



NRC

NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

**INFORMATION,
COUNSELLING AND LEGAL
ASSISTANCE
PROGRAMME (ICLA)**

**MONTHLY LEGAL AND
PROTECTION UPDATES**

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2016



NRC – www.nrc.no

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent, international, humanitarian, non-governmental organisation which provides assistance, and protection and contributes to durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people worldwide. NRC has been working in Lebanon since 2006 providing humanitarian assistance to communities affected by displacement. In early March 2012, NRC commenced its Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme in Lebanon, with a focus on assisting refugees and displaced persons to understand and enjoy their rights. All NRC services are free of charge.

For further information about NRC Lebanon's ICLA programme or to find out about making legal referrals or receiving NRC training or awareness sessions on legal issues, please contact Ms. Julia Herzog-Schmidt, ICLA Specialist at julia.herzog-schmidt@nrc.no or 01 366 113.

Copyright © 2016

By the Norwegian Refugee Council. All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

The Protection and Legal Context Updates should be duly cited when used as a reference.

Suggested citation: **Protection and Legal Context Updates** (*Months*), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) 2016, p. X.

1. Background

The NRC Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) team provides information, counselling and legal assistance to refugees from Syria about access to essential services and legal issues in Lebanon. ICLA provides its services at NRC community centres and through outreach at a number of locations, including UNHCR registration sites, informal tented settlements (ITS), medical centres, community centres and schools. The ICLA team works in Beirut/Mount Lebanon (BML), North Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley and South Lebanon. By regularly following legal developments and through its ICLA programming in the field (ongoing mapping of services, assistance to refugees, its referral and follow-up systems and its case management database), NRC monitors the circumstances for refugee and host communities in Lebanon. Based on this information, NRC has been able to follow changes in the protection situation and identify protection and legal concerns that require specific focus. Throughout its daily work, in close contact with the refugee and host communities affected by displacement, the ICLA team identifies protection trends and issues of concern for humanitarian actors participating in the Syrian response.

During **January and February 2016, the NRC ICLA team provided services to 31,357 refugees** across the country (see Table 1 below for more details).

The following update is based on data from field programmes and covers the months of January and February 2016. It presents protection trends and information on issues identified by NRC ICLA field teams in BML, Bekaa, North and South. All the points mentioned in the update are, as relevant, being followed up by NRC staff.

Governorate	Caza/district¹	Refugees who received ICLA services
Akkar	Akkar	1,754
Baalbek-El Hermel	Baalbek	3,690
	El Hermel	5
Beirut	Beirut	239
Bekaa	Rachaya	15
	West Bekaa	2,391
	Zahle	9,922
El Nabatieh	Bent Jbeil	188
	El Nabatieh	763
	Marjaayoun	22
BML	Aley	584
	Baabda	3,513
	Chouf	495
	El Batroun	7
	El Metn	825
	Jbeil	29
	Keserwane	54
North	El Koura	16
	El Minieh-Dennie	550
	Tripoli	2,859
	Bcharre	2
	Zgharta	186
South	Saida	827
	Sour	2,421
Total		31,357

Table 1: ICLA beneficiaries during January and February 2016²

¹ In the following tables 2 and 3 some Caza may not be captured because the beneficiaries would have received a set of services not detailed in table 2 and 3.

² Total numbers in tables 2 and 3 will not correlate with the total number of beneficiaries in table 1 as some beneficiaries will have received more than one service.

Governorate	Caza/district	Refugees who received information about birth registration	Refugees who received information about legal status	Refugees who received information about housing, land and property (HLP)
Akkar	Akkar	850	837	851
Baalbek-EI Hermel	Baalbek	2,405	799	763
	Beirut	226	226	226
Bekaa	West Bekaa	2,323	907	659
	Zahle	9,381	3,380	3,301
EI Nabatieh	Bent Jbeil	102	102	34
	EI Nabatieh	566	597	85
BML	Aley	522	483	483
	Baabda	3,402	2,948	2,912
	Chouf	413	395	395
	EI Metn	778	747	747
	Jbeil	21	21	21
	Kesrwane	35	35	35
North	EI Minieh-Dennie	256	255	158
	Tripoli	2,568	2,568	2,362
	Zgharta	92	92	92
South	Saida	517	490	365
	Sour	2,172	2,166	1,528
TOTAL		26,629	17,048	15,017

Table 2: Number of individuals receiving ICLA services (on birth registration, legal status, HLP and UNHCR registration) provided during January and February 2016

Governorate	Caza/district	Refugees who received information about UNHCR registration	Refugees who received information about shelter	Refugees who received information about education	Refugees who received information about health
Akkar	Akkar	430	620	398	741
Baalbek-El Hermel	Baalbek	2,233	764	743	2,308
Beirut	Beirut	226	0	0	186
Bekaa	West Bekaa	1,038	69	67	1,383
	Zahle	9,371	2,586	1,965	9,311
El Nabatieh	Bent Jbeil	116	120	124	28
	Marjaayoun	1	0	0	1
	El Nabatieh	124	99	20	318
BML	Aley	488	0	185	491
	Baabda	2,767	0	168	2,777
	Chouf	436	3	45	438
	Jbeil	24	0	0	23
	Kesrwane	39	0	0	40
	El Metn	678	0	87	669
North	El Koura	0	3	1	4
	El Batroun	0	2	0	0
	El Minieh-Dennie	102	311	197	273
	Tripoli	691	1,994	1,846	1,944
	Zgharta	92	66	65	92
South	Saida	0	462	496	58
	Sour	595	1439	856	1,547
TOTAL		19,451	8,537	7,263	22,632

Table 3: Number of individuals receiving ICLA services (on shelter, education and health) provided during January and February 2016

2. Access to territory

As in previous months, access to Lebanese territory remained restricted to Syrians who were able to comply with one of the limited entry categories mentioned in the General Security Office

(GSO) circular issued 5 January 2015. During January and February 2016, ICLA encountered six Syrian refugees who were able to enter Lebanon since 5 January 2015. Four of them entered through an official border based on a “pledge of responsibility”, one entered on the basis of a hotel reservation under the tourism category; and the last one on the basis of embassy appointment.

3. Legal stay and freedom of movement

NRC field observations during January and February 2016 confirm the trends identified in the previous months. The majority of refugees continue not to approach the GSO to renew and/or regularise their legal stay (as demonstrated in figure 1).

During the reporting period, ICLA asked 2,977 beneficiaries³ who received counselling and legal assistance on legal stay, civil documentation and HLP issues, if they had approached the GSO since 5 January 2015. Out of those beneficiaries, only 29% (862 beneficiaries) had approached the GSO since the issuance of the new renewal regulations while the remaining 71% (2,115 beneficiaries) stated that they did not approach the GSO.

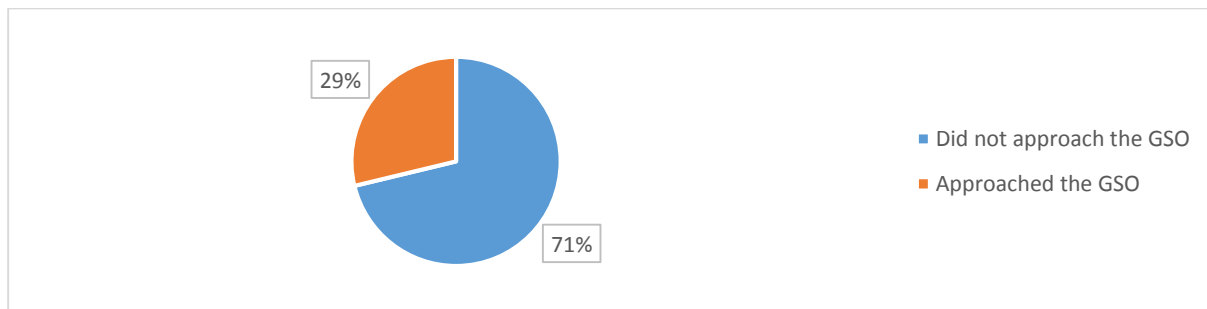


Figure 1: Percentage of refugees who approached or did not approach the GSO to renew or regularise their legal stay since 5 January 2015. January and February 2016, sample size: 2,977

As shown in figure 2, of the 29% (862 beneficiaries) who stated that they approached the GSO to renew and/or regularise their legal stay, 34% expressed their reasoning as a willingness to

³ It includes Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS).

have freedom of movement, 32% to abide by the law, and 20% to have access to work. This is in line with NRC’s previous findings, which demonstrate that Syrian refugees with no legal stay experience restrictions on their freedom of movement, which is key in order to access essential services and livelihood opportunities.

For example, during January and February 2016 there have been increasing *ad hoc* checkpoints by the Lebanese Army Forces (LAF) in the North of Lebanon. During this period, the ICLA team in the North has received nine detention cases of Syrian refugees due to lack of valid legal stay.

In addition, in the different field locations, ICLA teams were approached during the reporting period by students and/or parents of students who face challenges in applying for official exams because of lack of valid legal stay. This year as in the previous years, the requirement for valid legal stay in order to sit for the official exams was waived by a decision taken by the Lebanese Government on an exceptional basis.⁴

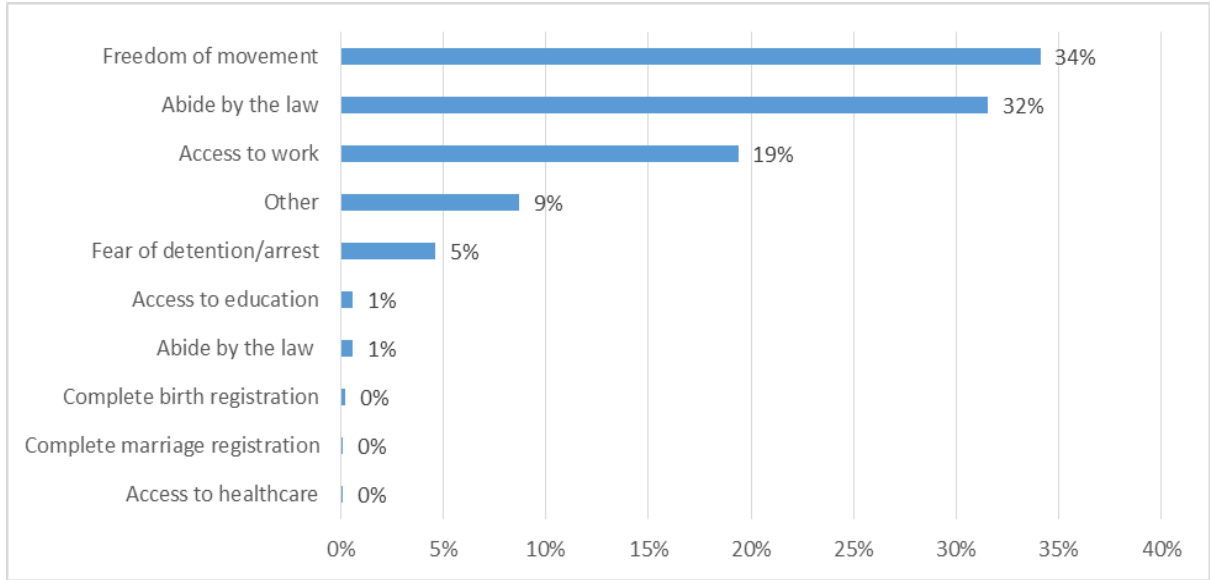


Figure 2: Reported reasons for approaching the GSO to renew or to regularise legal stay since 5 January 2015. January and February 2016, sample size: 862

Out of the 71% (2,115 beneficiaries) who stated they had not approached the GSO to renew and/or regularise their legal stay since 5 January 2015, 46% cited a lack of documents, in

⁴ Lebanese Government, Decision number 40, issued on 17/3/2016.

particular the “pledge of responsibility”, as the main obstacle to renewal and/or regularisation of their legal stay and 33% cited the financial costs.

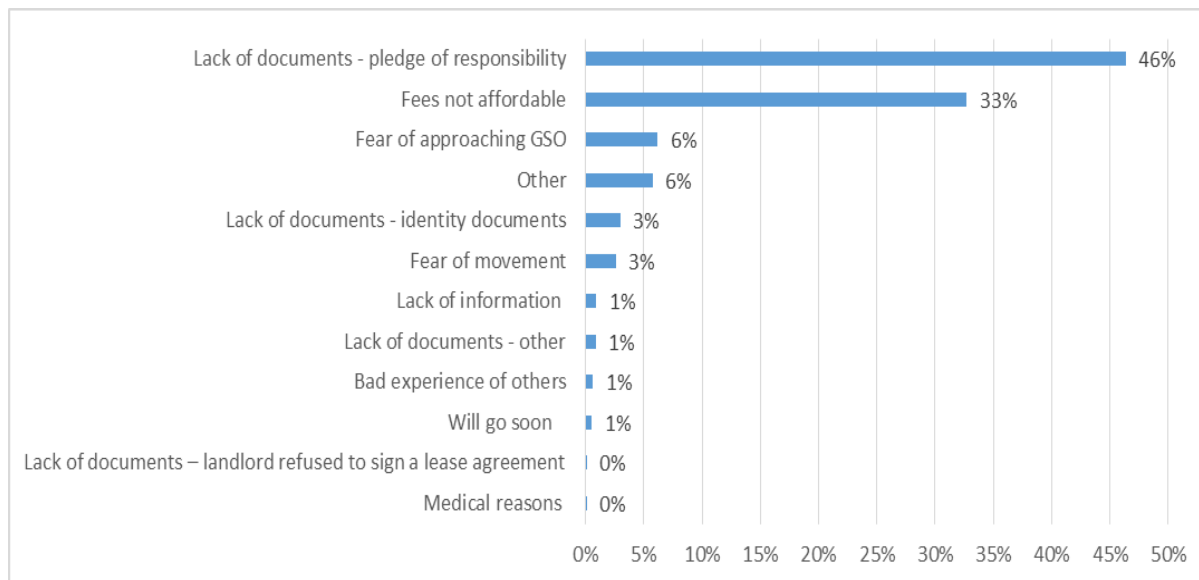


Figure 3: Reported reasons for not approaching the GSOs to renew residency visa or to regularise legal stay since 5 January 2015. January and February 2016, sample size: 2,115

a. Legal stay for Syrian refugees

During the reporting period, ICLA interviewed 137 out of the 862 counselling and legal assistance beneficiaries who have approached the GSO to renew and/or regularise their legal stay. As illustrated in figure 4, out of these 137, approximately 77%⁵ (105 beneficiaries) were granted residency visa for a period between 6 months and one year.

9% (13 beneficiaries) were denied renewal and/or regularisation. In four cases the beneficiary’s entry card was stamped “To return to Syria”.

The remainder of the renewal and regularisation applications 11% (15 beneficiaries) were still pending at the time of the interview.

⁵ This percentage is the sum of: 3% (granted residency visa for less than 6 months); 9% (granted residency visa for more than 6 months); 15% (granted residency visa for 6 months) and 50% (granted residency visa for one year).

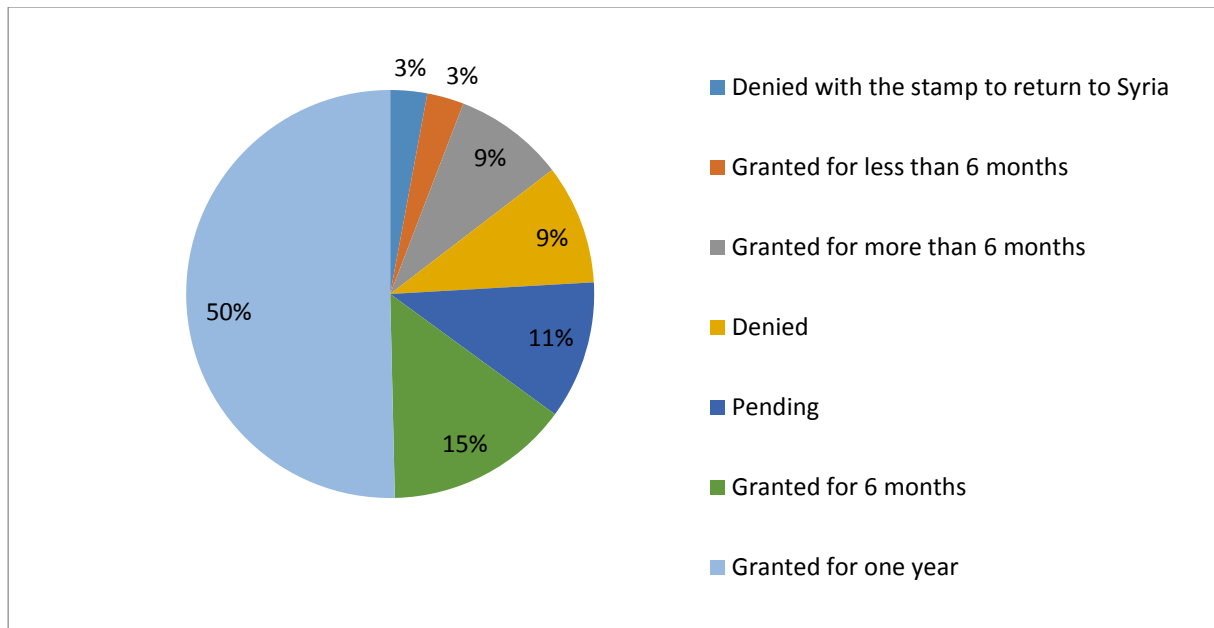


Figure 4: Outcomes of the renewal and regularisation applications for Syrian refugees. January and February 2016, sample size: 137

Among those 105 cases that succeeded in renewing their legal stay, 70% (73 beneficiaries) managed to do so based on a pledge of responsibility.

NRC observations continue to indicate that even though Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR should be able to renew without a pledge of responsibility⁶, many refugees, although registered with UNHCR, are not approaching the GSO because in practice they also have to provide a pledge of responsibility.

In fact, figure 5 shows that refugees are less likely to succeed in renewing their legal stay based on their UNHCR registration certificate, with only 8% (9 beneficiaries) of those interviewed by NRC who were able to do so.

⁶ GSO's last circular mentions the possibility to renew with a UNHCR registration card and a pledge not to work.

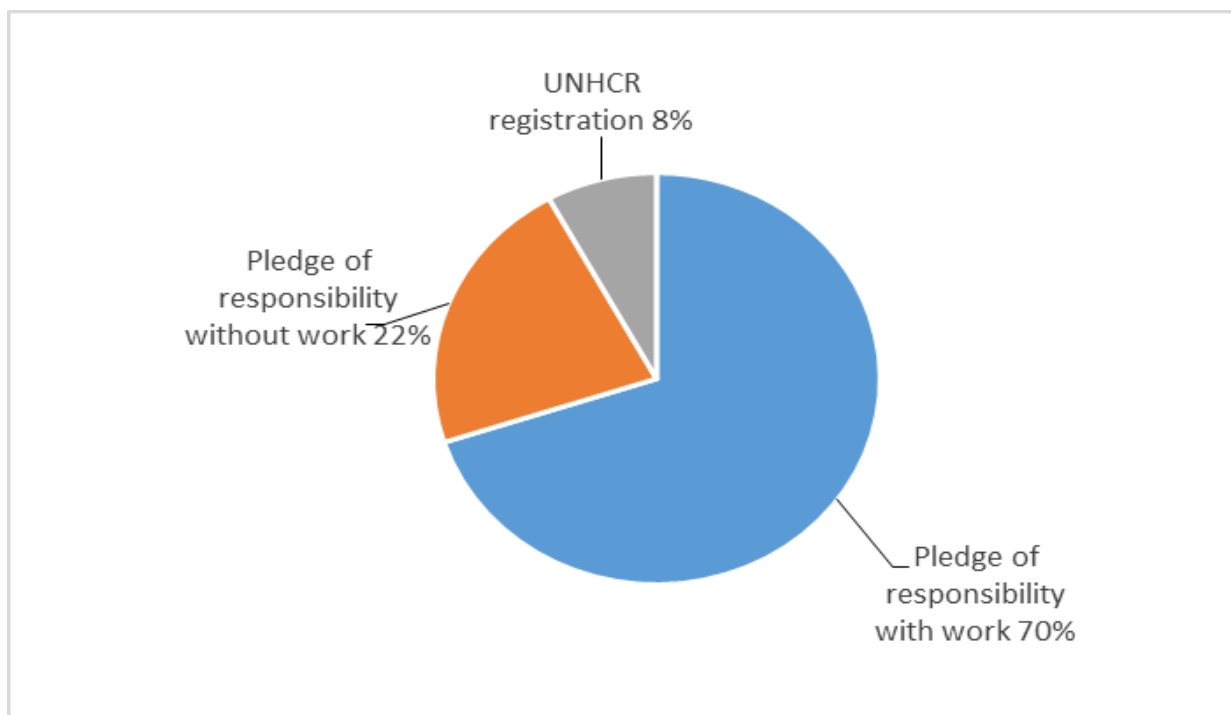


Figure 5: The basis for granting and/or regularising legal stay. January and February 2016, sample size: 105

b. Legal stay for Palestinian refugees from Syria

The internal memo allowing Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) to renew and regularise their legal stay and exempting them from paying the applicable fees was extended until the end of March 2016. At the moment of drafting the report, no information was available whether or not the memo would be extended again.

During the reporting period, ICLA interviewed among ICLA counselling and legal assistance beneficiaries 36 PRS who have approached the GSO to renew and/or regularise their legal stay. Among these beneficiaries, 45%⁷ (16 beneficiaries) were successful and were granted 3 months, 22% of the interviewed did not succeed in renewing (8 beneficiaries). The rest of applications (33%) were still pending at the time of the interview (figure 6). The high proportion of unsuccessful renewals may be explained since the sample comes from PRS who have actively

⁷ This percentage is the sum of: 3% (granted residency visa for one year; 6% (granted residency visa for less than 2 weeks); % 36 (granted residency visa less than 6 months).

sought counselling and legal assistance from NRC so their cases may already have complications.

As per NRC field observations, PRS who have entered through unofficial borders and those who have overstayed a 24 or 48 hour transit visa do not benefit from this internal memo. In addition, in most cases PRS who have previously received a “departure order” or those who have an entry card stamped with “To return to Syria” are also excluded from the internal memo.

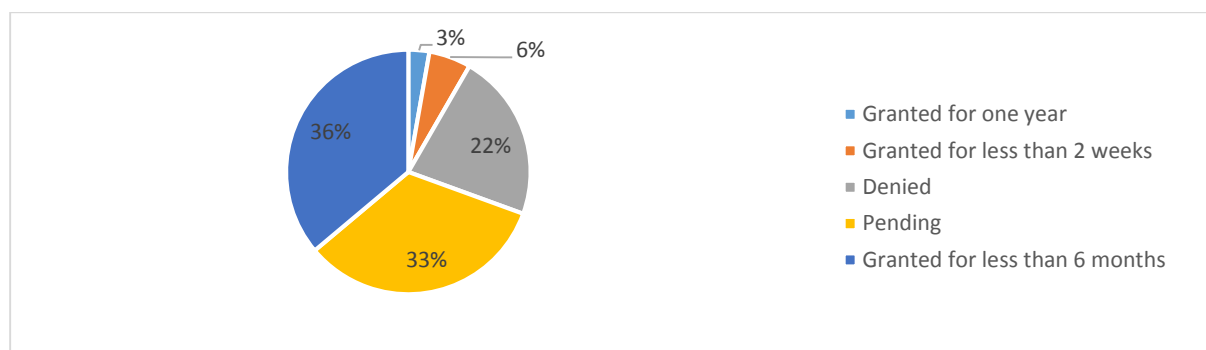


Figure 6: Outcomes of the renewal and regularisation applications for PRS. January and February 2016, sample size: 36

4. Civil documentation

a. Birth registration

The below graphs are representative of the status of 877 beneficiaries’ progress across Lebanon in relation to registering the birth of their child in Lebanon prior to receiving counselling from NRC.

Out of the 877 beneficiaries, 3% (23 beneficiaries) had no birth notification. The reasons for that differ from one case to another; these include delivery at home without the presence of a certified midwife or the hospital’s refusal to provide the birth notification document because the couple does not have a proof of marriage.

Of the 97% (854 beneficiaries) who have a birth notification, 65% (571 beneficiaries), completed the second step of the process by approaching a *Mukhtar* and managed to get a birth certificate.

Based on ICLA fieldwork, the third step of the birth registration process is where refugees report encountering the most problems. While 18% (159 beneficiaries) completed the *Nofous* step, only 4% (38 beneficiaries) succeeded in completing the Foreigner's Register step.

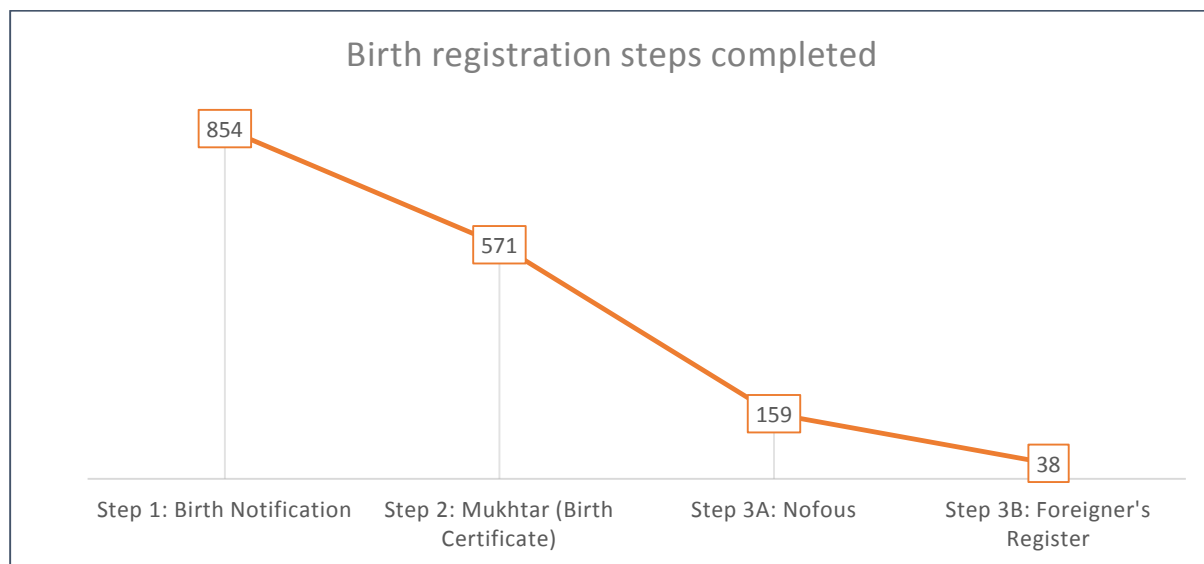


Figure 7: Birth registration steps completed. January and February 2016, sample size: 877

As illustrated in figure 8, across the nation, the most frequent reasons given by interviewed beneficiaries for not completing the birth registration procedure were as follows: lack of legal stay (38%); lack of information (34%) and birth over one year (10%, 87 cases). In these 87 cases where the baby was over one year, a court process is required in addition to having the required documents to complete the birth registration.

Aiming to provide information to refugees to support them in registering the birth of their child, NRC has been trying to understand why access to information is such an important issue. NRC's previous update⁸ and ongoing field work suggest that one of the main reasons is that authorities do not implement the procedures consistently, undermining the information provided about how to register a child.

⁸ See Norwegian Refugee Council, Birth Registration Update: The Challenges of Birth Registration in Lebanon for Refugees from Syria, January 2015.

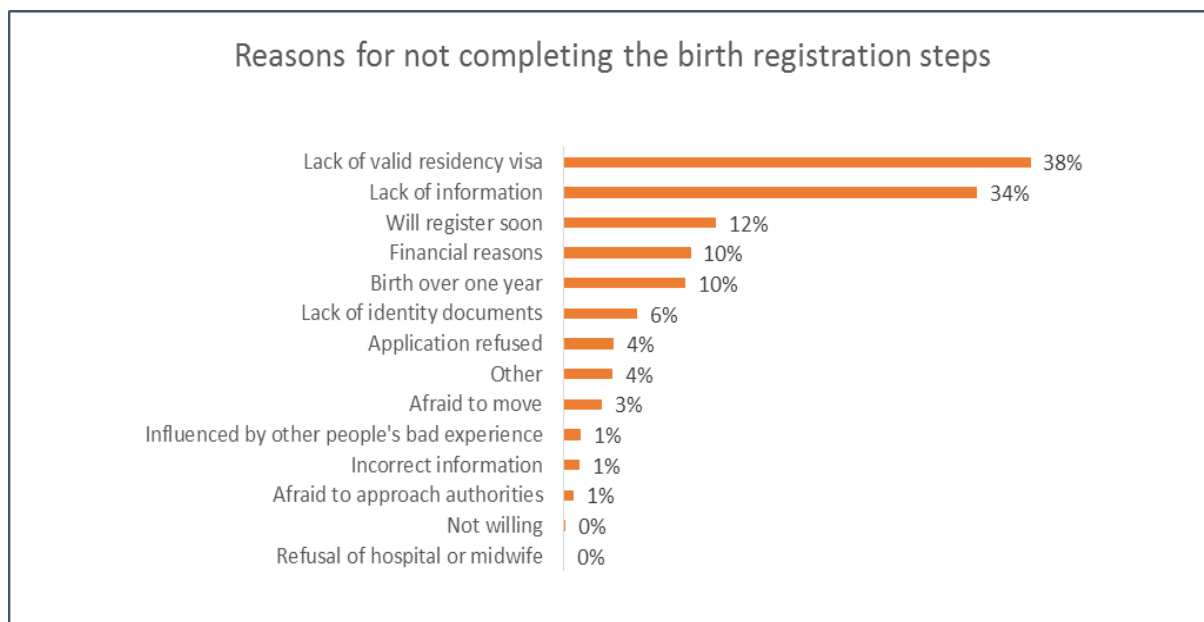


Figure 8: Reasons for not completing the birth registration steps. January and February 2016, sample size 877

Two months after receiving counselling from NRC, 93% of the refugees counselled were able to explain clearly the process of birth registration procedures and 75% tried to act based on NRC's advice. Among those who acted, 84% succeeded to achieve at least one additional birth registration step, as a result of NRC's assistance. These are the results of 509 outcome monitoring interviews conducted by NRC, two months after the beneficiaries received counselling.

b. Marriage registration

Below (figure 9 and figure 10) are representative of the status of 423 beneficiaries' progress across Lebanon in relation to their registration of marriage contracted in Lebanon prior to counselling from NRC.

While all the 423 beneficiaries had a kind of written marriage contract, in only 51 cases was it duly contracted by a relevant authority i.e. authorised *Sheikhs* or at the *Sharia* court. This complicates further the marriage registration procedure for the other 372 cases which have to go through the "proof of marriage" case law in front of the *Sharia* court before being able to continue their marriage registration procedure.

Of the 423 beneficiaries, only approximately 8% (32 beneficiaries) approached a *Mukhtar* and succeeded in getting a marriage certificate. All of these had a marriage contract concluded at *Sharia* court and/or by an authorised *Sheikh*. While only approximately 2% (7 beneficiaries) completed the *Nofous* step and less than 1% (one beneficiary) the Foreigner's Register step.

The most frequent reasons given by interviewed beneficiaries for not completing the marriage registration procedure were as follows: lack of information (49%); lack of financial means (27%); lack of residency visa (23%) and lack of relevant identification documents (11%).

During the reporting period, NRC field teams have observed in all field locations an increasing number of requests for registration of early marriage cases.⁹ In these cases NRC, together with other protection actors tried to mitigate the protection risks faced by the child spouses (especially girls) by providing relevant legal support and/or referring to specialised child protection or gender based violence actors.

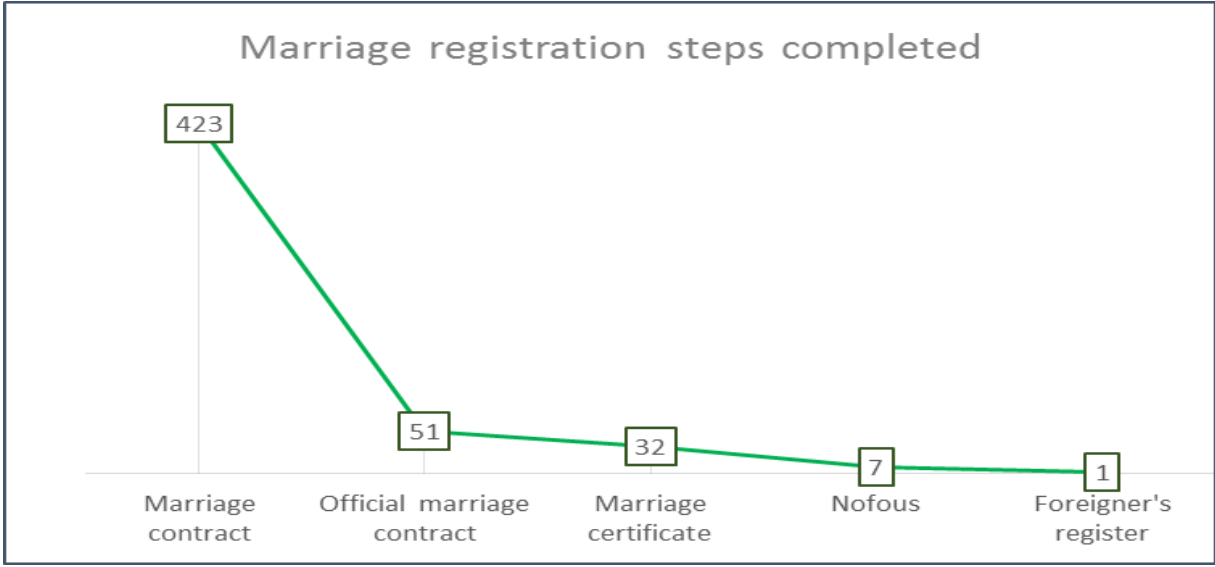


Figure 9: Marriage registration steps completed. January and February 2016, sample size: 423.

⁹ By early marriage we understand the marriage between two persons in which one or both parties are younger than 18 years of age.

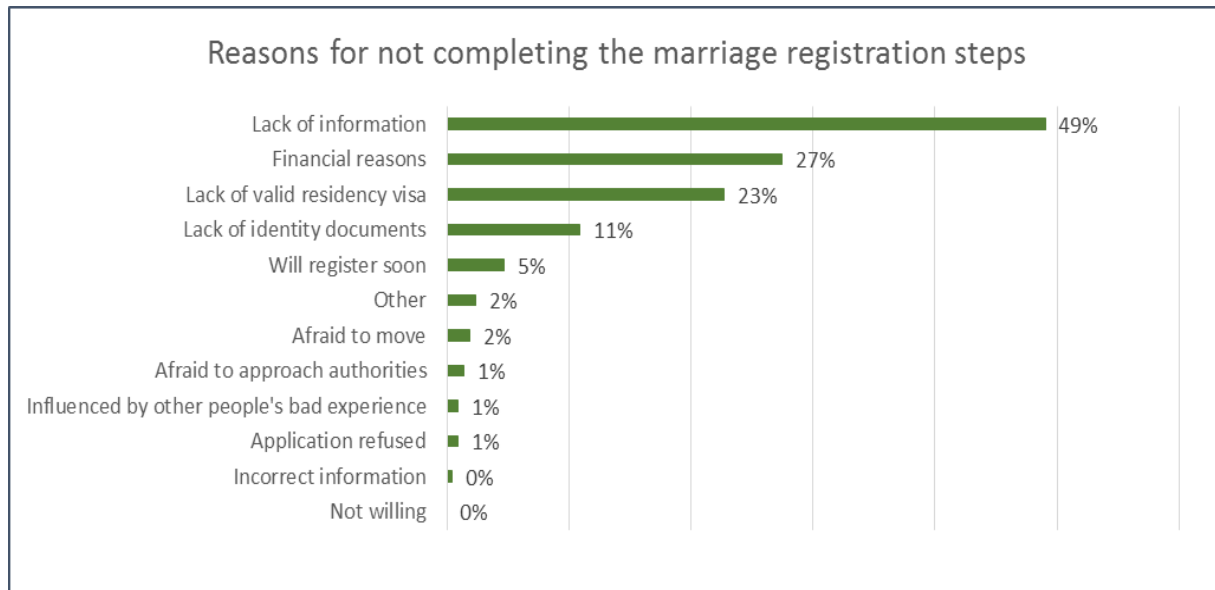


Figure 10: Reasons for not completing marriage registration steps. January and February 2016, sample size: 423

Two months after receiving counselling from NRC, 99% of the refugees counselled were able to explain clearly the process of marriage registration procedures and 77% tried to act based on NRC’s advice. Among those who acted, 77% succeeded to achieve at least one additional marriage registration step as a result of NRC’s assistance. These are the results of 127 outcome monitoring interviews conducted by NRC, two months after the beneficiaries received counselling.



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid; the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and UK aid from the UK Government. The contents of the document are the sole responsibility of the Norwegian Refugee Council and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Commission's Humanitarian Department, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or the UK Government.