NRC’s Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme conducts outreach to refugee communities through 40 legal clinics, four community centres and a growing number of mobile clinics that travel to refugee communities. The ICLA programme covers assistance with civil documentation (birth, marriage, divorce and death), legal status and residency, and housing, land and property (HLP) rights in its response. ICLA team members also provide referral services to direct refugees in need of additional assistance to the appropriate agencies and teams, both within NRC and to other service providers.

Obtaining legal residency and required civil documentation in a foreign bureaucracy can be extraordinarily complex, expensive, and difficult to navigate for people who have been displaced. NRC’s ICLA services work to help refugees from the Syrian and Palestinian communities navigate these systems, raise awareness of refugees’ rights and obligations in Lebanon, and conduct advocacy at community and national levels on protection related issues.

Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Instead, rules regarding the entry and legal residency of refugees from Syria are guided by laws and regulations that apply generally to all foreign citizens and do not provide the specific recognition of status and protections afforded by the UN Convention.

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees are required to renew their legal residency on an annual basis and pay a fee of USD 200 per person aged 15-years or older. A partial waiver was introduced in early 2017. As a result of these high costs and other administrative barriers, more than half of the refugee population does not hold legal residency documentation. This results in refugees living with severely restricted freedom of movement and limited access to rights and services.

At the request of the Government of Lebanon, UNHCR registration was discontinued in early 2015. There are an estimated 500,000 refugees from Syria in Lebanon who are not registered, which may impact their access to humanitarian aid and third country resettlement.

Access to civil documentation such as birth and marriage registration remains challenging for most refugees due to lack of information on procedures, inability to cover fees, and a lack of required documents.

**ICLA PROGRAMMING IN LEBANON**

- **Outreach and Awareness:** Refugees are informed about relevant legal provisions and procedures on birth and marriage registration, legal status/residency and security of housing tenure through group information sessions, supported by the dissemination of brochures and leaflets on legal issues.

- **Counselling:** Refugees receive individual confidential counselling on civil documentation, legal stay or housing rights, with a view to enable them to act upon the legal advice obtained.

- **Legal representation:** In selected cases, a lawyer represents refugees in front of a court or authority, either due to the complexity of the case or specific vulnerability factors.

- **Collaborative Dispute Resolution:** When disputes arise between refugees and their landlords (or other parties), NRC facilitates the resolution of such disputes.

- **Capacity Building:** of local authorities (including Mukhtars andробе offices) and other protection/humanitarian actors on relevant legal issues affecting refugees in Lebanon.

- **ICLA for Shelter Beneficiaries:** ICLA also cooperates with the NRC Shelter programme by providing legal services to shelter beneficiaries.

- **Referrals:** ICLA staff regularly identify and refer protection concerns to specialized agencies such as child protection or health providers. NRC actively engages in protection coordination amongst legal service providers and other humanitarian actors at national and field levels.
ICLA PROGRAMME REACH IN 2016

- 232,200 refugees received information, counselling or legal representation in 2016.
- 12,000 group information sessions
- 13,732 children assisted with obtaining birth registration
- 6,694 couples assisted with marriage registration
- 5,500 individuals assisted with Legal Stay/residency issues

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

NATION-WIDE REACH
NRC’s ICLA team consists of programme staff based in the North, South, Bekaa and Beirut/Mount Lebanon, contracted Lebanese lawyers and volunteer Information Focal Points from within refugee communities.

Information Focal Points increase NRC’s community outreach. They support the provision of information to refugees about their rights and available services.

ASSISTANCE FOR PALESTINIAN REFUGEES
ICLA services also work to address legal challenges faced by the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon, mostly related to housing and property rights.

MOBILE SHARIA COURT
In an effort to overcome the movement restrictions that many refugees face, NRC facilitates mobile sessions of Sharia courts in Bekaa and in North Lebanon and South Lebanon. These courts mostly cover proof of marriage and kinship cases, related to helping refugees register babies born in Lebanon.

WHAT LEGAL ISSUES ARE REFUGEES FACING?

- The lack of formal refugee status and restrictions on legal residency remain major obstacles for many refugees to access rights and services.
- Civil documentation procedures are cumbersome and costly for many refugees, and regulations are applied inconsistently across the country.
- Access to adequate housing and protection from forced evictions and the threat thereof is an everyday concern for refugees in Lebanon.