

# Mobility as a solution

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International organisations, NGOs and even researchers tend to characterise all Syrians as 'refugees'. While this may reflect the administrative category of those registered with UNHCR, it is not a good reflection of the diverse range of their realities. Not all those who have gone to Syria's neighbours are registered, nor do all these people regard themselves as refugees.

Moreover, some of these 'crisis migrants' in fact move back and forth between Syria and the neighbouring countries. This allows them to keep a potential distance between themselves and the violence in their country and at the same time to pursue other economic, cultural or educational objectives.

The conventional 'durable solutions' on offer for forced migrants scarcely fit the mobility strategies that some individuals use which require them to be able to continue circulating between several locations, including their country of origin. The Syrian urban middle-class illustrates this point well. A number of them move backwards and forwards between Damascus and Beirut, where one can meet a large Syrian population.

Alongside migrant workers and an elite group who have long been in the Lebanese capital, there are now members of the Syrian urban middle class; few would have been there before the crisis, and if it were not for the crisis they would not be there now.

While avoiding the fighting is one of their motives, they also see this as a way of pursuing activities that are no longer sustainable in Syria alone.

Some have followed their professional environment – teachers their students, actors the casting opportunities, and artists their audiences, and so on. Others have set up small businesses or off-shoots of businesses they have in Damascus. They have not 'left' Damascus for Beirut but 'circulate', maintaining some of their activities in Syria, whether or not that includes their family home. For some of these migrants, the effect is not a new phenomenon but rather an extension of their movements before the crisis, which might have been from one area of Syria to another.

Even if the numbers of such people among the Syrians currently in Beirut are not great, they represent a significant and often unrecognised phenomenon. A 'mobile and multi-located life' should be seen as a possibility when considering the options for Syrian forced migrants. So far Lebanon has adopted a relatively open-door policy that allows this possibility, while other countries have set up barriers to such movements.

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*A Night In Damascus*, by Syrian artist Wissam Al Jazairy. [www.wissamaljazairy.daportfolio.com](http://www.wissamaljazairy.daportfolio.com)