

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION



Saadnayel Community Centre 2023

Photo - Caleb Jack Williams

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FOREWORD

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with Salam LADC. It is people like you that we rely on to deliver our various programmes to marginalised populations within Lebanon. Salam LADC is a grassroots organisation and volunteers are the face, heart, and soul of what we do.

They are the front-line workers in the field, providing education classes, homework support, distributing aid, and many other activities that we have designed and implemented throughout the years. Since February 2016, we have been extremely fortunate to have had over 500 volunteers from over 30 countries come work with us and we are excited to welcome many more as we continue our work. Along with delivering programming, we immerse ourselves into the surrounding culture. When we live within the community, our presence enters into their lives, and stories begin to form. These memories that we share together will stay and teach us that life is a partnership through dialogue and peace. To all who are coming from different countries to contribute to the message of peace, we can't thank you enough.

Joseph Matta
Founder & Director



INTRODUCTION TO LEBANON

Refugee situation in Lebanon

Lebanon is one of the smallest countries in the world, bordered by Syria to the North and East, Israel/Palestine to the South and the Mediterranean Sea to the West. While small in area, the country has an incredibly varied demography, with an amazing diversity of religion, culture and nature. With a tumultuous recent history however, the country has struggled to develop and prosper in many regions, with a highly uneven distribution of wealth. After a long civil war that ended in 1990 and multiple invasions from Israel since, more than 1 million Lebanese were already living below the poverty line before the Syrian refugee crisis began in 2011.

Lebanon has taken in 1.5 million refugees from Syria and today hosts the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. 69% of all informal refugee settlements in Lebanon are located in the Bekaa Valley, where Salam decided to set up its headquarters.

In 2015, the Lebanese government enforced stricter regulations resulting in restrictive access by refugees into Lebanon. Because of this, the Lebanese economy and infrastructure has taken additional strain, which has created tensions between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees. An example is the increased competition for jobs and resources. Refugees also face evictions, police raids, mistreatment, and local restrictive movement because of tensions¹. Lebanon has banned the construction of formal camps for Syrian refugees, forcing them to live in substandard shelters like garages, warehouses, tents, unfinished buildings, and animal sheds. An increasing number of refugees lack proper documentation, restricting their free movement and access to basic services, as well as exposing them to greater risk of harassment and exploitation. Refugees also face serious restrictions in obtaining healthcare and have to pay for food, rent, clothes, medicines, and other necessities.

Economic crisis in Lebanon

Since October 2019, Lebanon has been experiencing an economic crisis, triggered by piling debt and depletion of US dollars in the country. In March 2020, Lebanon defaulted on its debt for the first time in history, becoming the third most indebted country in the world³.

The local currency (Lebanese lira or pound [LBP]) has lost 90% of its value (since late 2019), driving over half the population into poverty. And banks have had major problems, with savers being locked out of dollar accounts or told funds they can access have lost value. While the official exchange rate is set at 1,500-1,600 LBP to 1 USD, black market rates (currently set at 95.000 - 100.000 LBP to 1 USD) now apply, with goods and services set according to this rate. This has caused staggering inflation, and fluctuating exchange rates and prices.

The crisis has caused nationwide protests, with some erupting in violence between protestors, security forces and supporters of political groups. And the situation has only been exacerbated by the Beirut port explosion in August 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

VOLUNTEERING IN THE BEKAA VALLEY

Introduction to Salam

Salam LADC supports vulnerable populations in Lebanon through providing direct aid and educational and vocational programmes, as well as strengthening inter-community dialogue (between Syrian and Lebanese communities).

In light of the overwhelming need created by the Syrian refugee crisis, our aim is to provide agile, effective, and non-bureaucratic assistance, which fills the gaps where refugees and local communities – regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation – do not receive sufficient support.

Salam projects

Education

Salam's educational programmes are aimed at supporting children from both displaced and host communities on the path towards enrolment in the Lebanese school system. For those already enrolled, we provide the support they need to stay engaged. To achieve this, the content of our English, French, Arabic and Math classes are tailored to the Lebanese curriculum.

Community-Based

Our community-based projects aim to empower the local refugee and host communities who are experiencing the severe strain from the refugee influx. While the vast majority of humanitarian assistance in the region focuses on people's basic needs, we believe that it is important for people to engage in activities that are not just about survival – activities where people can express themselves, share experiences, relax in a safe environment, or simply have fun. While not always having direct developmental impacts, these projects can help people to feel human, start fresh dialogue, make connections across boundaries, strengthen civil society, and improve social stability and cohesion.

Aid

Salam's aid programme aims to alleviate the financial pressure on the most vulnerable people in the area. We offset spending through the provision of different types of aid, such as food, most of which is meant to fulfil short-term needs. We conduct needs assessments regularly within communities to ensure that we are providing relief to those who need it most.

By working closely with other local and international partners on the ground, Salam is able to reach the most vulnerable families and individuals.

ROLE AND EXPECTATIONS OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers at Salam LADC assist the local staff in Lebanon, supporting the running of the organisation and participating in a wide variety of activities. Since our international volunteering programme began in 2016, we have hosted more than 600 volunteers from over 30 different countries.

We are looking for open-minded, driven and dedicated volunteers who can commit to being part of our team for an absolute minimum of one month (but staying for at least two months is really helpful for the stability and continuity of all our projects). We are primarily focused on supplementary education for young children, with other projects including adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, early childhood education classes, and material/food aid distributions.

We provide our own training and are open to welcoming volunteers from all kinds of backgrounds. That said, there are particular skills that are definitely an added bonus:

- Previous experience in ESL teaching specifically and education in general
- Experience working with children and/or vulnerable populations
- Experience writing funding applications and/or interest in learning this
- Experience in social media and
- Arabic language skills
- The ability to drive in Lebanon (depending on where you are from, you may need to obtain an International Driving Permit in your home country)

Challenges in Lebanon as a volunteer:

If you are coming from a Western country, Lebanon can be somewhat of a culture shock. The Lebanese dress code is more relaxed than in most Middle Eastern countries. However, you should still dress conservatively and respect religious and social tradition. Driving can be a challenge – local drivers have little regard for traffic laws and congestion and aggressive driving are serious problems throughout the country.

SALAM HOUSE

The volunteers live in our volunteer house 'Salam House' in Zahle, which includes basic necessities and:

1st floor:

Office

Meeting room

3 bedrooms (each room consists of 3-4 volunteers)

2 toilets

2 showers

Kitchenette

4th floor:

3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, living room and full kitchen

Rent (paid in USD) costs 150 USD per month. Volunteers are expected to pay for the first month within their first week at Salam.

Each volunteer is expected to participate in the weekly cooking and cleaning schedule.



LIVING SITUATION



1. Bedding: You are welcome to bring your own bedding with you (all beds are single) but we usually have a large amount of bedding available, which you are welcome to use (please check this with our Volunteer Coordinator before your arrival). Please note that it can get very cold in Bekaa at night (especially between November and March)
2. Food: At the start of each week; volunteers contribute to a communal food shop for basics like fruit, vegetables, pasta and milk (you can also buy your own extra foods, like chocolate, meat, cheese and there are plenty of takeaway options in the area). We also have a cooking and dish-washing rota that all residents participate in.
3. Cleaning: Salam House residents participate in a cleaning rota, though to supplement this we do have a house keeper who cleans certain areas around 4 times per week.
4. Mixed gender: This is a mixed gender house with shared bathrooms, shower, and bedrooms (though if you would prefer to be in a single-gender bedroom, you can discuss this with the Volunteer Coordinator before your arrival)
5. Indoor shoes: The floor around the house can be very cold, so it is recommended you bring some indoor shoes with thick soles (for example, sliders or flip flops)
6. Drinking water: It is not advisable to drink the tap water in Lebanon, so we provide a large water cooler for all Salam House residents.
7. Wi-Fi: We have Wi-Fi in the house, but it can be slow and is prone to outages (streaming, video-calling and gaming can be challenging). We recommend obtaining a sim card with data once you arrive.
8. Electricity: Power outages happen frequently in Lebanon. Since Salam House runs on a generator, these are usually short outages, but it can still be especially useful to bring a headtorch with you.

HOUSE RULES



For everyone's comfort, safety and security, we ask all Salam House residents to follow these rules:

- Do not flush paper or sanitary items in the toilet (this can result in blockages and floods)
- Wash your dishes after you use them
- No consumption of illegal drugs on Salam property
- Whoever is the last person up MUST lock all doors and turn off the heating
- Quiet time between 11pm - 7am
- No settlement contact unless on official business
- We do not tolerate any form of violence, racism, prejudice, or misogynistic behaviour
- No guests from outside of Salam LADC in the Salam House without prior permission

DAILY OPERATIONS

Day to day schedule

The majority of our projects run Monday to Friday. We start each day with a group volunteer meeting to go over the schedule for the day and discuss any issues. You may go on multiple outings per day, for example to the Community Center to give classes or on a distribution, but generally volunteers work normal office hours (around 9am-5pm with time for lunch and breaks, but this is flexible). Weekends are generally free; however, volunteers are occasionally needed for projects on weekends, in which case they would be offered an alternative day off.

Communication

We ask all volunteers to be available through WhatsApp as this is what we use for all our daily operations. Our team can help you buy a SIM card with data once you arrive.



LIVING COSTS AND CURRENCY



Exchange rates: Lebanese LBP and US dollars (USD) are accepted throughout the country. It is important to note that there are two exchange rates in Lebanon – the current official exchange rate (currently 1 USD = ~1500-1600 LBP*) and the black market exchange rate (currently 1 USD = ~95.000 - 100.000 LBP*). Goods and services are generally priced according to the black market rate. This means that if you exchange money or make payments according to the official exchange rate, they can become very expensive. We strongly advise you to wait until you are in Bekaa to exchange large sums of money, so that our team can ensure you find the best exchange rates. We also advise you to speak with your Volunteer Coordinator about exchange rates before your arrival *Subject to change

Cash: Lebanon is predominantly a cash country. Due to the ongoing financial crisis, it is generally advised that you bring a sizeable amount of cash (in USD) with you (i.e. to cover your living costs, including rent, for several weeks) – this is because ATMs are difficult to access and you would also be required to withdraw money at the official, more expensive rate. If you do need more cash while in Lebanon, it is possible to obtain USD through Western Union or MoneyGram (for a small fee)

SIM card and data: We do ask that all volunteers purchase a Lebanese SIM card upon their arrival to Lebanon. SIM cards can range from 30-40 USD. Data charges can range from 5 USD* (5 GB) to 15USD* (20 GB) a month. *Subject to change

Food costs: At Salam House, we currently pay 400,000-600,000 LBP*(about 6-10 USD a week) each at the start of each week, which goes towards basic communal food like fruit, vegetables, pasta, rice and milk (you can also buy your own extra foods, like chocolate, meat and cheese). There are also plenty of takeaway and restaurant options in the area (around 4-8 USD for a takeaway meal and 8-12 USD for a restaurant meal) *Subject to change

Toiletries: There are supermarkets in the local area where you can get your basic goods like shampoos, soaps, and razors for low prices (generally cheaper than what you would pay back home).

Car rental: For leisure activities on the weekend, we do not generally allow Salam cars to be used, but we can recommend trusted drivers and other forms of transportation like vans

CULTURE

The culture in Lebanon is very diverse – please be aware of social norms and conduct yourself accordingly. We are here as guests, to help the vulnerable by working alongside existing culture, not pressing our own standards and opinions onto the host population. Please remember, everybody deserves the same amount of respect, whether you are a politician, a volunteer, a refugee, poor or rich. We are here to support humanitarian aid.

You will quickly learn the culture once you are here, but some things to keep in mind include:

- If someone offers you tea, a gift or a seat, it is considered impolite not to accept – however, please keep in mind that there may be security implications (dependent on context)
- If you learn a few Arabic phrases and show interest in the culture by saying “hello, how are you?” in Arabic or “shukraan” instead of “thank you”, it goes a long way
- As a woman, more conservative men will not shake your hand – just place your hand over your heart, instead of shaking their hand

Safety and security

We stress that Lebanon is NOT Europe. We advise that volunteers who wish to apply familiarise themselves with what being in the Middle East is like through reputable sources and check travel advice provided by their government.

Additionally, please familiarise yourself with the following guidance:

General movement: You should remain vigilant at all times while in public spaces in Lebanon and carefully consider the safety and security implications should you wish to travel to certain areas or regions:

NO-GO areas (not exhaustive):

- Syria (as a Salam volunteer, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES are you allowed to enter Syria, and you must also stay away from the border)

- The town of Aarsal

- Palestinian refugee camps, including those in and around the Southern suburbs of Beirut

- Permissions: As the security situation across Lebanon can easily change, we ask volunteers to please seek advice from Salam as to where is considered safe or not safe to travel to.

You also need permission from the military to travel to certain areas (e.g., South of Tyre)

SAFETY AND SECURITY

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SAFETY AND SECURITY

Protests:

You should avoid large crowds and political gatherings. Ongoing protests have centred on Beirut and Tripoli but have occurred at various locations nationwide (often with little notice), including the Bekaa Valley. Violent confrontations between protestors, security forces and supporters of political groups have been known to occur, sometimes resulting in large numbers of casualties and even deaths in some cases (though this has mostly been in bigger cities)

Passport and emergency cash:

You must always have your passport with you in Lebanon (this is a government requirement), and it is advisable that you carry emergency cash with you at all times.

Military presence and security checkpoints:

You will often see the military in Lebanon (for example guarding government buildings and at security checkpoints throughout the country), whose purpose is to maintain safety and stability. The officers are in 99% of cases very pleasant, but you MUST cooperate and be respectful with them at all times. You must NOT take photos of the military (or security checkpoint areas) under any circumstances. When driving through a checkpoint, slow down, wind down your window, turn down any music and say “marhaba” (hello). If it is nighttime, turn on the lights inside the car. They might wave you by, ask where you are going, and/or ask to see your ID (as a reminder you must always have your passport with you in Lebanon)

Social media:

It is important to consider how social media content may impact your safety and security in Lebanon. Please see ‘social media’ (under ‘what to expect as a volunteer’) for further guidance.

Working hours:

Our volunteers generally only work in the field during daylight hours unless a project has received pre-approval. You should NOT go out alone at nighttime and if you are out doing errands, always go in groups of 2 or more.

DRESS CODE

Be aware that people dress more conservatively in Lebanese culture and, when working within settlements and in the local region, we dress similarly. This includes wearing loose-fitting clothes, keeping your shoulders covered (if it is hot, wear a scarf around them) and wearing pants/skirts/dresses well past the knee.

If one follows the security measures, remains very vigilant and aware and conducts themselves in a polite and respectful manner, it is very unlikely that danger will come to a volunteer.



DRIVING

While we encourage experienced drivers to use Salam cars for work purposes, we stress that driving in Lebanon can be a challenge – drivers have little regard for traffic laws, and congestion and aggressive driving are a serious problem.

At night, many drivers use their high beams exclusively, often creating a serious hazard due to blinding glare.

It is normal to frequently use the horn in Lebanon, for example to alert other drivers that you are passing them. To be fully insured you **MUST** have an International Drivers Permit (IDP), which should be obtained in your home country, prior to departure.



SOCIAL MEDIA

It is important to consider how social media content may impact your safety and security in Lebanon. We ask all volunteers to be cautious when posting, as you never know what it will imply to a refugee, an NGO, or the police/military if they were to see it.

General guidance:

- Do not post political posts while in Lebanon
- Do not overly dramatise or exaggerate versions of reality
- Do not take pictures of the military, security checkpoints and bases, governmental or municipal buildings and staff – you may be detained
- Do not use live streaming
- Be cautious of taking photos and videos – assess if it is appropriate to do so and generally it is advised to ask for permission first
- A photographer will be assigned to certain projects during the week and photos will be made available for all volunteers afterwards. We ask that no phones be out during the activities/projects as the focus needs to be on the work at hand

DISCLAIMER: To preserve Salam's vision and standing it is essential that all volunteers of Salam comply with all Code of Conduct and Security measures, as described above and disclosed by Salam Coordinators upon arrival. In the case of non-compliance, Salam reserves the right to withdraw all association with any/all volunteers involved.

OLIVE BRANCH (BEIRUT)

We also welcome international volunteers to come and join our project in Sin El Fil, Beirut, which began in the summer of 2022. If you are interested in volunteering in an urban environment and making an impact in a vulnerable area of the city, then this is a great opportunity to be a part of the establishment of a thriving community center in the capital of Lebanon.

Olive Branch is a community center located in Sin El Fil, Beirut, that welcomes all people living in the local area, and offers a range of social and educational activities, from ESL classes to vocational training. Olive Branch started in June 2022 as a pilot project and became fully operational in October 2022. The Olive Branch is still a very new project, so as a volunteer, you should not expect very set structures yet, so it's important to come with an open mind and a willingness to be flexible in your daily work. You will then get to experience and contribute to the growth of a much-needed safe space in Beirut.

Although a lot of the above-mentioned information and guidelines also apply to a volunteer coming to Olive Branch there are some differences in the day-to-day life that you can gain an insight into here.





OLIVE BRANCH

(BEIRUT)



Olive Branch Social Space is a non-profit project under Salam LADC, with a mission to provide a community center where people can feel a sense of belonging, connect with one another and work towards common goals. The center is located on the border between Sin El Fil and Nabaa, an area that oftentimes is affected by intercommunal tensions.

The project emerged out of the existing needs of the local communities, where a lack of safe public spaces was a primary issue. Our goal is to meet this need and provide a space free from discrimination on the basis of religion, gender, age, nationality, or any other. We believe that to be able to understand and identify the actual needs of the communities we serve, active engagement, input, and involvement play an essential part in how we grow within our center, as friends, and as a community.

We seek to address issues such as inter-communal tensions, prejudices, and stereotypes through different programs and activities, and provide and promote a forum for communities to participate in decisions that affect their own lives. We pride ourselves in having successfully created a safe space in which people from different backgrounds and nationalities can create meaningful connections without the prejudice that is often present outside of the center.

Living situation

Living in Beirut offers a host of opportunities to explore Lebanese culture and cuisine, but there are some things to be prepared for, especially coming from a Western country. The living situation is generally not the same as in many Western countries, areas such as electricity and water supply are more limited, and you should expect to run into issues during your time here. Fortunately, we have a janitor in the building who can fix building-related problems.

APPLYING TO SALAM

Things to consider before applying to our volunteer program:

Duration:

To ensure the long-term sustainability of our projects, we can only accept volunteers who can commit to one month or more and highly encourage those who can stay two months or more, to take a leading role in some of our projects.

Age:

You must be 23+ to volunteer at Salam.

Language:

Volunteers must have an intermediate level of English, OR be fluent in both French and Arabic; working ability in Arabic is desirable

Health insurance:

You must have health insurance to volunteer with Salam and it is also currently a requirement of the Lebanese government for visitors to have health insurance covering COVID-19 complications. Please purchase it before arriving. See 'insurance' under 'before your arrival' in this handbook for provider recommendations

COVID:

Currently, Salam requires that volunteers are fully vaccinated to join our team.

Please see: <https://www.mea.com.lb/english/covid19-and-travel/travel-forms#3420> - for up to date entry requirements for entering into Lebanon.

Communication:

It is mandatory that you have a working cell phone with WhatsApp

Intentions:

We are only looking for volunteers that have their hearts in the right place, meaning that you are here primarily to help the vulnerable populations that Salam works with. We are strongly against any form of voluntourism. It is also important that you are able to work as part of a team – while we encourage volunteers to bring their own ideas to the table, you must also be able to listen to others and take instruction

Once you have read the full pre-arrival handbook (including understanding the security risks), ensured you meet all conditions above and feel that you are qualified as a volunteer at Salam, you are welcome to fill out the application form here. If you have any queries, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator at volunteering@salamladc.org.

PRE-ARRIVAL

Useful items to bring:

- Indoor shoes
- Money belt/small side bag
- Laptop/tablet
- Travel adapters
- Power bank
- Sleeping aids like earplugs/eyemask
- Speaker (useful for classes and personal life)
- Tampons (can be difficult to find here and expensive)
- Currency (USD)
- Headtorch
- Warm clothes including waterproof shoes, thermals, a hat and a thick coat
- Sunscreen and mosquito repellent (available but expensive)
- Stationery items for teaching
- Specific toiletries

International driving permits (IDP)

If you would like to drive in Lebanon, it is essential that you obtain an IDP before you travel.

Insurance

Volunteers must have valid health insurance for the duration of their stay before you arrive in Lebanon. We can recommend using a Lebanese insurance provider, Habib at hananimi63@gmail.com before arriving with 'Health Insurance' as the subject- attach a photocopy of your passport photo and indicate that you are volunteering with Salam LADC (cost is 70-90 USD for 3 months, subject to change).

ARRIVING TO LEBANON

Getting to Lebanon

You will need to fly to Beirut airport (BEY) and obtain a visa to enter Lebanon – many nationalities are able to get a visa on arrival, but please check with your national consulate for visa guidance.

Some other notes of importance when entering Lebanon include:

- At passport control, you must be clear that you are entering Lebanon as a tourist
- You are not required to pay for a visa
- If you have travelled to Israel and have an Israeli stamp in your passport, you will most likely be refused entry at customs
- If you are required to list an address in Lebanon, please write down the address of whatever hotel or other accommodation you are staying at on your initial night

Getting into Beirut from the Airport

Alternatively, you can pre-book a taxi before your arrival. We recommended Allo Taxi (+ 961 78 881 213) or Si Taxi (+ 961 76 306 456) but alternatively you can book a taxi through your hotel or another trusted source.

If you arrive late in the evening, you will be asked to stay in Beirut for the night.



Beirut Apartment

Volunteers are welcome to use Salam’s apartment in Beirut upon arrival. The apartment is located in Sin El Fil. Alternatively, volunteers are welcome to make their own arrangements in Beirut and the volunteer coordinator can assist with sleeping recommendations.

Getting to Bekaa Valley

Our HQ and Salam House are located in the same building (“Samir Sadir” building) in Zahle in the Bekaa Valley – around a one-hour drive from Beirut. You can find us by searching for ‘Salam LADC’ on Google Maps.

Alternatively, you can use trusted taxis like Allo Taxi and Si taxi but alternatively you can book a taxi through your hotel or another trusted source.

If you pay in LBP, it should cost 2.000.000 LBP-3.000.000 LBP* (equivalent to 20 USD -30 USD). If you have not exchanged money before you arrive in Bekaa, one option is for Salam to pay for your taxi (in LBP) upon arrival, which you can pay back once you have exchanged money. You can talk to your Volunteer Coordinator about this before your arrival. Subject to change*

Please also liaise with our Volunteer Coordinator about when exactly you will arrive in Taanayel (volunteering@salamladc.org) or over Whatsapp.

DONATIONS

Please consider fundraising before coming to join us! We depend on donations to continue our projects and provide much needed short-term aid. Even small amounts can achieve a lot here in Lebanon. If you would like guidance on how to set up a GoFundMe or a Facebook fundraiser, you can see our Start a Fundraiser webpage or speak to our Volunteer Coordinator for further tips (volunteering@salamladc.org).

You can transfer your funds to the Salam bank account, ideally 2-3 weeks before you arrive. If unable to transfer directly to our Lebanese account, you can use our PayPal or Salam Norway accounts*. Once you are on the ground in Lebanon you can meet with the coordination team and determine which programmes you would like to support. If you arrive with cash donations (US dollars, please), that will also need to be deposited into our account and the same process applies for those funds. This helps us comply with local and national laws, as well as allowing us to be more transparent as an NGO.

Monetary donations are by far most useful to Salam, but you may also consider bringing material aid (such as art supplies or first aid kits) with you to Lebanon. In this case, we ask you to please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, who can provide an up-to-date list of current needs (volunteering@salamladc.org). This helps ensure that aid is appropriate and does not duplicate any existing efforts on the ground.

***PLEASE BE AWARE:** Do not use the words "refugees", "Syria" or anything similar when noting the transfers as it will be flagged, and transfers may be delayed or denied.

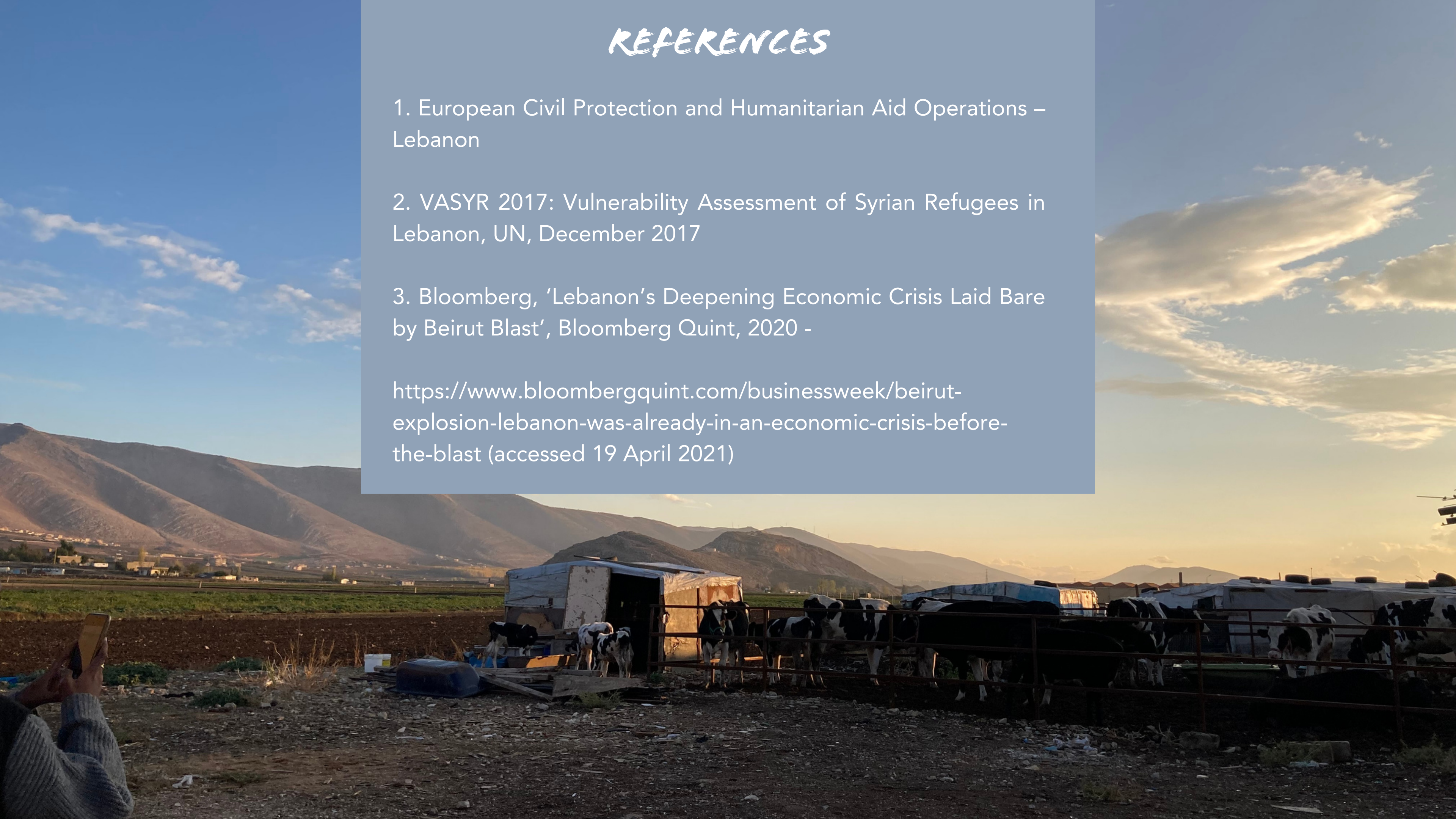
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THANK YOU



info@salamladc.org



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[Salam LADC سلام](https://www.facebook.com/SalamLADC)



[salamladc.org](https://www.salamladc.org)

October 2023

Volunteer Coordinator - Sally Day

Photography - Yusaku Kawano