



Migrant
Workers'
Action

حركة مناهضة
العنصرية



Anti-Racism
Movement

October 30, 2024
Beirut, Lebanon

Urgent Action: IOM should open shelter for displaced and stranded Migrant workers in Lebanon

The undersigned organizations strongly condemn the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Lebanon's inadequate response to the current escalation of violence and wave of displacement, including the decision to not open a shelter for migrant communities. An urgent intervention is needed to ensure that an emergency shelter is set up by the IOM for stranded and displaced migrant workers and communities in Lebanon.

Since the beginning of the current genocide against the Palestinian people in October, Lebanon has been facing daily crossfire on its Southern border, which had already displaced over 100,000 people prior to September 2024. The frequency of aerial bombardments and indiscriminate attacks carried out by Israel significantly increased since September 2024. According to the Lebanese government, this resulted in the displacement of more than 1.2 million people across the country. This crisis is significantly affecting the population, including thousands of migrant workers who have had to flee conflict areas, as their employers left without them.

One of our main concerns is the current lack of adequate shelters for the migrant population in Lebanon.

The Lebanese government had announced earlier this year that, in case of an Israeli escalation in the country, it would only accommodate Lebanese citizens. It specified that for non-Lebanese nationals, the UN agencies (IOM, UNHCR, UNRWA, etc) should bear the sole responsibility of providing emergency shelters and other humanitarian assistance. This practice of prioritizing Lebanese citizens is currently being applied, resulting in migrant communities being refused access to government-run shelters and other services.

In addition, there is currently a shortage of adequate shelters for the displaced. Few Embassies have provided shelters to their nationals in Lebanon, but they remain very limited and not adequately equipped. Several local civil society organizations have received many support requests from groups of migrant workers who are stranded in Beirut, Saida, and Tyre in the South of Lebanon, with no means to relocate to a safer area, or find shelter where they are. In at least two cases, migrant women were evicted from public shelters and forced to spend the night on the streets. The cases included over 60 Sierra Leoneans evicted from a shelter in Tripoli and 100 Bangladeshis evicted from a shelter in Beirut.

This has forced migrant activists and allies to bear on the responsibility of starting and operating informal shelters. This poses considerable risks on the safety of activists running it, as well as individuals and groups taking shelter there.

We believe that this responsibility should be borne by the IOM Office in Lebanon, as it is the most resourced and experienced institution mandated to provide emergency shelter to migrant communities.

Yet, following inquiries by civil society groups, the IOM Lebanon office has made

concerning statements about the infeasibility of opening an IOM-run shelter in Lebanon during a meeting of the Migrant Working Group.¹ Considering the urgent and increasing needs of migrant workers and the limited capacity of CSOs, this decision by the IOM will lead to irreversible consequences affecting the safety and well-being of the group their mandate requires them to protect. On 11 October, ARM and MWA sent a letter to the IOM Headquarters in Geneva as well as the regional office and IOM Lebanon, to bring all these issues forward. The IOM Lebanon office replied that they are aware of the issue, and are working on addressing it, while still maintaining the decision of not opening a shelter and without providing any insight to the reasons behind such a detrimental decision.

In a context where there is a close to complete vacuum on the government and institutional front, at a time of aggravated war and displacement, we must not forget that the civil society actors that are being relied on for full scale solutions is also comprised of people who are dealing with the war and displacement themselves and all other fatal types of instability. Even in peacetime, such groups were never anywhere close to filling the gap of national social protection or the impact of its absence for migrant workers. Expecting under-resourced, sometimes undocumented individuals, who may lack capacity or expertise, to carry on the high-risk operations of providing shelter, is highly contentious and unethical.

For migrant communities, an extremely precarious status under the sponsorship/Kafala system in the country is now much more worrying than ever. Based on our experiences following the 2020 Beirut Blast, financial breakdown and the COVID-19 Pandemic, we only expect this to get worse as resources dwindle, needs increase at a national level, and hostility spreads against migrant communities.

In light of the above, we echo the demands previously raised with IOM to:

- ❖ Set up and maintain a specialized emergency shelter for migrant communities through their offices in Lebanon to meet the immediate need for sheltering, access to basic necessities, and the provision of healthcare
- ❖ Increase advocacy efforts to urge the Lebanese government to recognize the importance of including all residents of Lebanon in their emergency response program, and take concrete actions to ensure migrant communities have access to shelter and life saving assistance without discrimination and systematic exclusion.

** This letter has been discussed with and endorsed by ten migrant communities and activists.

Signatory Organisations

Anti-Racism Movement
Legal Agenda
Egna Legna Besidet
Jeyetna
Public Works Studio

Migrant Workers' Action
The Syria Campaign
Regional Coalition of WHRDs
FairWork Lebanon
This Is Lebanon

¹ This meeting occurred on 07 October 2024. Many CSOs posed the question to the IOM Lebanon office on the urgency in opening a shelter.