Volunteering with ClimbAID in Lebanon

December 2019
Zurich, Switzerland
1. The Project

Through ClimbAID’s activities, socially disadvantaged and often war-disabled youth get a new perspective, train their perseverance and acquire competencies that are also valuable in everyday life. Through climbing, we foster not only physical strength, but also their mind and community values.

1.1. About Lebanon

Lebanon is made up of 4 million Lebanese, 1.1 to 2.0 million Syrian refugees, 0.3 to 0.5 million Palestinian refugees and about 0.5 million domestic migrant workers. 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 policy1, 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/day2.

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 the 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, 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 vulnerable populations in Lebanon. ClimbAID works with children (9 to 12) and youth (13 to 18+) from different backgrounds to help them combat previous and ongoing trauma and depression, while also helping them build resilience and psycho-social well-being through climbing. In addition, our participants get a new perspective and acquire personal and social competencies that are also valuable in everyday life.

More information: www.climbaid.org/ROCK

ClimbAID was founded in September 2016 with the purpose of giving young Syrian refugees in Lebanon a new perspective. Since then ClimbAID has reached more than 1500 refugees and people from other vulnerable populations with its projects in Switzerland and Lebanon.

2. Volunteering in Lebanon

2.1. Who we are looking for

- For conducting the interventions, we are looking for climbers with a background ideally in psychotherapy, psychological counselling, social work, education and life coaching.
- Experience in climbing instruction and route setting is a big bonus.
- For other potential projects, e.g. building permanent climbing walls, from time to time we are also looking for carpenters and people familiar working with building tools and materials.
- In addition, we welcome individuals with non-climbing related skills (e.g. photographers, videographers, mechanics, musicians, clowns, theatre performers or astronauts), 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 physically and mentally fit to perform in a challenging environment. You should be independent as a person and be able to improvise and adapt.
- Minimum stay are 4 weeks. The longer, the better for the participants, the team and the project.

2.2. What to expect

- You will be working five days a week. During the week there’s no time for sight-seeing or exploring the country.
- Your main tasks include planning and delivering climbing sessions to ClimbAID’s beneficiaries.
• Every volunteer will also be assigned to a partner and/or group as a focal point. In this role, you are responsible for planning and leading the session, for writing detailed session reports and keeping statistics.

• Delivering the sessions and route setting requires frequent heavy lifting. Ensure that you are physically fit to perform heavy lifting duties as required.

• Weekends are reserved for volunteers to travel and climb around Lebanon. ClimbAID’s weekends may not align with typical weekend days (i.e. Saturday and Sunday) in order to accommodate our partners’ availabilities.

• Ad-hoc tasks may also be required depending on the evolving objectives e.g. competition preparation, exploring the area for climbing spots, building a permanent climbing wall, etc.

• In order to guarantee communication between team members in the field, you will be required to buy a SIM card with data (costs about USD 25 / month). More information: http://prepaid-data-sim-card.wikia.com/wiki/Lebanon

• Volunteers usually have their own private rooms (no guarantee). Wifi is available but often unstable.

2.3. Packing List

2.3.1. Work

• During your work in the field, you will be exposed to high levels of dust and dirt. Bring robust pants, t-shirts, sweaters and headgear (hats, buff etc). Female volunteers are advised to wear pants that cover the knees. You will receive a ClimbAID T-Shirt that you are required to wear during the sessions.

• Bring trainers or approach shoes. Wearing open shoes, especially during outdoor bouldering sessions, is not advisable. Your feet will thank you for comfortable climbing shoes for the sessions.

• Please bring an international driver’s license.

2.3.2. Accommodation

• ClimbAID rents a house/apartment for all volunteers in which beds and/or mattresses are provided. Bring a sleeping bag.

2.3.3. Weekends

• Weekends are usually spent camping and climbing. Bring your sports climbing equipment including rope, quickdraws, climbing shoes, chalk etc.

• Bring a tent, sleeping bag and sleeping mat.

• If you are concerned about space in your luggage, message the volunteers’ WhatsApp group before arriving to coordinate with present and future volunteers.
2.4. **Logistics**

2.4.1. **Getting to Lebanon**
- Take a plane to Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport or inform yourself about the ferry coming from Turkey.
- No specific volunteer visa exists. Enter the country as a tourist. Fill in the address of the ClimbAID house (to be confirmed before arrival) into the required application form at customs.
- Our apartment in Chtoura is approximately a 1-hour drive from Beirut. If your flight to Beirut arrives early in the morning or late at night, we will arrange a taxi that takes you directly to our home. During the day you can take a taxi to the Cola bus station in Beirut (approximately $20 from the airport). From there you take a bus to Chtoura (approximately $5-10).

2.4.2. **Accommodation and Transportation**
- We do our best to provide affordable accommodation for the ClimbAID team. Approximate costs: $10 / night.
- Getting around Lebanon is difficult without a car. Costs of about $20 / day for a passenger car are shared among all team members for weekend trips. If necessary, an additional car – usually around $25 / day can be rented.

2.5. **Security Situation**
- The social and political situation is tense. Since 17 October 2019 there have been demonstrations, roadblocks and strikes throughout the country. We are watching the situation closely and are expecting to continue our project in April 2020.
- Inform yourself about the political situation in Lebanon. We are happy to discuss any questions in the information call.
- Inform your country’s embassy about your stay in Lebanon.
- You will most likely be refused entry at customs if you have travelled to Israel and have an Israeli stamp in your passport. Please discuss this with us if you have any concerns about your travel history.
- Upon your arrival, you will receive a security briefing with detailed information about the current situation in the country and our rules of conduct.

2.6. **Costs and Expenses**

Lebanon is not cheap and unfortunately, ClimbAID cannot cover the costs associated with your stay. A budget of $600 / month should comfortably cover your expenses for food and beverages, accommodation, transportation and communication.
2.6.1. Accommodation
● We do our best provide affordable accommodation for the ClimbAID team. Approximate costs: $10 / night.

2.6.2. Transportation
● Getting around Lebanon is difficult without a car. Costs of about $20 / day for a passenger car are shared among all team members on non-work days. If necessary, an additional car – usually around $30 / day can be rented.

2.6.3. Food and Beverages
● House food: We usually shop and cook together and share our expenses for food, drinks and other household necessities. E.g. meat and alcohol are shared among its consumers.
● Eating out: A small breakfast will usually amount to $5. Dinners are usually not more than $10 - 15.

2.6.4. Communication
● A local SIM card with data costs around $3 (details here) – Must get package with either data or one which specifically accommodates WhatsApp as it is the primary form of communication used within the group.

2.6.5. Currency
● The buying power of the Lebanese pound has plummeted since October 2019 and banks have been limiting the withdrawal of USDs.
● Bring USD in cash.

2.6.6. Health and Travel Insurance
● You are required to purchase health and travel insurance before arriving in Lebanon. ClimbAID does not have the capacity to assume liability for anything that may happen.
● Confirm that your insurance covers Lebanon and specifically the Beqaa Valley.

2.7. Code of Conduct and Tips
Lebanon is culturally more conservative than most European and Western countries. Please be aware and respectful of local social norms. As foreign guests we work within the existing culture and do not impose our own culture and expectations on the local communities.

2.7.1. Security Situation
● Please refer to 2.5. above.
● Upon your arrival, you will receive a security briefing with detailed information about the current situation in the country and our rules of conduct.
2.7.2. For female volunteers

- Be aware that women dress more conservatively in Lebanon and across most Middle Eastern countries. When working with local communities:
  - Keep your shoulders covered, if it’s hot wear a scarf
  - Wear loose pants/skirts/dresses well past the knee
  - In some cases, wearing a ring will make things easier

2.7.3. Social Media

- In general, publishing photos and video material on private social media channels depicting ClimbAID’s projects, its participants and activities requires the consent of ClimbAID. You will be informed about the rules in detail, including exceptions, upon your arrival.
- 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.

3. Next Steps

- Have you read the whole document?
- Do you understand your role and the logistics of being in Lebanon?
- Do you understand all the security risks?
- If you have any unanswered questions please email us at info@climbaid.org.

To be able to coordinate the arrival and schedule of volunteers, please fill in the online application form and send us a message to info@climbaid.org with your name in the subject link.

The following link will take you to the online application: www.climbaid.org/volunteer

We look forward to have you in the team!