A ROLLING ROCK حجر يتدحرج

Volunteering with ClimbAID in Lebanon

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Zurich, Switzerland
1. The Project

ClimbAID seeks to address the most vulnerable populations among refugees in Lebanon, children and youth, and help them cope with the traumas they have experienced and contribute towards increasing their resilience and psycho-social well-being through climbing.

1.1. About Lebanon

Lebanon is a country made up of 4 million Lebanese, 1.1 to 2.0 million Syrian refugees and 0.3 to 0.5 million Palestinian refugees. These figures make it the country with the highest concentration of refugees per capita worldwide. More than 75% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are women and children. The Lebanese economy and infrastructure in all sectors (education, health, housing, electricity and water supply) is struggling under the pressure of so many refugees. Competition for already scarce resources is contributing towards increased tensions between the host and refugee communities, making peace and resilience building an increasingly important component in the response strategy of the humanitarian community.

Due to the Lebanese no-camp policy\(^1\), Syrian refugees live scattered across the country in unfinished buildings, garage apartments, informal tented settlements and warehouses; in most cases they pay exorbitant rent for extremely substandard living conditions. According to UNHCR over 70% of Syrian refugees lived below the poverty line in 2016 earning less than 3 USD\(^2\).

According to UNHCR among the Syrian refugees registered in Lebanon more than 500'000 are children and teenagers (between 0 to 17 years), and an estimated 50% have no access to any form of education. Access to healthcare is extremely limited due to high costs, geographical challenges and coverage restrictions. Treatment for many severe physical diseases (birth defects, cancer, renal failure, etc.) are not covered by governmental or international organization’s healthcare services, nor is treatment for mental health disorders (PTSD, depression, anxiety, etc.) suffered by many refugees who have escaped the terror of war zones.

Children and youth are among the most vulnerable refugees. Although they often find safety in the host countries they require additional support to overcome the distressing experiences they have faced in Syria, including violence, abuse, exploitation and family separation. While displaced in Lebanon they frequently continue to face child protection risks including child labour, violence in their homes and schools, early marriage and gender based violence.

1.2. A ROLLING ROCK

It is against the above background that ClimbAID seeks to address the needs of the most vulnerable population among the refugees. ClimbAID works with children and

\[^1\] \url{https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/lebanon_syrian_crisis_en.pdf}

youth to help them combat previous and on-going trauma, while also helping them build resilience and psycho-social well-being through climbing.

During the last few years therapeutic climbing has increasingly gained attention from academic research as a treatment for a variety of mental health issues and as a method of experiential education. Self-esteem and body-awareness are fostered through concrete challenges, fears are overcome, team building capacities and responsible social interactions are taught.

Taking into account the extremely fragmented settlement situation of refugee populations in Lebanon and their very limited travel abilities, a mobile climbing wall built on a small truck is the optimal solution to bring therapeutic climbing sessions and potentially other activities to as many children and teenagers as possible.

2. Volunteering in Lebanon

2.1. Who we are looking for

- For conducting the interventions, we are looking for climbers with a background in helping professions, such as psychotherapy, psychological counselling, social work, education and life coaching.
- For other potential project, e.g. building permanent climbing walls, we are also looking for carpenters and other people who know how to use their hands.
- Besides that, we are looking for volunteers with all kinds of specific and unspecific skills (e.g. musicians, clowns, astronauts and mechanics), who can add colour and sustainability to the A ROLLING ROCK project.
- Language skills (Arabic, English and French) as well as any work or volunteer experience in the humanitarian sector are very much appreciated and valued.
- All volunteers should be both, physically and mentally fit as to perform in a challenging environment. You should be independent as a person and be able to improvise and adapt.

2.2. Packing List

2.2.1. Work

- During our work in the field, we are exposed to dust and dirt. Bring robust pants, t-shirts, sweaters and headgear. Wearing open shoes is not advisable. Bring trainers or approach shoes. Your feet will also thank you for comfortable climbing shoes for the sessions.

2.2.2. Accommodation

- We provide beds and/or mattresses. Bring you sleeping bag.

2.2.3. Weekends

- Usually we spend our weekends in the mountains with camping and climbing. Bring your sports climbing and camping equipment.
2.3. Logistics

2.3.1. Getting to Lebanon
- Fly to Beirut – there’s only one airport. For the time being, no specific volunteer visa exists. Enter the country as a tourist. Fill in the address of your hotel in Beirut into the required application form at customs.
- Our base is in Zahle or Taanayel, which is approximately a 1 hour drive from Beirut. If your flight to Beirut arrives early in the morning or late at night, it is advisable to take a direct taxi to our apartment in the Beqaa ($50) or spend the night in Beirut.

2.3.2. Accommodation and Transportation
- As last year, we plan to provide cheap accommodation for the whole ClimbAID team. Approximate costs: $10 / night.
- Getting around Lebanon is difficult without a car. Costs of about $10 / day for a passenger car are shared among all team members. If necessary, an additional car – usually around $30 / day – needs to be rented.

2.3.3. On or before arrival
- Save all emergency numbers (found in the security section)
- Know the location of the closest hospital and police stations
- Buy a local sim card with data (~$50 for the SIM card and then different deals for data and SMS/calls) – Must get package with either data or one which specifically accommodates WhatsApp as it is the primary form of communication used within the group.
- See Health Insurance info below (under subheading Costs)

2.4. Security
Lebanon is not Europe. We advise that volunteers who wish to apply are familiar with being in the Middle East and check travel information provided by their government. Always carry your passport with you and emergency cash.

2.4.1. Precautions traveling to Lebanon
- You will most likely be refused entry at customs if you have travelled to Israel and have an Israeli stamp in your passport.

2.4.2. Security check points
- There are military checkpoints all over Lebanon. Their purpose is to maintain safety and stability in a country all too familiar with war. The officers are in 99.9% of the cases very nice. They will sometimes check your identity, so always have your passport with you when driving around. It is the only valid ID for foreigners in Lebanon.
- When driving past slow down, roll down your window and say “Merhaba”. They might wave you by or ask where you are going. If they stop you, say where you are going before they even ask if possible and most likely they will wave you on.
- They are always very friendly, maybe just surprised to see Westerners. Cooperate and be respectful at all times.

2.4.3. Taking pictures and videos
• Do not take pictures of the military, military checkpoints and bases, governmental or municipal buildings and staff.
• Be cautious of taking photos and videos, assess if it is appropriate to do so. Generally, it is advised to ask for permission before doing so.
• In Palestinian settlements, political factions are housed in civilian areas. They will not be happy with any pictures taken.

2.4.4. Driving
• The traffic rules you know do not apply, you must adapt.
• Don’t be afraid to use the horn.

2.4.5. Travelling
• Please consult with someone from the project before travelling around the country. Some areas are no-go zones and will need permission from the military. Some of the Palestinian settlements are safer than other. But none is considered safe. There are two in Beirut which can be accessed with specific NGOs or in agreement with local security; ask in the group. The Palestinian settlements are self-run, there is no Lebanese military or security presence. In some of the camps there are armed groups and active militias.
• Stay away from Arsal and the Syrian border. Don’t cross the border to Syria!
• Emergency numbers:
  o Civil Defence: 125
  o Ambulance (Red Cross): 140
  o Fire department: 175
  o Internal Security (Police): 112
  o Embassy: Find out the number of your embassy and save it on your phone
• This security advice is for your own safety and protection. Follow them and stay safe. Get travel insurance. We cannot guarantee anyone’s safety. We do not take any responsibility for anything that may occur. You will travel on your own risk. Let your embassy know you are here and what you are doing.

2.5. Costs and Expenses
Lebanon is not cheap and ClimbAID cannot cover any costs associated with your stay.

2.5.1. Currency
• The Lebanese Pound is pegged to the U.S. Dollar and both are used equally. Current exchange rates can be found here: http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/

2.5.2. Flight
• Check online (e.g. http://www.skyscanner.com/). Sometimes it’s better to buy flights separately, like to Istanbul and then from Istanbul to Beirut.

2.5.3. Car Rental
• Rental cars should be about $30-40 a day.

2.5.4. Food
• House food: Common food for $10 per week / person is bought for everyone to use (pasta, cheese, fruits, veggies, etc.). This will cover a majority, but not all meals.
• Eating out: A small breakfast will usually amount to $5. Dinner not more than $10 per meal.

2.5.5. Health Insurance
• You must have health insurance.
• Verify if your current insurance covers Lebanon and specifically the Beqaa Valley.
• If interested/in need of health insurance, send an Email - before arriving in Lebanon - to: info@climbaid.org. Subject: Health Insurance. Attach a scan of your passport photo. Costs: $70 for 92 days

2.6. Code of Conduct and Tips
The culture in Lebanon is more conservative, please be aware and respectful of their social conduct. We are hosted as guests in Lebanon and in their culture. We are in the country to help refugees and general vulnerable people by working within the culture not by pressing our culture onto them.

Please remember, everybody deserves the same amount of respect, whether you are a politician, a volunteer, a refugee, poor or rich. Please ask your area or project coordinator for advice on any cultural or social conduct.

In the case of non-compliance, ClimbAID reserves the right to withdraw all association with any/all volunteer involved in misconduct.

2.6.1. Lebanese Culture
• If somebody offers you tea, a gift or just a seat, it is considered impolite not to accept.
• Feel free to have a meal with a family or arrange meetings as dinners or in shisha parlors.
• If you learn a few Arabic phrases and show interest in the culture by saying “hello, how are you?” in Arabic or “Shukran” instead of “thank you” it goes a long way.

2.6.2. As a woman
• Be aware that women dress more conservative in Lebanese culture. When working within settlements we dress similarly:
  o Keep your shoulders covered, if it’s hot wear a scarf around them
  o Wear loose pants/skirts/dresses well past the knee
  o In some cases, wearing a ring will make things easier
• More conservative men will not shake your hand, just place a hand over their heart: either always put your right hand over your heart and say “hello” instead of shaking their hand, or be prepared for them not to shake it.

2.6.3. Social Media
• Please be cautious when posting on social media, you never know what it will imply to those who may see it (a Syrian or Palestinian refugee, a local NGO, or the police/military).
• In Lebanon, there are precautions and warnings for a reason, but don’t post overly-dramatized or exaggerated versions of reality.
• Be respectful of taking pictures of settlements and refugees. Ask for permission to take photos.
Do not take pictures of any military personnel or bases or official buildings like municipalities or their staff
Do not take pictures in orange zone areas like Shatila in Southern Beirut or any other Palestinian settlements – ask the area coordinator for advice

2.7. Next Steps
• Have you read the whole document?
• Do you understand all the points?
• Do you understand all the security risks?
• If you have a question that hasn’t been covered please email us
• Would you like to come volunteer in Lebanon?

To be able to plan and facilitate in the best possible way, please fill in the online application form and send us a message to info@climbaid.org with your name in the subject.

Please use following link for the online application: www.climbaid.org/volunteer