. He also gave examples of being robbed and defrauded by smugglers:

"One time we stayed in Türkiye for almost two months. We were meant to go back to Lebanon two hours after they caught us, but they put us in prison and they tortured us just because we're Lebanese. Even women were tortured. For the next time I travel, if I take the same road and they catch me, I'm going to ask them to shoot me because I can't even imagine living the same pain again. At first many traffickers stole my money, and some took the money and then went to the police and told them everything. We almost went to prison many times because of some traffickers." (Male 21, Tripoli)

Members of this group were clear that they were self-organizing going forward, and they would not include others outside their group in their efforts:

"Some people ask us to help them travel, but we always say that we don't know how." (Male, 24, Tripoli – seven prior attempts)

"It's like buying people; we would never do that." (Male, 21, Tripoli – 10 prior attempts)

This group was also adamant that it would never consider taking family with them:

"I would never let anyone from my family go with me. I would never put someone in such a danger." (Male, 25, Tripoli – four prior attempts)

One female participant had tried to migrate irregularly previously with her husband, who had been imprisoned as a result:

"We tried to migrate irregularly once. My husband was working in the marina Dbayeh [Mount Lebanon]. He is a mechanic. He was doing a check-up on the boat on which we were migrating. He got caught, and now he is imprisoned. I have a 15-year-old child who migrated irregularly via sea. He was working at the port, and when he saw a boat departing, he got on it and left Lebanon. He didn't tell me and I didn't tell my imprisoned husband." (Female, 45, Akkar – one prior attempt)

She is adamant she will leave Lebanon as soon as her husband is released from prison:

> *"I'm ready to travel and die for the future of my husband and I don't mind drowning in the sea rather than to live in Lebanon. I'm just waiting for my husband to get out of the prison and to leave. He told the Lebanese army already, that the day he gets out of the jail, he is migrating irregularly." (Female, 45, Akkar – one prior attempt)*

Other participants spoke of being aware of the risks, but their knowledge was perhaps more theoretical. Notably, the focus was very much on completing the journey, and little forethought had been given to what happened after arrival.

Some participants were clearly distressed by the reality of the impossible choices they feel they are being forced to make:

> *"I have three kids. My daughter has health problems. When the dollar used to be equal to 1,500 LL, I was able to pay for my daughter's treatment and the tests that should be done and the operations. And in her case, she's only allowed to visit a specific doctor, and now he's abroad. Back then, we were waiting for a medication that was under experimentation to see if it adapted to her case. For her to be able to take this medication, she should go to France. Even her operation can't be done here. But then we knew that the medication doesn't match her case, but the doctor told us that still there's hope. Doctors are leaving. Also, my second daughter is sick and we couldn't find her medication here. It's only available in France, and my reason to leave is based on what the doctor said. They told me that there's no medication available here, and all the doctors I know are leaving." (Male, 36, Tripoli)*

Having heard the experiences shared by the young men who had been tortured and imprisoned, he was visibly distressed but also continued to express that he had no other option:

> *"Travelling irregularly is very dangerous. If I didn't have a special case, I would never travel, but my problem is medical and this is my biggest motivation to travel. Anything else is okay. For now I still don't have the needed amount to travel, and of course it's dangerous and challenging, but I'm forced to do that. And for sure I started asking about the procedure and I know people that could help me in this. I didn't take that decision from nothing, I took that decision because I was forced to take it. I have to let my daughter have her treatment. This is my job. If someone would come and tell me that he's willing to give my daughter her treatment and pay for it I would never think of travelling." (Male, 36, Tripoli)*

Mindset and tensions

The focus groups provided insight into the levels of pressure that people are under and the distress they are experiencing, but also what is influencing their lives and decision-making.

In terms of mindset, participants in the focus groups noted that they had weathered economic downturns before, but the current situation was perceived to be different, with runaway inflation alongside widespread failure across all essential services. The current crisis in Lebanon was so deep and wide that people literally had no sense of hope that positive change would come:

> *"We can't obtain a passport. We can't even afford its price. We have bad education. We can't establish anything or invest in something. Our only option is to migrate. Everyone living abroad is encourage us to leave. We are already dead." (Female, 22, Akkar)*

Views were also expressed that Lebanese nationals were being forgotten in their own country. For example, it was noted that the Syrians had access to medical care more than Lebanese nationals, as Syrians were supported by the United Nations and were getting assistance from all the non-governmental organizations.

WHAT ARE THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND FACTORS LINKED TO IRREGULAR MIGRATION?

Central Question	Associated subquestions
What are the decision-making processes and factors linked to irregular migration?	Of those who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly and a level of advanced planning: • What information sources are they consulting? • Which information sources are most trusted? • What are the roles of community, family, friends and networks? • Who is involved in the decision-making process? • Who controls or makes the final decision? • Are decisions being made alone or together with others? Of those who indicate the intention to migrate irregularly, what would influence these intended irregular migrants to consider staying or going regularly?

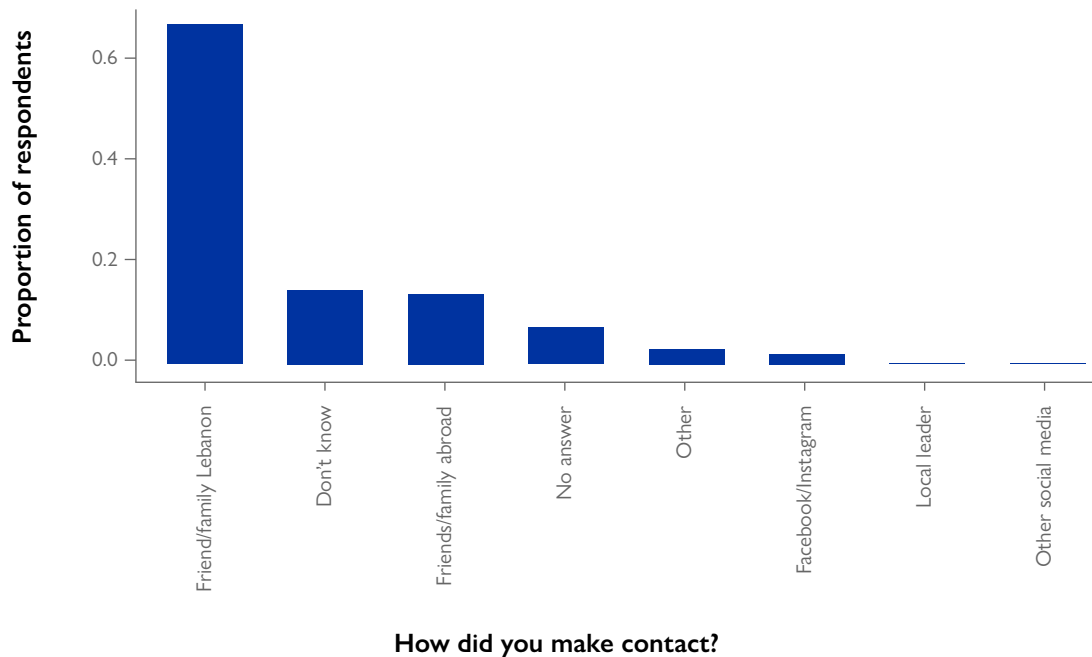## Information sources

Survey data strongly suggest that Lebanese nationals are turning to their families and friends locally to find out about migrating irregularly. While it is clear that friends and family at the destination have a role, this is secondary to the role of local contacts (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Information sources consulted by respondents considering irregular migration, by sex
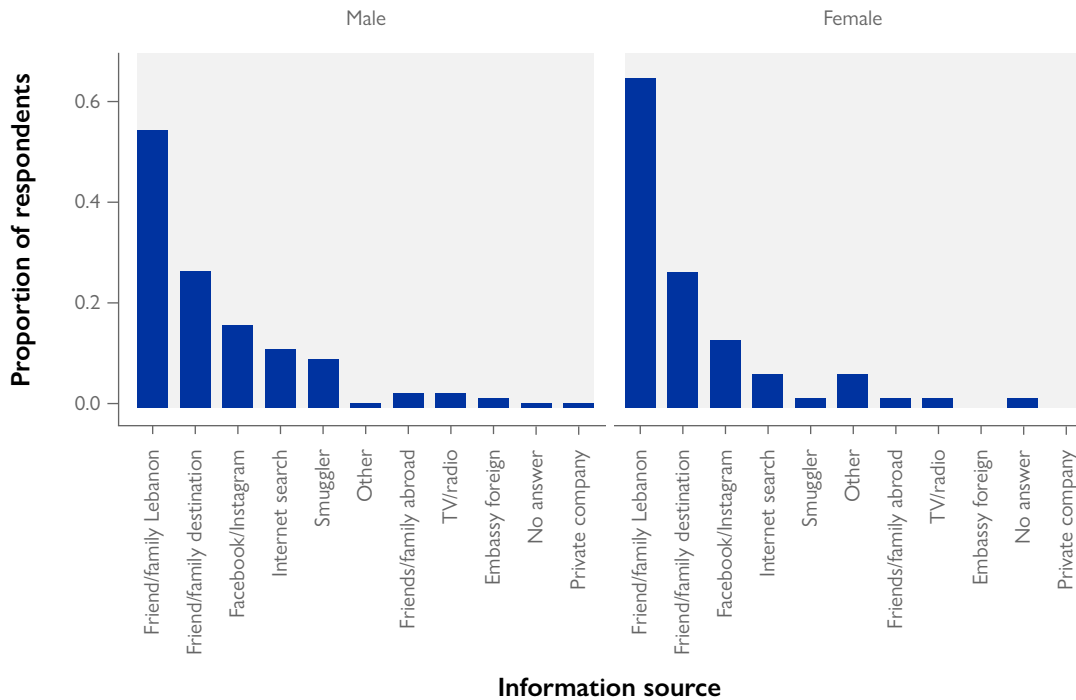
More specific questions were asked in the survey about intention to use a smuggler, either to leave Lebanon or along the journey. (Questions asked: "Are you using a smuggler to leave Lebanon?" "If no, do you plan on using a smuggler during the continuation of your journey?") Respondents who answered in the affirmative to these questions were then asked a question about how they were connecting with smugglers. ("Where did you find the first smuggler and how did you get in touch with a smuggler?") The majority answered that they were connecting with smugglers via family and friends (Figure 17.A).

Figure 17.A. Sources of information consulted by respondents to identify and connect with smugglers

How did you make contact?

The reliance on family and friends locally for information about irregular migration likely reflects the clandestine nature of the task at hand. Equally, however, focus group discussions suggested that the smuggling business is organized relatively locally in these regions, with transactions taking place within extended family networks. While not everyone in focus groups personally knew a smuggler, at least some did. As one participant put it:

"We know the smugglers; some of them are my cousins." (Male, 43, Akkar)

Both Akkar and Tripoli are located on the coast, and several participants referred to their own experience working at sea, or the experience of family members working at sea:

"What matters to me the most is the captain who will drive. I work in the sea and I know." (Male, 46, Akkar)

In contrast, those who had no experience or particular skills with the sea referred to needing to turn to professional smugglers, relying on factors such as reputation and track record:

"Smugglers have reputations. Some of them have a great reputation. Their prices include the food, water and lifejackets. Their boats are secure and the captain knows the sea well." (Male, 43, Akkar)

Agency and decision-making

The majority of respondents had taken the decision to migrate themselves, but women were more likely to have had the decision made by their spouses.

Figure 18. Responses to the questions "Did you take the decision to migrate yourself?" and, if not, "Who decided?" by sex [a]
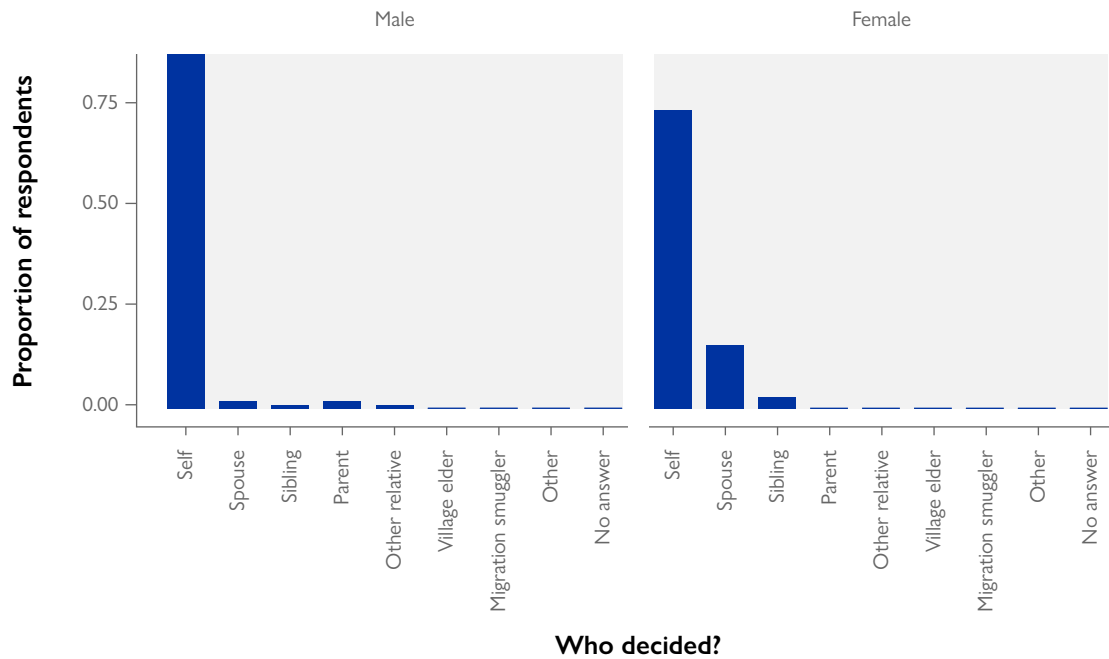
Note: [a] These questions were only asked of respondents who indicated that they had already started making plans to leave Lebanon (n = 168).

As noted above, the focus group discussions suggest that in married relationships, while decisions may be taken together, the husband will have responsibility for organizing the smuggling process, while the wife will have responsibility for organizing the children and home affairs. The focus group discussions also provided insight into the complexity of the nature of "choice" that some women will have, particularly in more traditional relationships:

"I don't have the right to decide. In Bebnine, the fiancé or the husband decides and we (the women) should always accept the decision because they know better than we do." (Female, 28, Akkar)

*"I know nothing about the steps. I know that whenever my parents tell me let's go, I will go. They decide, but I know that we are going once the weather gets better." (Female, 20, Akkar)*

"Of course she will agree. It's not an option. In our mentality (in Bebnine mainly and in Akkar in general) either she agrees, or she goes back to her parents' house." (Male, 43, Akkar)

Reasons to stay

The survey suggests that the reasons respondents might consider staying in Lebanon, among all potential migrants, were thematically correlated with the reasons cited for wanting to leave, the most common being better job opportunities, better work and provision of basic needs (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Reasons to go versus reasons to stay: proportion of all respondents considering migrating out of Lebanon [a]
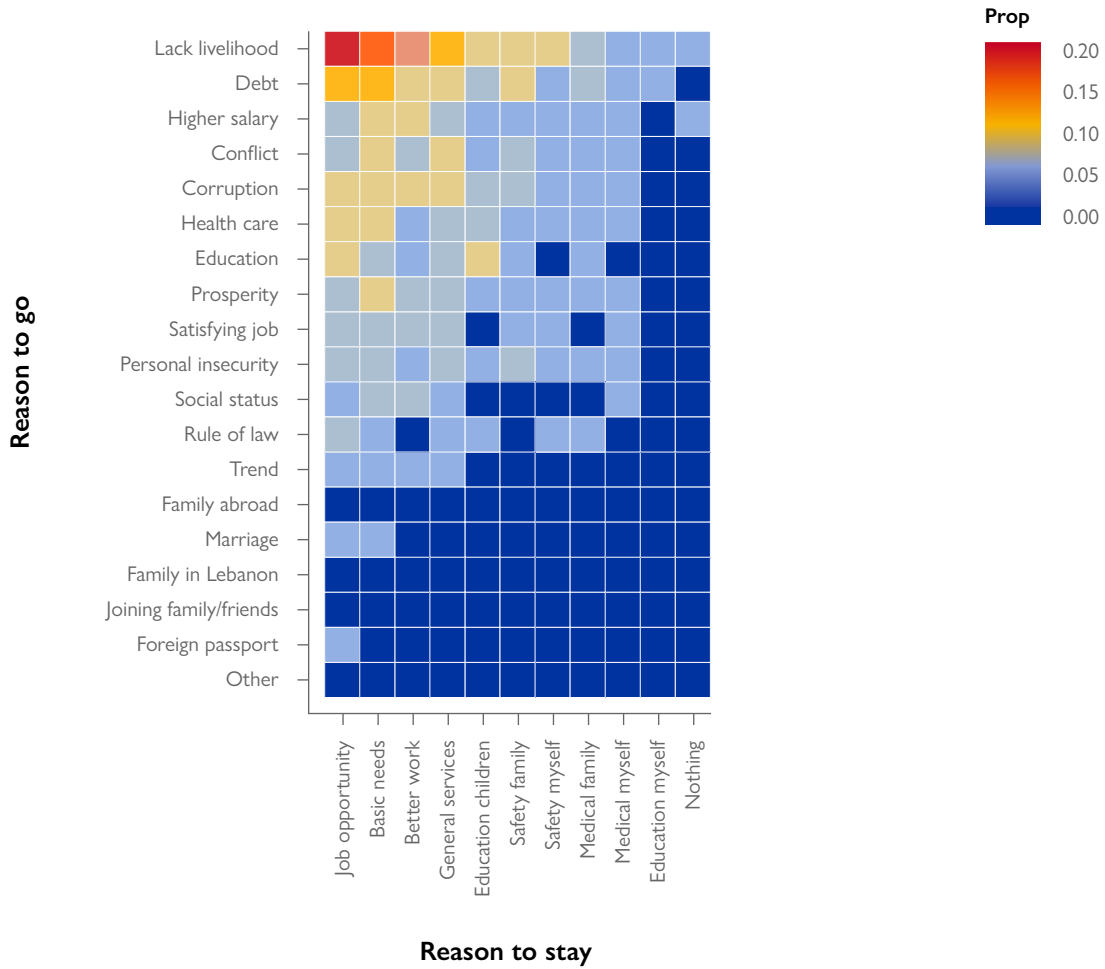
Note: [a] Note that relatively few respondents answered the "What would make you stay?" question, but the heat map indicates the strongest areas of overlap between major reasons for leaving and main reasons for staying in that case.

However, those with children had more interest in issues of their family's safety, children's education and medical care for their family (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Reasons to consider staying in Lebanon, by those with and without children
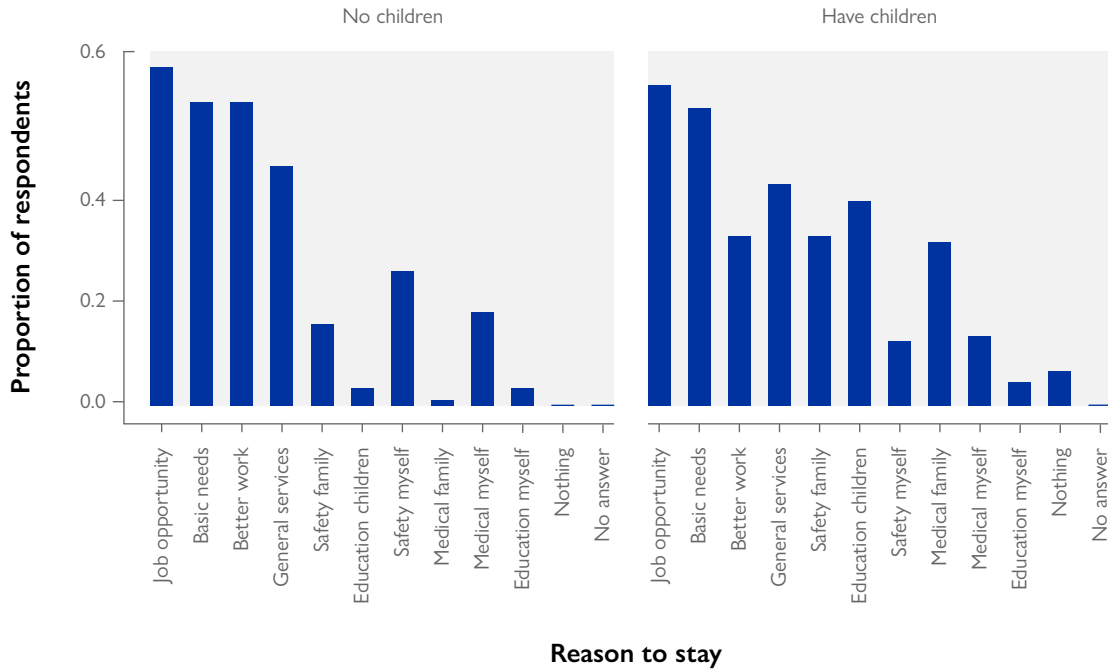
While some participants in focus groups said nothing would change their minds, others noted specific suggestions for what would need to change for them to regain a sense of hope and overcome the practical issues they were experiencing. These included:

- Access to medication and medical care. Consideration needs to be given to the difficulties people are having funding travel, given rising petrol costs:

    "Medication is our first priority, then education and then our basic needs. I as a mother am always worried about my kids. I don't think about myself and about my needs. What matters is my kids." (Female, 26, Tripoli)

- Decent work, meaning safe, with an income level that reflects inflation and living costs:

    "If we had jobs with good salaries, we would never think of leaving." (Male, 21, Tripoli)

    "Building a hospital in Bebnine, schools, universities, women should learn new skills and to invest them to earn money and become independent." (Female, 45, Akkar)

- Education for both children and young adults. This needs to take account of travel costs:

    "If I get to pursue the education of my son, we won't leave." (Female, 45, Akkar)

- Migration counselling, with guided exploration of whether there is a realistic pathway to regular migration:

    "I wish you could help me to afford money and to do my son's surgery, help me with the rental fees to help me to migrate in a regular way for my kid's education." (Female, 32, Akkar)

    "If there's a possibility of migrating in one year regularly, of course I can wait." (Male, 23, Akkar)

- Basic needs such as electricity and water:

    "Electricity and water. I should add that mukhtars are deciding whether I need assistance or not." (Female, 45, Akkar)

RECOMMENDATIONS

PART 3

"If you give me a light of hope I won't migrate irregularly. I'll wait." (Male, 48, Akkar)

WHAT WILL CHANGE BEHAVIOUR?

Taken together, the survey data and focus groups confirmed that many of those looking to migrate irregularly are being driven by an inability to meet practical needs locally, not by any preference to leave Lebanon. It is likely that interventions focusing very locally on improving livelihoods, access to safe and decent work, health care and education will help to change the decisions people are making about irregular migration. For some people, there may be one single factor that is dominant, such as the need to find specialist medical intervention for a sick child. However, for many, people would be greatly assisted by even small interventions across a set of domains – financial, medical, education and practical needs such as safe housing. The cost of meeting these needs locally has to be weighed against the human and economic cost that will be associated with rising numbers of smuggling boats seeking to depart Lebanon.

It is unclear that simply sharing information about the harsh realities of irregular migration will change behaviour. Given the awareness of the risks involved in attempting irregular migration, particularly by those who have already tried before, it is possible that efforts to communicate the high risk will cause at least some of this group to disengage from organizations associated with these messages.

Consideration should be given to urgently developing evidence-informed messaging, that shifts from a fear frame and instead leverages insights from behavioural change theory. This includes providing people with new options that do not currently exist, to help solve their problems locally, along with aids for decision-making. Where local communications are justified, consideration needs to be given to identifying the most effective messenger (likely to be peers and other locals), the most effective message (increasing choices, not fear) and effective media (such as local information networks, including face-to-face discussions) to communicate the information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Address unmet needs locally

This research project sought to understand irregular migration intentions and drivers, more so than local service provision or availability. However, the following appear to be unmet needs that require urgent consideration, grounded in more detailed assessment and understanding of what already exists and the gaps in access and support:

- **Case management and referrals for Lebanese nationals in high-risk areas:** There is a need to support people to work through the practical issues they are trying to address under conditions of extreme stress, and to better link individuals to the wider network of services that may be available. Individual case management can play a critical role in rapidly identifying unmet needs and communicating this to humanitarian agencies and donors, leveraging existing multisectoral interventions carried out under the Emergency Response Plan, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.
- **Medical care, including specialist care:** There is a need to better map the extent of and demand on existing medical services, and to find creative ways, whether through tele-health (given the departure from Lebanon of medical professionals), support for travel costs, raising awareness of existing services, or other means, to improve access to health-care services, including critical specialist medical care to people who are experiencing extreme distress.
- **Education:** This involves examining ways that education pathways can be reopened for those affected by rising fuel prices, unable to access education due to cost of transport, and ways that existing education services can be bolstered and supported locally, in Tripoli and Akkar.

- **Mental health and psychosocial support for vulnerable Lebanese people in distress:** This includes those who have previously attempted irregular migration.
- **Legal counselling:** This is for those needing support to advocate for their own legal rights, including access to travel documents such as passports.
- **Migration counselling:** This enables people who may have the opportunity to travel regularly to do so without engaging the services of costly rent-seeking third parties.
- **Peer-to-peer counselling on migration:** Opportunities should be created for people to talk about migration plans safely and without judgement. As people are turning to their neighbours and friends, consideration should be given to leveraging these local discussions, through training and support for peer-to-peer counselling.
- **Programmes directed at enabling decent work:** This should be done with income provided in US dollars, given the current fluctuations, and should be sufficient to enable discretionary spending. The availability of discretionary spending is critical to ensuring that related efforts locally – for example, to support business owners – will actually have customers. Equally, programmes need to have sufficient lifespans to engender a sense of hope.
- **Financial counselling:** This should have direct links to financial support for those experiencing financial distress and already in debt.
- **Support to communities in high-risk areas:** This includes through municipalities, to facilitate access to services such as health care and revitalize the local economy. Community-level programming can leverage existing interventions carried out under the Emergency Response Plan, the Lebanon Crisis Recovery Plan and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Recommendation 2: Provide wrap-around services in community settings

Given the many different dimensions to people's unmet needs, and the feeling of hopelessness that many vulnerable Lebanese people are feeling, consideration should be given to ensuring that individual case management and service delivery are embedded within broader efforts to strengthen social capital and community ties. For example, this could involve efforts focused around capacitating:

- A central, safe place where people feel valued and supported;
- Small incentives to attend, including support for travel costs or food to take home;
- Case management to help people solve their own problems locally;
- Trusted sources of information on regular migration and documents;
- Safe and judgement-free conversations with peer-to-peer counselors;
- Financial counselling and low-cost loans.

Centralization of services into a "one-stop shop" would also enable stronger coordination between multisectoral interventions, so these efforts can be leveraged for specific communities at risk of irregular migration.

Recommendation 3: Increase the options available to vulnerable people, to enable them to make safer choices

The research suggests some important ways that the international community could support Lebanese nationals living in Akkar and Tripoli to make safer choices around migration. At present, prospective migrants with low education, limited finances and high distress are choosing from the following options:

1. Stay in place (which is safe), but have no change to finances, health or education, in a context where long-term positive change seems unlikely;
2. Try to go regularly (expensive and uncertain) with no support provided or available to secure documents through dysfunctional government systems, or to navigate international migration processes or assess options, with high cost and low likelihood of success; or
3. Try to go irregularly, as they have known others to do, and get "support" from criminal networks.

It is recommended that consideration be given to practical ways the international community can create additional options for people, that enable them to choose safer pathways for themselves. For example, safer choices would seem to include the following additional options:

1. Stay in place but experience even small changes across a portfolio of basic needs, finances, medical/health needs and education (Recommendation 1);
2. Be supported to migrate regularly, with external support to assess options, secure travel documents and navigate complex migration processes (Recommendation 4); or
3. Stay in place in the short-to-medium term while getting certification or training for skills in demand in other countries, as part of a medium-term, more realistic path to regular migration (Recommendation 4).

Recommendation 4: Enable safe labour migration

Regular labour migration is complex and expensive in the best of times. Given the breakdown of government systems (including the passport office), the financial crisis and the inability of many to access regular electricity – let alone Internet – navigating complex migration systems is likely to be beyond the reach of most ordinary Lebanese. Sometimes seemingly simple requirements, such as access to a bank account or a critical document, may prevent labour migration. These are all obstacles that might be overcome through a combination of individual case management, expert advice, advocacy, access to basic resources, training that reflects international market demand, and support with processes such as recognition of qualifications and securing documents.

There is a need to ensure that trusted, free support services are available to Lebanese nationals looking to migrate for work or study. Without these being provided, it is inevitable that unscrupulous rent-seekers will move in to fill the gap in the market, greatly increasing the risk and cost associated with even regular migration.

Thus, there are critical information gaps that need to be filled to support these efforts. There is a need to map existing regular migration channels for Lebanese nationals, and to identify the barriers that are preventing access to these regular migration pathways. This information needs to be brought together alongside identification of market needs in destination countries that could be met by the Lebanese workforce. The international community can provide support by facilitating bilateral dialogue and cooperation between the Government of Lebanon and migration authorities in targeted countries, to smooth existing pathways and enable new pathways for labour migration.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that search-and-rescue, disembarkation and longer-term case management is available for survivors of failed irregular migration attempts

Given that smuggling boats were likely to commence as early as April 2023, there is an urgent need to ensure that local communities and State authorities are equipped to respond to the need for maritime search-and-rescue operations, alongside disembarkation and post-disembarkation assistance to migrants and refugees. This needs to include the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities' General Security Directorate, and the Civil Defence Directorate.

There is a need to ensure that longer-term case management and specialized support are available to those in the most vulnerable situations, such as shipwreck survivors and families of shipwreck victims, victims of trafficking, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Local service providers and national protection authorities should also be supported to ensure that migrants who need follow-up protection and assistance after rescue or upon return are referred in a timely manner to appropriate support services.

Recommendation 6: Ground responses in data and build the picture of "what works" to prevent irregular migration

Surprisingly little empirical research exists globally on "what works" to prevent irregular migration. Partly, this reflects the reality that, too often, responses to irregular migration are reactive and after the fact. Data collected for this project suggest that a sharp rise in irregular migration by sea is expected. There is a short and rapidly closing window in which to put preventative efforts, and data collection to support and track the impacts of these efforts, into place.

Local efforts to prevent irregular migration will benefit greatly from being supported and accompanied by local research support, to ensure programmes are being tailored to respond to need. For example, the surveys undertaken for this project suggest that debt is a high concern, but information is not available about how big this debt is. These and other questions could usefully be answered by local, short-duration research efforts. Equally, efforts to put in preventative measures should be monitored, alongside effort to track changes in irregular migration intention (and activity) over time. The information that could be captured through these efforts will be invaluable to crafting more effective future irregular migration interventions, both in Lebanon and beyond.