

Pilot Project

Return and Rebuild: Supporting the Safe Return of Syrian Refugees from Lebanon to the Homs Governorate of Syria

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“Relief & Reconciliation for Syria” (R&R) is a registered trademark of the Belgian non-profit organisation “Relief & Reconciliation International AISBL”, established on 2 January 2013 to combine peacebuilding with humanitarian aid in response to oppression and war in Syria. In areas of conflict, R&R is uniting moral authorities of different groups around a common cause: the future of the youth, focussing mainly on education. Based upon the legal personality of its Lebanese branch, R&R established a first Peace Centre in the Akkar Governorate of Lebanon in July 2013: a place that serves as an open house for young people from different communities. R&R has provided for regular education to over 3,500 Syrian refugees and Lebanese. Following the fall of the Assad regime, R&R is obtaining a legal licence to work inside Syria. Preparations are under way to open a new Peace Centre in the Homs Governorate of Syria.

1. Executive Summary

The pilot project “Return and Rebuild: Supporting the Safe Return of Syrian Refugees from Lebanon to the Homs Governorate of Syria” opens a new chapter in the history of R&R. After more than 12 years of constant presence in the Akkar Governorate of Lebanon, most families R&R has served wish to return to their home towns in Syria, mostly in the Homs Governorate. This project aims at facilitating their return by helping vulnerable families, with depending children and a woman as only head of household, to rehabilitate their partially destroyed houses and build social cohesion with inhabitants of their home towns who have not fled abroad. A factory/workshop for heavy carpentry work and brick production shall be established; 5 master craftsmen and 10 skilled workers shall be trained to rehabilitate at least 200 family houses, chosen in agreement with an elected family committee. More than 150 adolescents will participate in vocational and technical education and a construction summer camp to establish a youth centre that will help R&R to have a lasting presence in the area.

2. Context and Needs Assessment

Syria is emerging from more than 13 years of brutal oppression and civil war. The violence of the Assad regime against the own population has cost the lives of at least 500,000 civilians and forcibly displaced more than half of the country’s population, more than 14 million persons. Over 7 million of those have become refugees according to the definition of the Geneva Convention, crossing an international border and seeking shelter abroad.

Since Syrians had to flee the violent repression of the Syrian Revolution in 2011, Lebanon has become the country with the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. In early 2025, UNHCR said that 1,478,141 Syrians were registered or under process of registration in Lebanon. (The Lebanese government has prevented the UN from officially registering newly arriving refugees after 2015.) Besides these, estimations say that 200,000 Palestinians and 16,000 refugees from Ethiopia, Iraq, Sudan and other countries live in Lebanon.

The Akkar Governorate of Lebanon, in the northern border area, has seen a drastic increase in its population due to its proximity to Syria, sharing an 100km-long border. With the highest percentage of refugees in Lebanon, the ratio between refugee and host population reaches almost a one-to-one: roughly 150,000 Syrian and Palestinian refugees live together with about 200,000 Lebanese. Akkar also has the highest rate of socioeconomic vulnerability in Lebanon, with 92% of households unable to afford the bare minimum for survival.

R&R has been working in the Akkar Governorate since 2013 without interruption, serving equally Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese. The fall of the Assad regime in Syria, on 8 December 2024, constitutes a major change for the entire population of the area. It opened the path to the potential return of hundreds of thousands of refugees to their homeland. A flash survey amongst all R&R students in Akkar, conducted in January 2025, has given promising results: 19% of all students have already resettled to Syria with their families in the few weeks since the fall of the Assad regime. Another 51% wish to return within the next 12 months, most of them in the end of the current school year. In all Lebanon, the [Flash Regional Survey of UNHCR](#) came to the result that a quarter of Syrian refugees intend to go back in the next 12 months.

The conditions for the safe return of most refugees are not yet met, especially in places of intense battles, like the city of Qusayr in the Homs Governorate. More than 20% of the R&R students come from this town. More than 50% of them wish to return. Most have already gone for a first visit to Syria, but 67% of our Syrian students reported that their homes are destroyed. According to the statistics of local authorities we consulted in Qusayr, 85% of house of this town are still destroyed from the battle the Assad regime waged on the area in 2013. This means that the first priority for facilitating the return of families to Syria must be reconstruction, especially in areas like Qusayr that have been destroyed more than others.

3. Target Groups

This Pilot Project targets directly and indirectly four groups of concern in the Homs Governorate of Syria over an implementation period of nine months:

1. At least 15 craftspersons and workers to receive training and implement works
2. At least 150 adolescents aged 15-20 to participate in trainings and/or a summer camp
3. At least 200 returning families with depending children and a woman as head of household
4. At least 600 children from returning families to benefit from rehabilitated homes

In conformity with the gender equality approach of R&R, at least 40% of all persons benefiting from project activities will be female and at least 40% male.

4. Expected Results

As a Pilot Project, this proposal has not been drafted on the basis of an existing Programme Line; it has been directly adopted by the Board of Directors of R&R International instead. However, this Pilot Project will nevertheless be implemented in light of the overall objectives of the Peacebuilding Programme Line Lebanon 2020-2025:

- (a) To build reconciliation, justice and peace amongst different confessions and groups who are pushed into the rationale of a sectarian war in the context of the Syrian conflict.
- (b) To mitigate tension among different sectarian groups within and between both refugees from Syria and host communities in Lebanon in areas with high refugee concentration.
- (c) To unite moral authorities of different confessions and communities around a common cause: the future of the youth affected by the Syrian conflict.
- (d) To appease sectarian hatred and violence in the hearts of the youth of different confessions and groups by opening perspectives for the future.

The specific outcomes and outputs of this Pilot Project respond to the priorities identified in the rapid needs assessment, summarised above. Considering the urgent need for the reconstruction of houses as necessary condition for the safe return of Syrian refugees to their cities of origins, the following outcomes and outputs shall be obtained:

Outcome A: The sustainable access to housing for returning families with depending children and a woman as only head of household has been enhanced.

The support for the reconstruction of houses is the first priority of this Pilot Project. Following the establishment of a regional Steering Committee, composed by moral authorities (religious leaders and others) of all major communities of the area, which will be accomplished before the beginning of this Pilot Project, the following steps will be implemented over a period of nine months, which can be extended following the evaluation of the pilot:

- Output A1: 1 workshop/factory has been established in the Homs Governorate, most probably in the city of Qusayr or its vicinity, to process carpentry works and produce traditional bricks for the rehabilitation of partially destroyed houses.
- Output A2: 5 master craftspersons and 10 workers have been selected and trained in the respect of environmental and safety standards to implement the rehabilitation of partially destroyed houses in the area.
- Output A3: At least 200 adults from different religious communities living in the area of implementation have participated in 1 of 4 information sessions and have elected members of a Family Committee advising the choice of houses to be rehabilitated.
- Output A4: At least 200 partially destroyed houses have been rehabilitated, chosen by the local Family Committee amongst house owners from returning families with depending children and a woman as only head of household.

Outcome B: Social cohesion of Syrian youth aged 15-20, between those who have returned and those who have stayed, has increased through technical education and skill training.

The return of refugee families in an area marked by conflict and sectarian strife can only be successful if measures of social cohesion are accompanying the work of reconstruction and rehabilitation. During the implementation period of this Pilot Project, the following outputs are expected to lay the groundwork for the future work of R&R:

- **Output B1:** At least 75 Syrian adolescents, aged 15-20, have completed a module of vocational and technical education in the fields of brickworks, carpentry, plumbing, electricity or ceramics, attending at least 80% of 120 teaching and practise hours.
- **Output B2:** At least 150 Syrian adolescents, aged 15-20, have attended a construction summer camp over 10 days, participating in workshops and in the construction of a youth centre, open to all communities of the area.
- **Output B3:** At least 600 Syrian children, aged 6-18, and their families have participated in an inauguration feast after the end of the construction summer camp and in the end of the implementation period of this Pilot Project.

5. Activities

The activities of this project will be implemented over an implementation period of nine months in the Homs Governorate of Syria, most probably within the city of Qusayr or its vicinity. The location of the workshop/factory will be chosen in consensus with the regional Steering Committee, composed by moral authorities of all major communities in the Homs Governorate, following the criteria established by the R&R Board of Directors.

Based upon R&R's policies and its operational strategy, the principles of "spiritual solidarity" and "diapaxis" play a major role in the implementation of all activities. Thanks to the continuous presence of R&R in the border areas of North Lebanon, strong relationships have already been established with moral leaders and families of different communities in the Homs Governorate. This Pilot Project will benefit from the trust and knowledge of these persons.

Activity A1: Establishment and equipment of 1 workshop/factory

The establishment of a workshop/factory in the Homs Governorate of Syria is the basis for the implementation of this Pilot Project. An existing building with sufficient free space shall be chosen and rented for the duration of this Pilot Project and possibly beyond.

The Project Manager, recruited before the start of the implementation period of this Pilot Project, will be in charge of preparing the choice of a location by the regional Steering Committee, established by the R&R Board of Directors. The rental contract can exceed the implementation period of this Pilot Project. After the selection and the consultation of the master craftsmen (cf. Activity A2), installations for heavy carpentry work and the production of traditional bricks shall be purchased, in line with the R&R Procurement Policy.

The workshop/factory is supposed to outlast the implementation period of this Pilot Project. R&R will maintain activities in this location and possibly open permanent classes in vicinity, funded by own resources. Depending on the evaluation of this Pilot Project, further rehabilitation works will be pursued in the surroundings of the location.

Activity A2: Selection and training of 5 master craftspersons and 10 workers

In the first week of the implementation period of this project, 5 master craftspersons in the fields of carpentry, brickworks, ceramics, plumbing and electricity shall be recruited by the Project Manager in agreement with the R&R Country Director. In concertation with the selected craftspersons, 10 supplementary workers shall be recruited by the Project Manager; each craftsperson will receive 2 workers as assistants to form a rehabilitation team.

All selected personnel will receive one introduction day to R&R policies and standards by the Country Director in the second week of the implementation period, followed by 2 specialised training days with engineering and architecture experts for discussing the ratio and technical standards for the rehabilitation of damaged houses, aiming at the respect of highest standards in terms of safety and environmental protection and propagating both the use of traditional and modern techniques for the sake of energy efficiency.

The experience and knowledge of the craftspersons shall also be transmitted to the next generation. During the implementation period of this Pilot Project, all craftspersons shall participate in vocational and technical education courses (cf. Activity B1) and integrate their students in the rehabilitation work on the ground, as much as possible and as reasonable. The craftspersons will also be involved in the examination and grading of students.

Activity A3: Information sessions and election of a Family Committee

Following the training week for the selected craftspersons and workers (cf. Activity A2), a series of four information sessions shall be organised in different venues of the operational area, defined by the Project Manager in agreement with the R&R Country Director in a perimeter close to the location of the workshop/factory. The diversity of communities living in the operational area shall be taken into account while choosing the venue of each information session, with the goal of reaching all major communities in the area.

At least 50 families shall be represented in each of the information sessions, summing up to a total of at least 200 adults. In these sessions, the R&R Country Director and the Project Manager will be in charge of explaining and discussing the rationale of this Pilot Project and the criteria for the selection of houses that shall benefit from rehabilitation. Critical input from participating adults shall be recorded and taken into account as much as possible for the implementation of the project. A second round of information sessions shall be convoked by the Project Manager in the fourth months of the implementation period, according to the same criteria.

In the end of each of the 4 original sessions, 2 representatives and 2 supplements shall be elected by the participating adults in a vote by secret ballot to become members of the Family Committee that is advising the Project Manager in the selection of houses according to the criteria set by R&R. The Family Committee shall be convoked at least twice a month by the

Project Manager. Decisions shall be taken by consensus, as far as possible, or by majority vote. In the case of a tie vote, the decision of the Project Manager shall break the tie.

Activity A4: Rehabilitation of 200 partially destroyed family houses

Latest in the fourth week of the implementation period, the rehabilitation work for a total of 200 partially destroyed houses shall start with the selection of benefitting families. The Project Manager shall be in charge of drafting a preliminary list of at least 100 families who a) have returned to the operational area, b) have the uncontested property of a partially destroyed house, c) have depending children below the age of 18 and d) have a woman as only head of household. The Family Committee shall be consulted for the establishment of this list and must give its consent to the final selection established by the Project Manager.

Each benefitting family will be given the possibility to decide with the master craftsmen on a rehabilitation plan involving the purchase of construction materials for a maximum amount of USD 3,000 per family. Families are free to set their own priorities for the construction plan within this budget limit and the limit of feasibility, under the condition that the construction plan will create habitable units within the partially destroyed house. Each family is free to invest further resources into supplementary constructions, exceeding the budget allocation, with the agreement of the master craftsmen. The rehabilitation of houses will start according to a rota designed by the Project Manager in consensus with the master craftsmen. The rehabilitation work for one house should ideally be concluded within 5 working days.

A second list of at least 100 families, chosen according to the same criteria as mentioned above, shall be established by the Project Manager latest in the fourth month of the implementation period, taking into account the progress made during the first round of rehabilitations. The critical feedback from the second round of information sessions shall be recorded and taken into account by the Project Manager and the Family Committee for the final selection of families to benefit from the second round of rehabilitation works.

Activity B1: VTE classes for vulnerable adolescents aged 15-20

In the fifth week of the implementation period, vocational and technical education (VTE) classes shall start for a minimum of 75 adolescents, aged 15 to 20. One class of 15 to 20 students shall be associated with each of the master craftsmen who are implementing the rehabilitation work in the areas of carpentry, brickworks, ceramics, plumbing and electricity. The opening of the classes shall be announced at the information sessions (Activity A3) two weeks earlier. Inscriptions shall be accepted in the following week on a rolling basis. Students below the age of 18 need to have parental consent.

VTE classes will be implemented in two 3-month cycles, covering each at least 30 theoretical teaching hours and 90 practice hours. Theoretical classes will be given twice a week, either by the master craftsmen or by qualified teachers. Students will receive a certificate, either for attendance (in case they attended more than 80% of teaching and practice hours) or successful completion (in case they also scored more than 50% in the final examination). Successful students might continue training in a second 3-month cycle, in case a critical mass of at least 15 participants per class wishes to continue on a higher level.

In the week prior to the start of classes, the Project Manager shall test the recruited master craftspersons (cf. Activity A2) if their experience qualifies them for also giving theoretical lessons in the field of their work. The master craftspersons shall be paid an additional hourly rate for every theoretical session they give. In case the master craftspersons are not qualified or motivating to give theoretical lessons, supplementary teachers shall be recruited by the Project Manager in agreement with the R&R Country Director. All recruited teachers will be briefed by the Country Director on R&R policies and standards. The curriculum for their lessons shall be elaborated in agreement with the Project Manager.

Activity B2: Construction summer camp for vulnerable adolescents aged 15-20

During the summer months of the implementation period, a construction camp of up to 10 days shall be organised by the Project Manager for at least 150 local adolescents, aged 15 to 20, both girls and boys, who wish to participate in the design and the construction of a youth centre open to all communities of the area. Participants might have been students of the VTE classes (cf. Activity B1) or not. A not yet determined number of international volunteers of R&R might participate in the construction summer camp under the condition that the security situation and other conditions set by the Country Director are met. Including volunteers and other supervisors, a total number of 200 persons is expected to participate in the camp.

The construction summer camp will include both the possibility to sleep over at the construction site in tents, for a maximum of 100 persons, and to participate as a day camp, in case adolescents do not receive parental consent to sleep over at the site. The camp site will be chosen in a natural setting close to the workshop/factory. At least one month prior to the camp, a qualified architect shall suggest plans for the construction of the youth centre employing traditional techniques and materials, yet respecting modern building norms. The plans of the architect shall leave room for the participating adolescents to design their own space. The architect will be requested to accompany the construction camp.

The original budget for the materials employed for the construction of the youth centre shall be limited to USD 10,000. However, it might be expanded through private donations given to R&R for that purpose. Supplementary works for the completion of the construction shall be done by the construction teams of the master craftspersons after the completion of the rehabilitation of partially damaged houses (cf. Activity A4). The youth centre will be located either on the land leased for the workshop/factory (cf. Activity A1) or on a new plot of land either leased or purchased by R&R with private donations, independently of this project. It shall serve as activity centre for the R&R youth work beyond this project.

The youth participating in the construction summer camp shall be invited to form a new branch of the interreligious youth movement established by R&R in the Akkar Governorate of Lebanon. Those who are willing to commit to helping with the animation of smaller children, aged 6-14, shall be accepted as youth leaders of this movement. The youth leaders shall receive training and introduction to the R&R child protection standards during the construction summer camp by the Country Director and Project Manager. The constitution of a stable youth leader group will be the main tool for the lasting impact of this Pilot Project for social cohesion between different religious communities living in the implementation area.

Activity B3: Inauguration feast for vulnerable children aged 6-18

In the last week of the implementation period, after completion of the rehabilitation works (cf. Activity A4) and the construction summer camp (cf. Activity B2), children from all communities, aged 6 to 18, shall be invited with their families to an inauguration feast for the youth centre built by future youth leaders (cf. Activity B2). The feast shall take place either on the grounds of the youth centre, the factory/workshop or any other convenient location, such as local football pitches or public squares, that will be rented for this purpose. Members of the regional Steering Committee and local government officials shall be invited to participate and to speak.

The feast shall include structured recreational activities, such as games, quizzes, artistic activities and workshops for different age groups, to be prepared and implemented by the new youth leaders under direct supervision of the Project Manager and the Country Director. The feast shall also be the opportunity to unite parents of all families who have benefitted from rehabilitation works to provide feedback and discuss future priorities of the work of R&R. Different focus group discussions shall be organised by the Project Manager, each of which shall not exceed 20 adult participants. Participating parents shall be invited to become members of the local branch of R&R to participate actively in the future works of the organisation.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

All activities foreseen in this Pilot Project will be constantly monitored and evaluated. Different feedback mechanisms, internal reports and external evaluation surveys are foreseen throughout the school year, both in line with the Child Protection Policy, the Human Resources Policy and other policies or internal rules of procedure of R&R. Most notably, the following formats for monitoring & evaluation (M&E) are foreseen:

- (a) Weekly construction reports: The Project Manager is requested to submit a weekly activity report to the Country Director, including the work status on selected houses (cf. Activity A4) and an attendance sheet for all VTE classes (cf. Activity B1). All teaching staff is compelled to submit daily attendance sheets through the protected link of the Google Workspace owned by R&R.
- (b) Biweekly meetings of the Family Committee: The elected Family Committee (cf. Activity B5) has to be convoked by the Project Manager at least every second week for a review of the ongoing rehabilitation work. The decisions of each committee meeting have to be recorded in written minutes that have to be adopted by the Family Committee at the following meeting.
- (c) Monthly staff meetings: All construction and teaching staff shall participate in a monthly staff meeting to discuss the development of all activities foreseen in this Pilot Project, also for processing the monthly pay checks. The observations and remarks of each staff meeting shall be recorded in minutes submitted by the Project Manager to the Country Director.
- (d) External evaluation survey: In the last month of the implementation period, external experts from Lebanese universities or specialised consultancy firms are invited to conduct an external evaluation of the Pilot Project, pertaining to focus group meetings with adult family members and children in the implementation area, as well as an anonymous survey.

7. Budget

All activities foreseen in this Pilot Project are conditional upon the availability of public funding. Private donations shall be collected during the implementation period of this project to ensure the continuity of activities after its completion.

(a) Human Resources

Position	Units	Cost/unit	Total
1 Project Manager responsible for the implementation of this project, full-time over 9 months, monthly rate	9 months	\$500/m	\$4,500
1 Finance Officer, responsible for the preparation of payments and accounting, full-time over 9 months, monthly rate	9 months	\$400/m	\$3,600
5 master craftsmen, responsible for the implementation of construction works, full-time over 9 months, monthly rate	45 months	\$300/m	\$13,500
5 VTE teachers, responsible for theoretical lessons to 5 classes for 60 hours each over 6 months, hourly rate	300 hours	\$7/h	\$2,100
10 skilled workers, assisting the master craftsmen in construction work, full-time over 9 months, monthly rate	90 months	\$200/m	\$18,000
2 academic experts, each for 4 training days on environmental & safety standards, including travel costs, daily rate	8 days	\$300/d	\$2,400
1 architect for the design and supervision of the youth centre construction, lumpsum per unit	1 unit	\$3,000/u	\$3,000
SUBTOTAL			\$47,100

(b) Purchase of Goods

Position	Units	Cost/unit	Total
Purchase of 2 laptops for the Project Manager and the Finance Manager, lumpsum per unit	2 units	\$1,000/u	\$2,000
Purchase of 1 copy machine/printer for the Project Manager and the Finance Manager, lumpsum per unit	1 unit	\$1,500/u	\$1,500
Purchase of AC and office furniture for 2 office spaces and 1 class room in the factory/workshop, lumpsum per unit	3 units	\$1,000/u	\$3,000
Purchase of machinery for carpentry and brick production at the factory/workshop, lumpsum per unit	1 unit	\$30,000/u	\$30,000
Purchase of 20 solar panels and lithium batteries for the factory/workshop, lumpsum per unit	20 units	\$600/u	\$12,000
Construction materials for the rehabilitation of 200 partially destroyed houses, lumpsum per unit	200 units	\$3,000/u	\$600,000
Construction materials and furniture for the construction and equipment of a youth centre, lumpsum per unit	1 unit	\$15,000/u	\$15,000
SUBTOTAL			\$663,500

(c) Consumables and Other Costs

Position	Units	Cost/unit	Total
Rent for the factory/workshop and adjacent land for the youth centre over 9 months, monthly rate	9 months	\$500/m	\$4,500
Rent (or purchase) of a car for the Project Manager over 9 months, monthly rate	9 months	\$500/m	\$4,500
Rent (or purchase) of a small truck for supporting the rehabilitation and construction work, monthly rate	9 months	\$1,400/m	\$12,600
Catering (refreshments) for 10 information sessions and 16 committee meetings, lumpsum per unit	26 units	\$50/u	\$1,300
Catering (3 full meals) for 200 participants during the construction summer camp, lumpsum per day	10 days	\$1,000/d	\$10,000
Catering (1 full meal) for 1,000 participants during the inauguration feast, lumpsum per unit	1,000 units	\$3/u	\$3,000
Bus transportation for 100 adolescents to the location of the construction summer camp, lumpsum per day	10 days	\$200/d	\$2,000
Fuel for 1 car of the Project Manager and 1 truck for construction work over 9 months, monthly lumpsum	9 months	\$200/m	\$1,800
Teaching and game materials for the animation of 600 children during the inauguration feast, lumpsum per unit	600 units	\$3/u	\$1,800
Stationary materials, coffee/tea and other office supplies over 9 months, lumpsum per month	9 months	\$150/m	\$1,350
SUBTOTAL			\$42,850
GRAND TOTAL			\$753,450