

**ACHR** 

Annual Impact Report for 2023 Lebanon - Beirut

# **ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT**

**FOR 2023** 

#### Introduction

In 2023, Syrian refugees in Lebanon faced numerous significant challenges and hardships. Throughout the year, Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) worked to develop a deeper understanding of the humanitarian and security crisis confronting Syrian refugees, emphasizing the need for policies and procedures that improve their situation and uphold their rights and dignity, without compromising the principles of human rights protection and international humanitarian law.

During 2023, ACHR documented numerous human rights violations faced by Syrian refugees in Lebanon and analyzed the challenges in this context. ACHR monitored the impact of inflammatory political rhetoric and observed the Lebanese government's deliberate avoidance of clear policies to handle the refugee crisis, which supported direct and indirect practices to pressure refugees to return to their home country. These practices fostered hate speech against refugees and pushed them towards irregular migration across the Mediterranean, risking their lives in search of a better environment and dignified life.

ACHR also monitored the Lebanese authorities' tightening of security measures, the increase in security raids, arbitrary arrests, and forced deportations of Syrian refugees. These policies led to a rise in physical assaults, forced evictions from rented homes and camps, and a notable increase in kidnapping crimes for financial extortion and human trafficking against refugees. Additionally, ACHR highlighted the difficulties refugees faced in accessing the internet and information, affecting their personal and legal rights and decisions, and resulting in the loss of contact with the outside world, especially after security forces raided camps and confiscated electronic devices.

Based on the data, documentation, and reports that ACHR worked on during 2023 concerning the human rights situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, it aimed to enhance advocacy efforts and defend refugee issues through its active participation in various events, conferences, and meetings with relevant organizations, stakeholders, and decision-makers at local and international levels to advocate for and raise awareness about Syrian refugees' issues and highlight the violations they face amid media blackout. ACHR also sought to keep the public informed about the latest developments and events related to Syrian refugees through regular posts on its social media platforms and website.

The Lebanese authorities' tightening of security measures, the increase in security raids, arbitrary arrests, and forced deportations of Syrian refugees.

### **Background and History of the Organization**

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) is a non-governmental and non-profit human rights organization led and managed by Syrian refugees with professional backgrounds in law, human rights, and journalism, who sought asylum in Lebanon due to their pro-democracy activities in Syria. ACHR is committed to upholding the rule of law and combating impunity. It maintains a secular and non-sectarian stance and remains independent of any political affiliations. ACHR advocates for the collective and individual rights of refugees by investigating and highlighting the numerous violations of international law they endure. It calls for the voluntary, dignified, and safe return of refugees to their home countries. ACHR has been registered in Lebanon since 2017 under number 1716/2019 and in France since 2020 under number W931023779 and has equivalents in the USA and Canada as a charitable organization.



Since 2019, ACHR has published at least 80 issues, including investigative reports, research papers, press releases, position papers, policy papers, and advocacy letters. It has launched and/or co-led numerous advocacy campaigns aimed at enforcing laws, respecting international law, establishing clear policies for dealing with refugees, removing imposed restrictions, and raising awareness of human rights violations in Lebanon.

ACHR has a unique database containing documented information according to a specific methodology for documenting human rights violations, which has been used in most of its publications and supported its partners' publications on the human rights situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This database is a reliable reference for many partners active in human rights and documenting violations, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the Global Detention Project (GDP), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and partner organizations and alliances.



### **Programs Access Center for Human Rights Worked on During 2023**



Monitoring and **Documentation** 



Research and **Reports** 



**Advocacy and Campaigns** 



**Press Releases** 



**Emergency Case** Referrals



Support for Journalists, Media outlets, and s everal other Actors



**Communication with UN Mechanisms** 



**Publication and Awareness** of Human Rights Violations

# (a)

### **Monitoring and Documentation**

In 2023, Syrian refugees in Lebanon experienced various violations documented by ACHR, with a total of 4,532 documented cases.



4532

#### **Total of documented cases**



1080

Arbitrary arrest and detention



1289

ill-treatment and torture



763

Forced deportation



**596** 

Forced eviction



2

sexual violence



14

Enforced disappearance



773

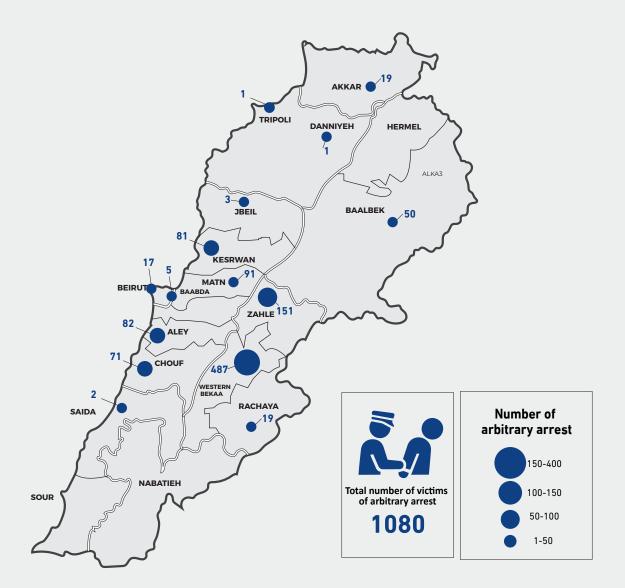
Discrimination based on thought and belief



15

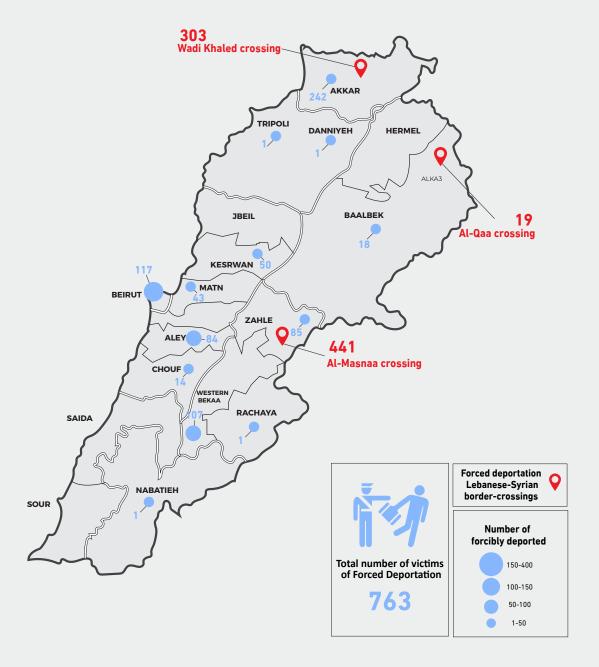
official document reservations

It is worth noting that the actual number of violations against Syrian refugees exceeds the documented figures.



#### A map showing the areas where arbitrary arrests occurred

The responsible authorities	Lebanese Army Intelligence	General Security	Information Branch	Municipal Police	Lebanese Internal Security	Lebanese Army	State Security Branch	Armed Groups
The number of victims	223	33	4	2	3	792	22	1

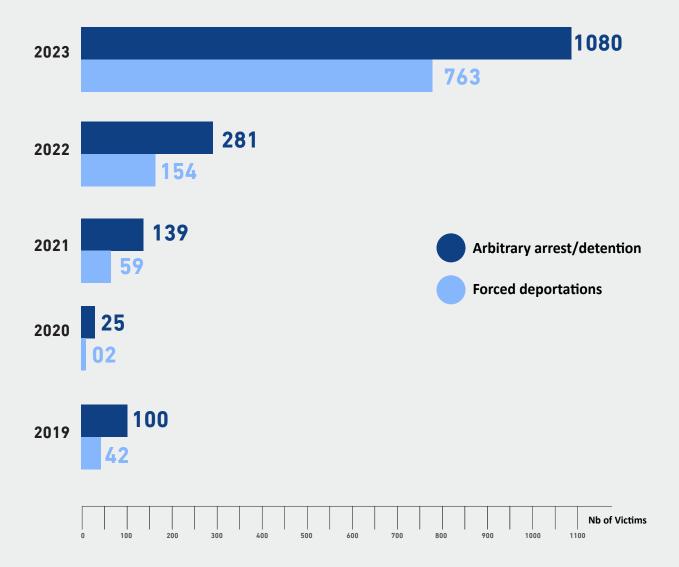


A map showing the areas where Forced Deportation occurred

The responsible authorities	Lebanese Army Intelligence	Lebanese Army	General Security	Military Police
The number of victims	202	437	10	114

A map showing the authorities responsible regarding arbitrary arrests

#### cases of arbitrary arrests and forced deportations documented by ACHR between 2019 and 2023

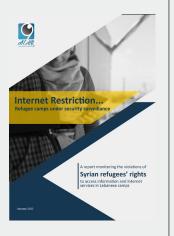


### **Research and Reports**



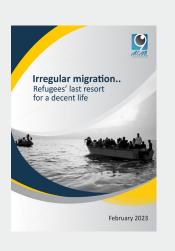
#### Internet Restriction... Refugee camps under security surveillance 1

The report addresses the difficulties refugees faced in accessing information and internet services in 2023, hindering their personal and legal decision-making, including voluntary return. Security forces' raids on camps and the confiscation of electronic devices were major reasons for the lack of connection with the outside world. Digital rights are crucial for ensuring freedom of opinion, expression, and access to information. The report also highlighted factors impeding refugees' access to the internet and information, such as power outages, the cost of communications, and Lebanese intelligence raids on camps.



#### Irregular migration... Refugees' last resort for a decent life<sup>2</sup>

The report highlights the inhumane treatment of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, pushing some to resort to irregular migration across the Mediterranean. Dozens of Syrians drowned while attempting to leave, while others faced significant challenges during their irregular journeys. The report criticized the unwelcoming policies towards refugees and the pressure to return to their home country, which contradict international refugee protection standards. It also recommended raising awareness about irregular migration and voluntary return, urging decisions that improve refugees' conditions, reduce tension, and stop discriminatory rhetoric against them in host countries.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://shorturl.at/fFUN5

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://shorturl.at/zfOGS

#### Security Raids in Lebanon: A Legal Weapon Used to Violate Refugee Rights<sup>3</sup>

The report discusses the tightening of security measures by Lebanese authorities due to fears of security disturbances amidst the economic deterioration. It mentions human rights violations during these measures, including arbitrariness and discrimination in the use of force during searches and raids. The report calls on the Lebanese government to ensure respect for human rights in any security measures, hold violators accountable, review policies and procedures to avoid further violations, and train security forces involved in these operations.



#### Lebanon's Violation of Human Rights Through the Forced Deportation of Refugees<sup>4</sup>

The report talks about the arbitrary security campaign initiated by Lebanese authorities against Syrian refugees, including a significant increase in security raids, arbitrary arrests, and forced deportations to Syria. This was accompanied by increased Lebanese political rhetoric calling for refugees' return while ignoring the realities in Syria. This approach led to deteriorating security for refugees in Lebanon, with arbitrary security campaigns and restrictive legislation. The report recommended that the Lebanese government adhere to international agreements and local laws, grant refugees legal protection, stop the plan to return refugees, and not forcibly deport them to Syria. It also urged the UNHCR to activate its protection office, provide legal representation, respond to urgent requests to assist refugees at risk of deportation, and always prioritize protecting refugees at risk of deportation.



#### **Crimes of Kidnapping and Human Trafficking Following** the Forced Deportation of Refugees from Lebanon<sup>5</sup>

This report revealed an increase in kidnapping and human trafficking crimes against Syrian refugees in Lebanon after their forced deportation. Victims were subjected to assault, torture, and ill-treatment. The report recommended that the Lebanese government enhance investigations and criminal prosecutions in cases of kidnapping and unlawful detention of refugees, provide necessary support to victims, and ensure fair trials for perpetrators.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://shorturl.at/5zn2n

<sup>4</sup> https://shorturl.at/NSLKD

<sup>5</sup> https://shorturl.at/PZg5R

# Press Releases

Syrian refugees in Lebanon have suffered from escalations and intensive security campaigns by Lebanese authorities in 2023, accompanied by mass arbitrary arrests and forced deportations. These operations were not limited to specific areas but extended to several regions in Lebanon, reflecting the deteriorating human rights situation for refugees. ACHR documented incidents where refugees faced discrimination and severe rights violations, including arbitrary detention, torture, forced deportation, and domination by security forces without respecting necessary legal procedures. This led to repeated rights violations against refugees, and in this context, Access Center for Human Rights issued several statements throughout 2023.



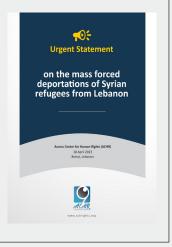
#### Lack of Means is No Excuse for Lack of Will<sup>6</sup>

The statement called for urgent review by UN committees concerned with prison conditions and torture to assess Lebanese prisons urgently, given the unprecedented overcrowding levels reaching 300%, especially in Roumieh Prison. The statement pointed out the Lebanese government's failure to take serious steps to address this issue.



#### **Urgent Statement on the Mass Forced Deportations** of Syrian Refugees from Lebanon<sup>7</sup>

ACHR strongly condemned the mass forced deportations of Syrian refugees by Lebanese authorities. The statement clarified that these operations were conducted arbitrarily, violating the legal and political status of refugees in Syria and disregarding international human rights law.

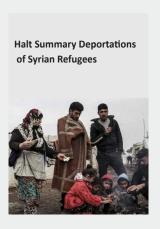


<sup>6</sup> https://tinyurl.com/4dca98vu

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://tinyurl.com/m8uk49se

#### Halt Summary Deportations of Syrian Refugees<sup>8</sup>

ACHR participated in a joint statement with 19 refugee-focused organizations, condemning the forced deportations carried out by the Lebanese army against hundreds of refugees, exposing them to the risk of persecution and torture in their homeland. The statement noted that these operations occurred amid escalating anti-refugee rhetoric in Lebanon and other coercive measures targeting refugees to pressure them to return to Syria.



#### The Lebanese Army Should Immediately Stop Arbitrary Arrests and Forced Deportations of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon<sup>9</sup>

ACHR issued a joint statement with Stand with Syria Japan (SSJ) in response to the persisting arbitrary arrests and forced deportations of Syrian refugees by the Lebanese army. The two organizations called for the immediate halt of these practices by the Lebanese army.



#### Politicians' Speeches Are Extremely Disturbing, and the Lebanese Authorities Must Intervene to Prevent the Escalation of Violence<sup>10</sup>

Access Center for Human Rights condemned the rise in incitement and violence against Syrian refugees. The statement noted that a systematic media, security, and military campaign was being waged against the refugees, including arbitrary arrests, forced deportations, and acts of both collective and individual violence. The statement urged the Lebanese government to investigate these violations.



<sup>8</sup> https://tinyurl.com/537dvsjr

<sup>9</sup> https://tinyurl.com/bdhp8bye

<sup>10</sup> https://tinyurl.com/5n7rrdud

#### Press Statements by the Executive Director of Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) in Response to Statements by Social Affairs Minister Hector Hajjar Regarding the Ministry's Reluctance to Receive Refugees from Southern Lebanon<sup>11</sup>

Mohammad Hassan, the executive director of ACHR, made press statements in response to Social Affairs Minister Hector Hajjar's announcement that the ministry does not intend to receive refugees from southern Lebanon due to tensions with Israel. The executive director considered the minister's statements to be discriminatory on the basis of nationality, emphasizing that the Lebanese government should protect all residents in the country, including refugees, without any discrimination.





#### **Urgent Appeal: The Lebanese Government Should Immediately** Stop The Security Crackdown and Forced Deportations 12

In this statement, ACHR condemned the ongoing security campaign conducted by the Lebanese army against Syrian refugees. ACHR also called on the Lebanese government to reverse its decisions regarding the deportation of refugees. Additionally, ACHR urged the UNHCR to provide the necessary protection for those in need and to stop the arbitrary arrests and forced deportations of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.



#### Joint Open Letter to the UNHCR in Lebanon<sup>13</sup>

This open letter was prepared as part of a coordinated effort by civil society organizations and NGOs to call on the UNHCR to increase cooperation and transparency with local organizations in appropriately responding to the alarming, forced deportations of Syrian refugees from Lebanon to Syria.



<sup>11</sup> https://tinyurl.com/54z3d67d

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> https://tinyurl.com/mr2w6ewk

<sup>13</sup> https://tinyurl.com/68bab4z9



### Advocacy

Access Center for Human Rights used the findings from its 2023 reports, database documentation, and testimonies from refugee victims to bolster its advocacy efforts. ACHR held numerous meetings with decision-makers to promote and advocate for the rights of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Notable meetings included those with the French Foreign Ministry, the Belgian, Spanish, and Dutch embassies, and a lengthy session with German parliamentarians invited by the RSL Foundation to discuss the situation of refugees in Lebanon. ACHR also supported the efforts of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic with information, facts, and related testimonies.

ACHR held several meetings with civil society organizations concerned with refugees in Lebanon due to the arbitrary security campaign and forced deportations led by the Lebanese authorities against Syrian refugees in 2023. In this context, ACHR, in collaboration with 33 civil society organizations, a coalition of 38 institutions, and another coalition of 8 institutions, launched an open letter to the UNHCR, calling on it to fulfill its responsibilities in protecting refugees from the risks of forced deportation and random raids on refugee camps and residences in Lebanon. ACHR also participated in the Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) coalition, contributing to a research paper on accountability strategies for affected populations. This paper is based on discussions with Syrian refugees in Lebanon and offers recommendations to the United Nations in Lebanon.<sup>14</sup>

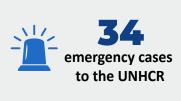
ACHR participated in the seventh Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, where it held a side event presenting the major human rights challenges faced by Syrian refugees in Lebanon. During the conference, ACHR held numerous meetings with partners and stakeholders. Additionally, ACHR contributed to the launch of an advocacy paper for Syrian refugees with the PASC coalition, which was shared at the Brussels Conference. In its advocacy efforts, ACHR also presented some recommendations related to the situation of refugees in Lebanon to the Canadian and US governments.



### **Referral of Emergency Cases**

"Referrals" between ACHR's partners in the field of human rights and civil society among various organizations refer to the process of directing individuals or cases from one organization to another for further assistance or support, aiming to achieve the greatest possible impact during their work. Human rights organizations often collaborate to promote and protect human rights worldwide.

In 2023, ACHR referred 34 emergency cases to the UNHCR and partners in human rights organizations and associations working with refugees. Most referrals required more than one type of specialized assistance simultaneously. 26 cases were referred to the UNHCR to prevent the risk of forced deportation of detained refugees, 4 cases involved arbitrary detention by Lebanese authorities or during their visits to General Security centers and required security protection due to repeated violations, and 4 cases needed legal or financial support and protection.





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## Support for Journalists, Media, and Stakeholders

Access Center for Human Rights played an active role in supporting media reports, journalists, research centers, civil society organizations, and stakeholders concerning Syrian refugees. In 2023, ACHR was a reliable source of information and analysis, mentioned 222 times in the media. This extensive media presence included 65 diverse media outlets, comprising independent and official, local, and international media.

Among this media coverage, 28 direct interviews were conducted with team members, reflecting the high level of trust the media places in ACHR's expertise and knowledge. These interviews allowed ACHR to highlight refugee issues, provide deep insights into the challenges they face, and discuss possible solutions and recommendations to improve their conditions.

ACHR's influence extended beyond raising awareness about refugee issues; it also included supporting and guiding journalists and researchers by providing accurate data and comprehensive analyses. This close collaboration between ACHR and the media improved the quality of news reports and research related to refugees, enhancing the public's understanding of the urgent problems and needs facing this vulnerable community.

Through these efforts, ACHR solidified its position as a reference authority on refugee issues and significantly contributed to enhancing public dialogue on human rights and the importance of providing support and protection to refugees locally and internationally.







Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) submitted three complaints to the UN special procedures concerning human rights violations faced by Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These complaints are part of ACHR's efforts to enhance accountability and highlight serious abuses and violations. Through this action, ACHR aims to achieve an effective international response, ensure the accountability of responsible parties, and improve the humanitarian and human rights conditions of affected Syrian refugees.



Complaints to the UN special procedures



### **Raising Awareness on Human Rights Violations**

In line with ACHR's strategic goals of raising awareness of human rights violations, ACHR launched the "Weekly News" at the beginning of 2023, which includes the most significant violations reported in the media against Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The weekly newsletter aims to provide quick and professional coverage of these challenging issues, which may not be adequately covered in ACHR's regular publications or are underreported in the media. Through the weekly news, ACHR seeks to ensure that accurate and up-to-date information reaches the public and those interested in human rights and refugee issues.

In this context, ACHR published 50 weekly news in 2023, averaging eight news items per week, resulting in 400 news items annually. These newsletters covered various aspects of human rights violations faced by Syrian refugees throughout 2023. They included the most significant violations reported in the media, events, and updates from the field team, monitoring hate speech, and discriminatory decisions against refugees by official and non-official Lebanese entities, as well as key events and developments impacting the lives of refugees.

The periodic weekly news contributed to enhancing communication with the media, civil society organizations, and the refugee community, leading to increased awareness and greater emphasis on refugee issues. Additionally, these newsletters provided a platform to highlight refugee news and their struggles, fostering more interaction and solidarity from stakeholders and those concerned with refugee issues.



### **ACHR's Presence on Social Media and Website**

In 2023, Access Center for Human Rights achieved remarkable results on social media platforms and its website. All ACHR's accounts perceived significant growth and increased audience engagement. These figures reflect ongoing efforts to enhance digital presence and community interaction. Below are the performance details for 2023.







17,519

Reach

**Posts** 



Instagram



3,705

Reach



**Posts** 





152,300

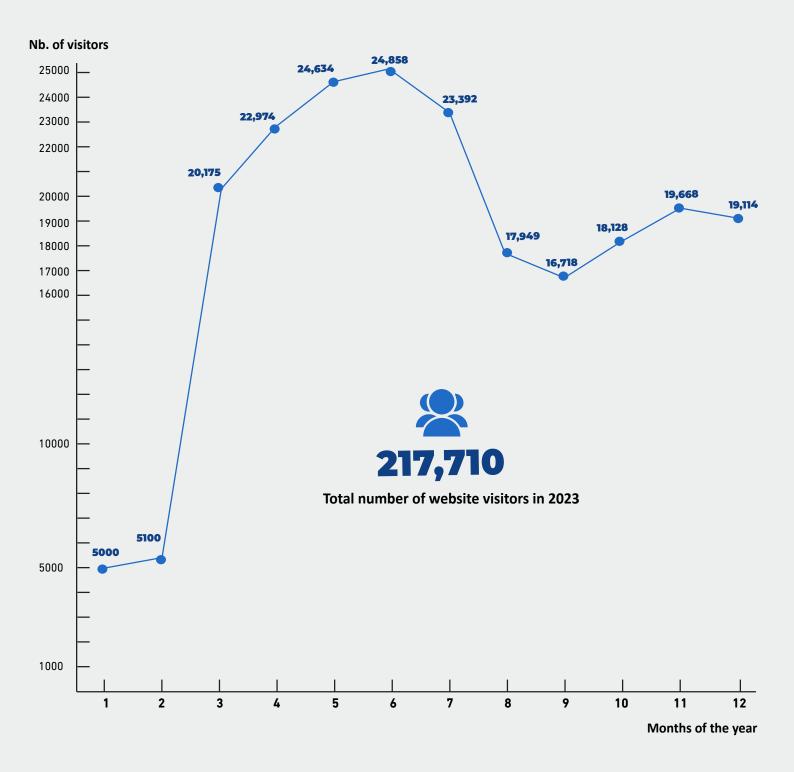
Reach





Reach

The annual performance of ACHR's website in 2023 perceived a noticeable increase in visitors throughout the year. Monthly visitor statistics were recorded as the following:



These results demonstrate ACHR's efforts in enhancing its social media presence and expanding its impact on digital platforms and its website. ACHR's role extends beyond disseminating information to building an engaged and interactive community, contributing to raising awareness and fostering dialogue on human rights and refugee issues.

### **Development and Review**

The ACHR team, under the supervision of the Board of Directors and independent consultants, held several workshops to discuss the impact of the previous strategy. These workshops covered all objectives, mission, and vision of the center and resulted in the approval of a new strategy for the period 2024-2028, aiming to develop ACHR's approach in various fields.

One of the main pillars of the new strategy is improving the methodology of investigation and research. ACHR will work on enhancing its capabilities in data collection and analysis, focusing on specialized research on refugee rights issues. It will also develop accountability mechanisms through the documentation process to ensure reports are accurate and reliable for use in legal and international advocacy efforts.

The new strategy will include expanding partnerships with organizations directly specializing in human rights issues. ACHR aims to build strong collaborative partnerships with civil society organizations, media, and academic institutions to enhance its impact and spread knowledge about human rights violations.

ACHR's publication strategy was developed to ensure that non-private and personal information of victims of human rights violations is accessible to the target audience and partners. ACHR has reviewed and developed various work policies to align with its commitment to the highest levels of quality and accuracy in institutional and professional work.

The visual identity of ACHR has been developed to better reflect its mission and vision. ACHR has also improved the use of software and applications in administrative coordination, enhanced internal and external communication policies and procedures, and ensured the secure archiving of information.

ACHR's team has contributed to the establishment and development of three civil society organizations focused on journalism, human rights, and accountability in Syrian affairs. ACHR provided its expertise in governance, financial management, technical administration, and digital security, sharing knowledge with its partners about the situation of Syrian refugees in Greece.

### Transparency, Accountability, and Policies

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) is committed to transparency and accountability as core values in its work. ACHR places great importance on providing information transparently and reliably to the public and partners. This commitment is evident in the regular publication of annual reports, research, and fact sheets, reflecting ACHR's activities and details of recorded and addressed violations. ACHR aims to clearly and transparently inform the public about its activities and future projects, disclose funding sources, including donations and grants, and publish audited financial reports from external audit institutions. Additionally, ACHR reveals its research partners to ensure the credibility and reliability of the information provided.

ACHR allows the public and stakeholders to access its information and reports through social media platforms and its website. It also provides means for direct communication, inquiries, or contributions. Within its 2024-2028 strategy, ACHR is working on developing databases to be accessible to research centers, media, journalists, and stakeholders, facilitating access to information about the human rights situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.



ACHR's commitment to standards of integrity and accountability is fundamental in all aspects of its work. ACHR conducts regular evaluations of its external and internal activities, provides ongoing training to support the team, and clearly defines responsibilities. Performance reports are prepared, and regular sessions are organized to improve performance, taking necessary actions after identifying strengths and weaknesses. ACHR takes every complaint, criticism, or recommendation seriously and responds effectively and responsibly to investigate any alleged violation or breach of principles of transparency and integrity.



### **Implemented Policies**



#### **Code of Conduct**

ACHR adheres to strict conduct rules to ensure the safety and dignity of all individuals it deals with.



### **Protection Policy**

The protection policy includes preventive measures to ensure the safety of all workers and beneficiaries of ACHR's services.



#### **Complaints Policy**

ACHR offers an effective system for submitting complaints, ensuring all feedback and complaints are heard and addressed seriously and transparently.



#### **Financial and Regulatory Policies**

ACHR follows precise financial and regulatory policies to ensure transparency and integrity in all its financial transactions.



#### **Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy**

ACHR implements a comprehensive policy against sexual harassment to ensure a safe and respectful work environment for all workers and those dealing with the center.



#### **Anti-Corruption and Bribery Policy**

ACHR adopts a strict policy against corruption and bribery to ensure the integrity of all its operations.

### **Support and Funding**

ACHR thanks its donors for their support.









Rockeffeler Brothers Fund





Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders المؤسسة الأورو-مقوسطية لدعم المدافعين عن حقوق الإسنان Fondation euro-méditerranéenne de soutien aux défenseur-e-s des droits de l'Homme

**CIVICUS** 

PAX

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN FOUNDATION
OD SUPPORT TO HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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**ACLED** 



PASC



CIVICUS



**EUROMED RIGHTS** 



**VOICES FOR DISPLACED SYRIANS** 



GRASSROOTS JUSTICE NETWORK



LEBANON POLICY AND RESEARCH NETWORK ON DISPLACEMENT



# ACCESS CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (ACHR) Centre d'accès pour les droits de l'homme

#### TOGETHER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



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