

Protection Monitoring Survey Findings

Lebanon – 3rd Quarter 2023

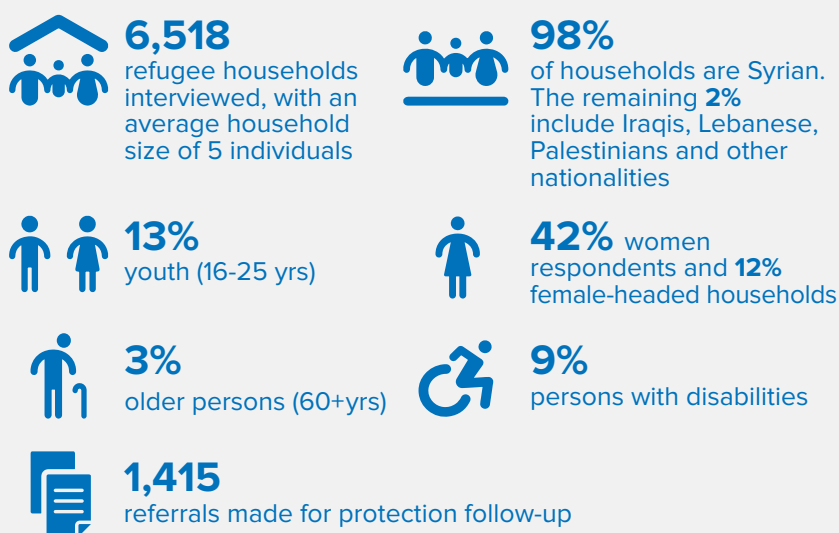


Key highlights

- A surge in the number of municipal restrictions targeting Syrian refugees has been reported during the third quarter of 2023, resulting in an increase of the already negative public discourse against them and a deterioration of the protection space.
- In the aftermath of the Cabinet of Ministers decision released on 11th September 2023 on displaced Syrians, the MoIM issued numerous circulars targeting displaced Syrians, which led to stricter implementation of restrictive measures by municipalities and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) across the country.
- The average household income of families continues to fall below the Standard Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB), even when factoring in humanitarian assistance, while the financial situation of 60% of these households remains critical.
- Some coping mechanisms employed by households in response to their inability to meet basic needs include reducing their expenditures on food and rent, increasing their debt and purchasing food on credit. The challenging financial situation is causing 97% of reported cases of psychological distress.

Refugee households are highly affected by the dollarization trend, leading to eventual increase of rental fees and limiting shelter alternatives.

Key numbers July to September 2023¹



¹ UNHCR conducts protection monitoring surveys with refugee households together with partners SHEILD and Intersos on an ongoing basis to analyse trends in the protection environment and risks facing refugees. This survey is one component of UNHCR's overarching protection monitoring programme in Lebanon, complementing other protection activities conducted by UNHCR and partners. The sampling of households and findings presented are representative both at the regional and at the national level. In addition, a number of interviews with key informants of different profiles complement the quantitative analysis from the household interviews. When needs for specific services, assistance or information are identified during interviews, UNHCR's protection monitoring partners refer the individuals concerned accordingly.

This report provides a summary of the protection monitoring findings from all regions of Lebanon in the third quarter (July to September) of 2023. The feedback from refugees is used to inform UNHCR's advocacy, and programmatic interventions with the aim of improving refugees' access to protection and essential services, assistance, and information.

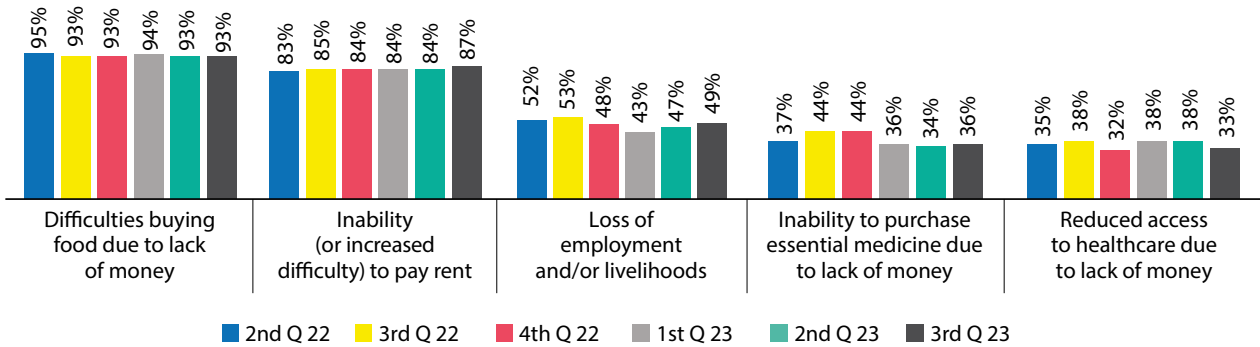
Impact of the socio-economic situation



We are afraid of not finding an alternative house for the same amount of rent.

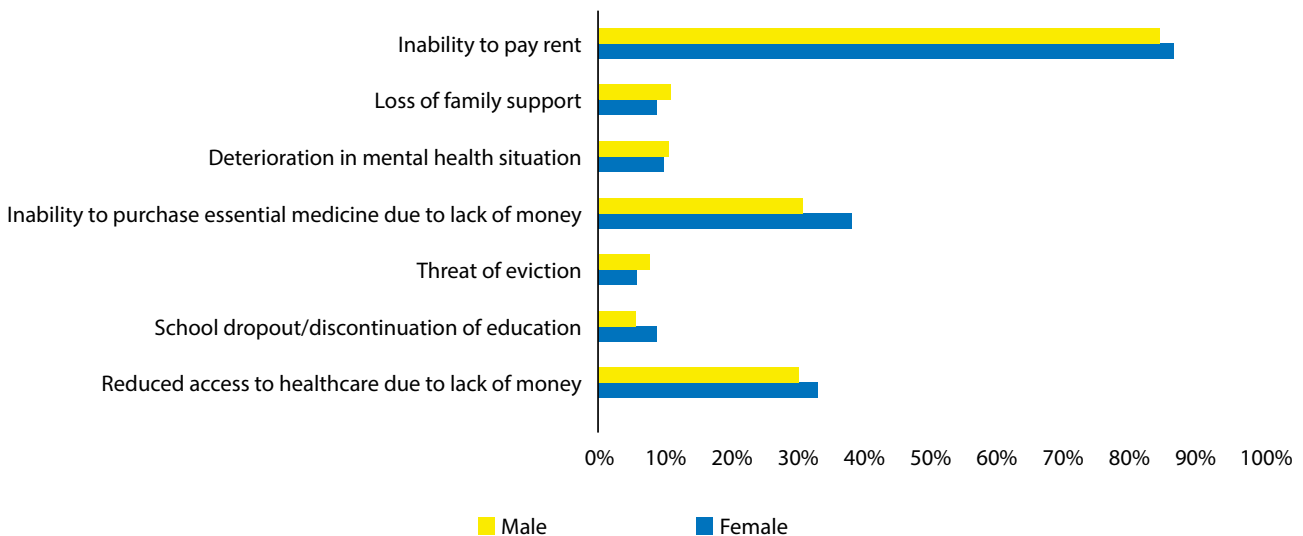
- Syrian Refugee, Southern Lebanon

Impact of the socio-economic situation



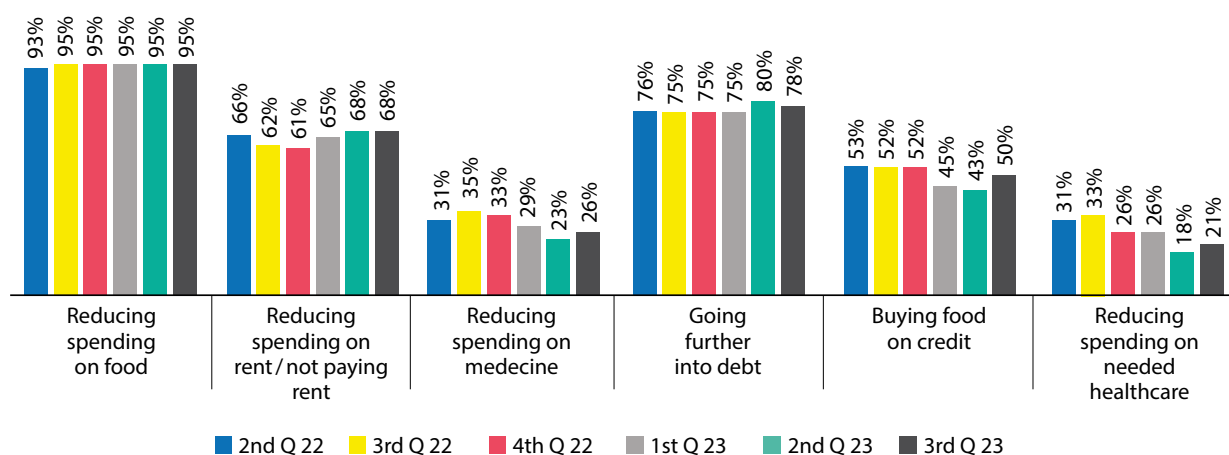
- The socio-economic situation of refugees in Q3 remains highly challenging and mostly consistent with previous quarters, with households facing major difficulties to cover their basic needs.
- During the third quarter of 2023, nearly all refugee families struggled buying food (93%) and paying rent (87%), while half of them have lost their livelihoods (49%). Some of these families also face reduced access to essential medicines (36%) and healthcare (33%). The inability to pay rent has increased, contributing to the already high risk of eviction.
- The socio-economic challenges faced by female-led households show some disparities compared to the male ones. Families headed by females encounter heightened difficulties, with 87% struggling to pay rent compared to a lower percentage (84%) of male-headed households. Similarly, 35% of female-headed households face limitations in accessing healthcare due to financial constraints, higher than the 31% reported by male-led families.

Impact of deteriorating socio-economic situation in Q3 (by gender)



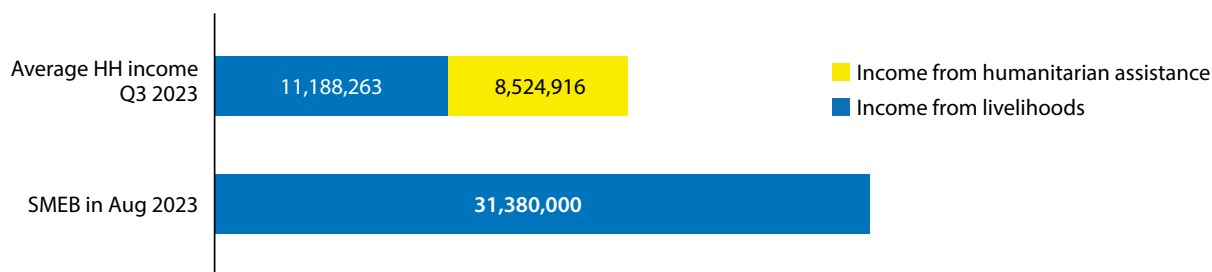
- Moreover, the struggles faced by the persons with disabilities (PwD) are notably accentuated. During Q3, there was a significant surge in their challenges to access essential PwD care services, from 5% in Q2 to a striking 18% in Q3. The primary barrier identified by the families is the lack of financial means to cover both service fees and transportation costs. This increase in the impediments faced by disabled individuals within households emphasizes a critical issue regarding the accessibility and affordability of necessary care, amplifying the strains caused by financial limitations.
- The persistent socio-economic challenges are evidenced by the ongoing use of negative coping strategies by refugee households. Like previous periods, the scarcity of resources has led to almost all families (95%) cutting down their expenditure on food. Additionally, 78% are increasing their debts, and 68% are either decreasing their rental expenses or failing to pay them altogether. Buying food on credit has been largely used as a coping mechanism to respond to the deteriorating economic situation by 50% of families, compared to 43% in Q2.

Main Coping Strategies



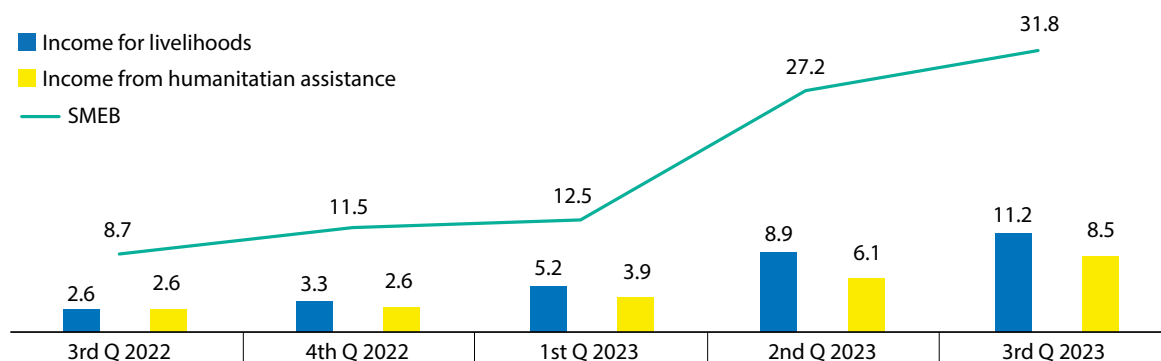
- The economic landscape continued to deteriorate in Q3 2023. This was marked by an alarming surge in the cost of living, which has escalated by approximately 350% compared to the same quarter of the previous year. This increase has resulted in critical affordability issues for approximately 60% of surveyed households, precipitating severe psychological distress in 97% of reported cases. Despite humanitarian aid, the average income of these families falls well below the SMEB. Consequently, households face great challenges in purchasing food, paying rent, securing employment, and accessing essential healthcare and medications. Over the quarter, 71% of households reported having reduced the number of meals eaten per day due to the economic situation.

Average Household income compared to SMEB (LBP) and debt



- As per World Food Programme situational reports, the SMEB reached LBP 31.38 million (US\$ 351) for a family of five in August 2023, an increase of 3% from the previous month.

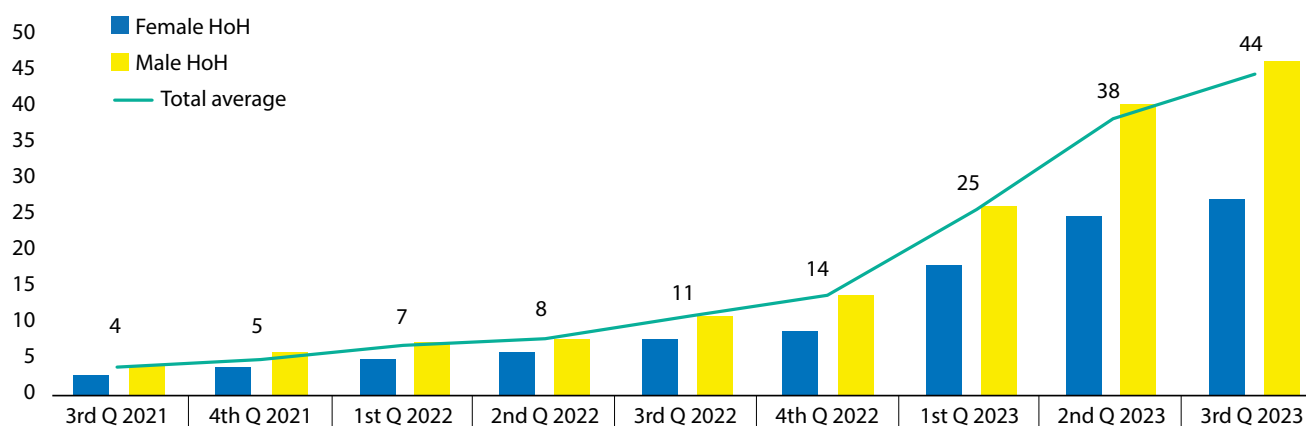
Average income vs SMEB (in millions of LBP)



- These statistics illustrate a dire economic situation, where the soaring costs are outpacing household incomes, leading to a multitude of challenges in meeting even the most fundamental needs with nearly all households relying on borrowing money as a coping mechanism. Over the past year, the struggle to keep up with these rising costs is mirrored by the exponential growth of debt accumulated by refugee households, with a notable increase in the disparity between male and female household heads. In the third quarter of 2023, the average household debt was 44 million LBP, a 16% increase compared to the previous quarter (38M LBP) and 300% more than last year (11M LBP).

- Male-headed households (MHHs) seem to have a significantly higher debt, a gap that has increased over time as per the graph below. In Q3, debt levels reached 46 million LBP for male and 27 million for female-headed households (FHHs). This trend seems to confirm the findings of the 2022 VASyR.² These gender differences require further analysis as it is not quite clear what are the factors influencing such a sustained upward trend. Perhaps, one of the reasons contributing to is a higher proportion of MHHs living below the SMEB as compared to FHHs in Lebanon. According to 2022 VaSyR, when assistance and credit were included in the total expenditures, the share of MHHs below the SMEB (68%) was higher than that of FHHs (62%). Also, MHHs may have more dependents and expenses than FHHs, which could increase their need for borrowing. Moreover, FHH could accumulate less debt due to disparities in employment opportunities, lower access to credit, and systemic barriers that may limit their borrowing capacity.

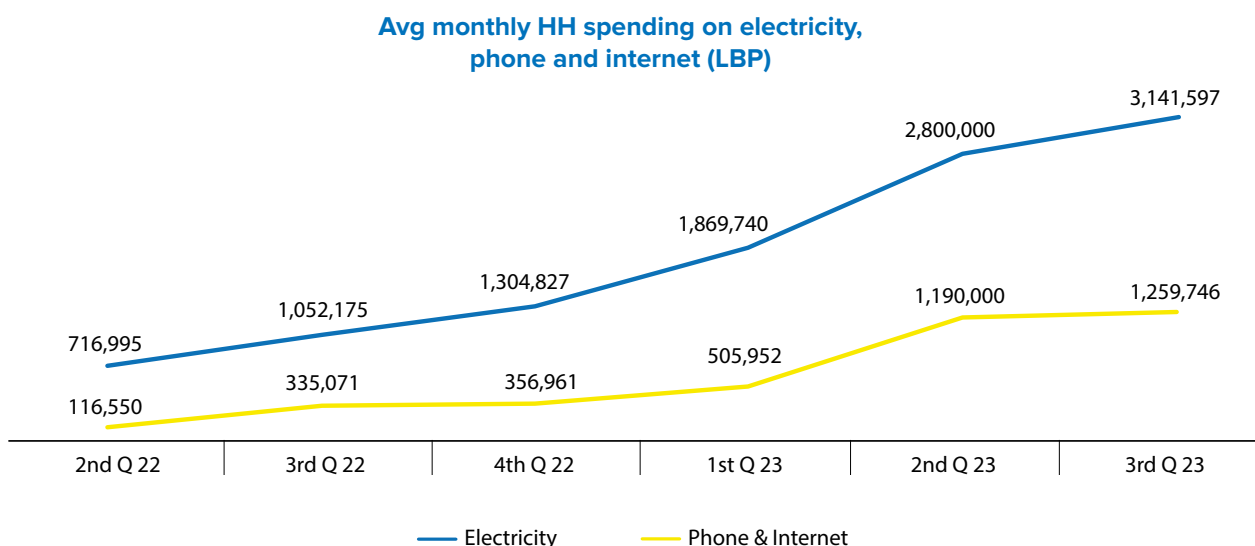
Average accumulated debt (in million LBP)



² VaSyR concluded that MHHs accumulated more debts (LBP 12,555,123) than FHHs (LBP 7,159,588) in 2022, see **Lebanon – Preliminary Results of the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees – VASyR 2022**, p. 49.

- Furthermore, the dollarization of the Lebanese economy has disproportionately negatively affected FHHs, notably in relation to rent. Taking the North region of Lebanon as an example, 8% more females than males reported daily verbal harassment from the property owner to leave as a new protection risk since dollarization of rent. This shift has also made females more exposed to other safety risks, such as sexual harassment from property owners, based on reports from key informants.

- Additional escalating costs were related to electricity, phone and internet services, which are negatively impacting the ability of surveyed refugees to stay connected and access essential resources. Connectivity is not only a mean of staying in touch, which is vital for the wellbeing of those displaced and away from their loved ones, but also a gateway to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, service providers and humanitarian assistance, including UNHCR response services.



Mental Health

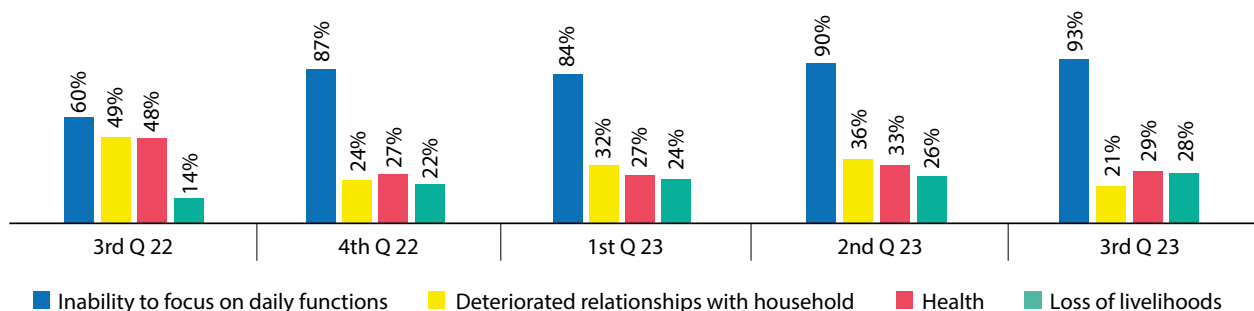


Everything we are going through is affecting our children's wellbeing, and we are unable to give them a decent life.

- Syrian refugee living in Mount Lebanon

- The negative impact of the protection situation on the mental health and wellbeing of refugees is a continuing concern, deeply rooted in financial hardship, compounded by gender disparities and varying regional conditions.
- Financial struggles serve as the primary catalyst for psychological distress among refugees, with 97% of reported cases directly linked to the challenging financial circumstances. This strain leads to heightened stress and emotional distress, hindering their ability to cope with daily life.
- The deteriorating mental health situation impacts refugees on multiple fronts, affecting their daily functionality as 93% of respondents struggle to focus on day-to-day tasks. Additionally, mental health issues contribute significantly to health problems (29%) and have led to the loss of livelihoods for 28% of those experiencing psychological distress. Moreover, the identification of personal problems as a significant factor affecting their mental wellbeing differs between female (49%) and male (21%) headed households.
- Importantly, regional disparities reveal concerning variations in the mental wellbeing of surveyed households. The North region reports the highest distress levels, with 37% of families affected, followed by lower rates in Bekaa (23%), the South (12%), and BML (10%). Within the North, 45% of these cases involve depression, anger, and potential harm to others, while 36% report milder symptoms like lack of sleep, irritability, and loss of motivation.

Impact on mental health



Education and child labour



My children are out of school because I am barely able to meet their basic needs, food and shelter.

- Syrian refugee, Mount Lebanon

- Child labour is known to be largely underreported but occurring throughout the country. This quarter, 7% of families reported to have at least one working child. Of particular concern is the significant rise in children working on the streets, with 19% engaged in street labor during this quarter compared to 13-14% in previous months, highlighting a shift toward more precarious and potentially unsafe working conditions. Furthermore, a gender discrepancy in child labour can be observed during the summer months, with 10% of female-headed households report having a working child compared to only 4% of male-headed households. This gender disparity was not evident in previous quarters, signifying a new dimension to the labor dynamics within these households.

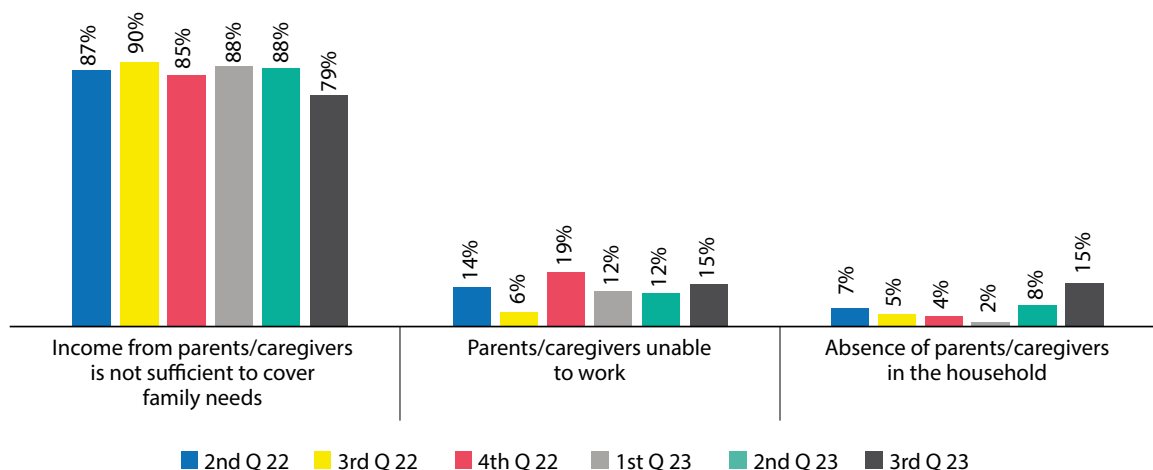
- The reasons for children engaging in labor are multifaceted. While the primary cause remains the insufficiency of parental income to meet basic needs, there has been a slight decrease to 79% from previous quarters (85-90%). Interestingly, the absence of parents or caretakers in the household has increased as a reason for child labor in Q3 (12% compared to an average 5% trend in previous quarters). This has been reported by 38% of female-headed households and a mere 3% of male-headed households.

67%
of children engaged
in work are not
attending school

- The types of labor children are involved in vary, with shops, agricultural work, street vending, and hospitality being the most common. There has been a notable increase in children working in hotels and restaurants (10%), compared to the usual 5% trend during the rest of the year. The rise in working girls to 20% from 13% in Q1 and 17% in Q2 can be attributed to seasonal agricultural work and the summer break.

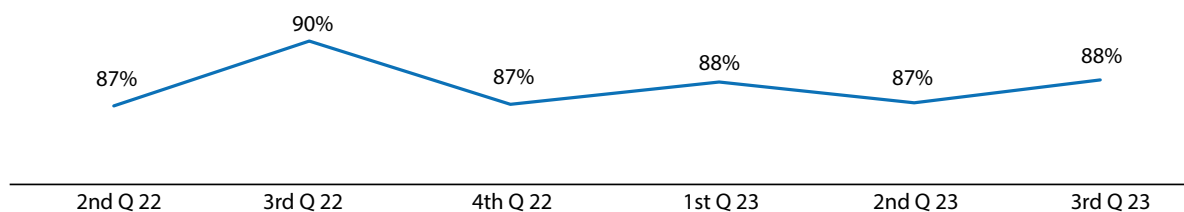
- Worryingly, a significant portion (67%) of working children are not attending school. This is further compounded by 34% of refugee families reporting that their children stopped attending school during the reporting period due to challenges such as transportation costs (47%), school fees (49%), and conflicting working hours (10%).

Reasons for child labour in the household



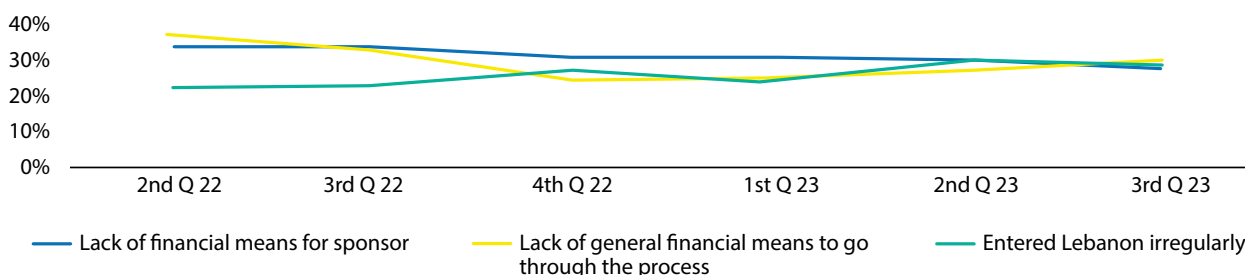
Legal residency

HH with at least one member aged 15 years and above lacking residency



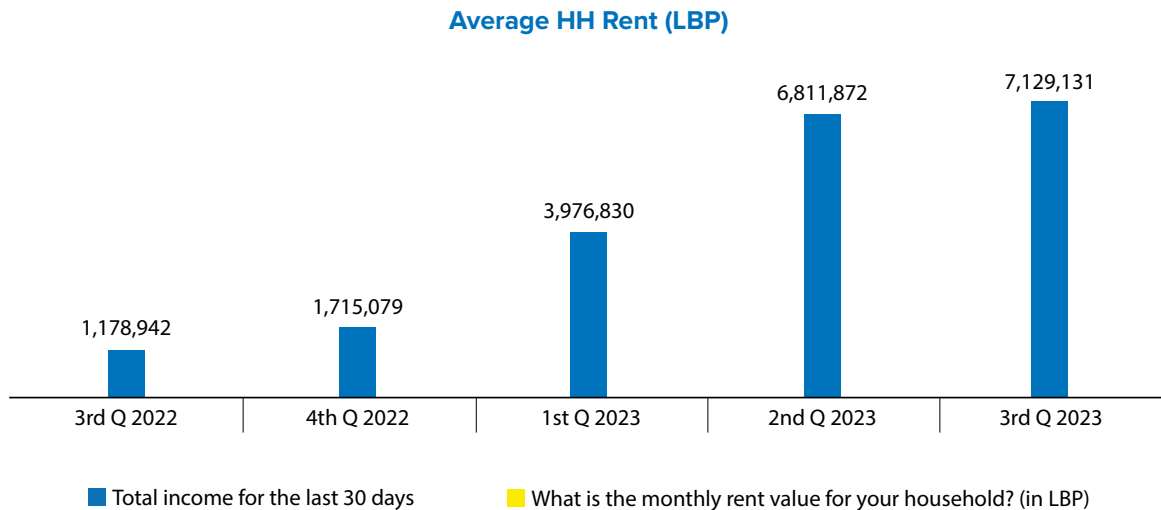
- The current legal residency challenges faced by refugees depict a complex and consistent situation since 2022. The reasons for lacking legal residency are multifaceted. Financial constraints play a significant role, with 30% citing a lack of financial means, including sponsorship (30%) and covering associated costs (28%). Additionally, a slight increase can be observed in the number of families reporting an irregular entry in Lebanon as the main reason to lack legal residency (29% in Q3 compared to 24% in Q1), noting, however that there has been no corresponding increase in new arrivals reported by UNHCR.
- Consequently, these legal challenges have precipitated adverse effects on refugees' well-being. Psychological distress is on the rise due to the uncertainty surrounding residency status. Moreover, a staggering 62% households report limitations on their movement, which significantly curtails their ability to access essential services, education, and employment opportunities. The absence of legal residency exacerbates refugees' vulnerability, exposing them to the risk of detention and deportation. Notably, there has been a concerning surge in raids and restrictive measures targeting refugees during the last month of the quarter.

Top Reasons for Lack of Legal Residency



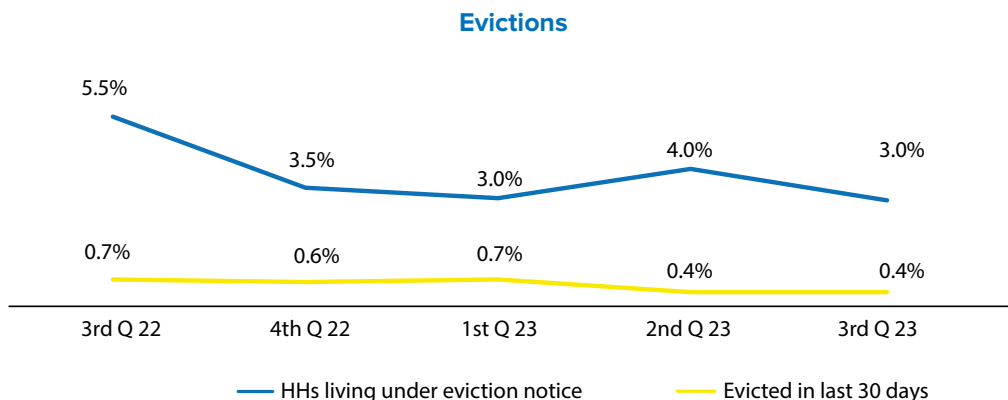
Rent and Evictions

- Inability or difficulties to pay rent are reported by 87% of households (an increase from 85% in the previous quarter). This struggle is exacerbated by the exponential rise in the average monthly rent, soaring from 4 million LBP in Q1 to 7.1 million in Q3. This drastic increase surpasses the financial capacities of most refugee households.



- The already dire circumstances concerning rent and shelter also include a challenging picture related to collective evictions. In Q3, more than 300 individuals were affected by collective evictions, while over 3,000 received eviction notifications or threats. Although the inability to pay rent is cited as a reason for these evictions, it's noteworthy that 70% reported re-appropriation of the property by the owner. This could be linked to the overall restrictive climate against refugees, including municipal measures imposing constraints on rental agreements for refugees. These figures however represent a slow decrease in numbers compared to the previous quarter.

- 40% of survey respondents resorted to further debt to prevent eviction, a figure that spikes to a staggering 70% when assessing the impact of eviction itself. Additionally, 53% of evicted families exhibit symptoms of psychological distress, underscoring the immense emotional toll and mental health repercussions faced by those displaced due to eviction.



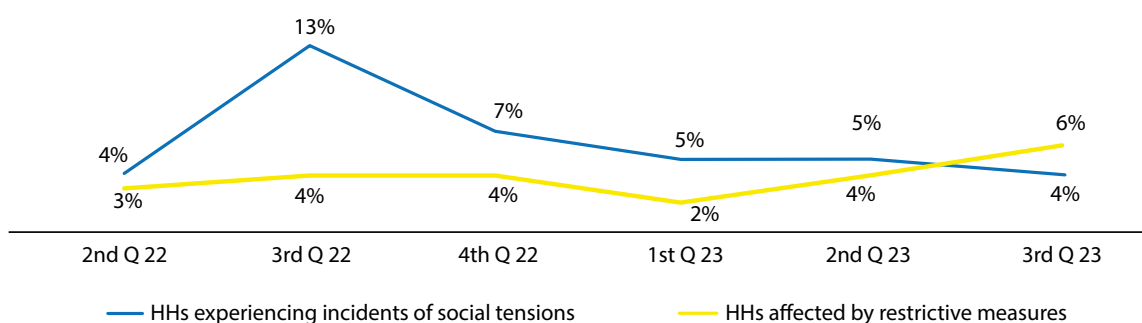
Social Tensions and Restrictive Measures



We reject being subjected to daily humiliation through violence for no justified reasons; we are human beings and have been living in this village for years!

- Syrian Refugee, Southern Lebanon

- The protection space for displaced Syrians has been severely impacted by the Cabinet of Ministers decision released on 11th September 2023. This was followed by several circulars issued by the Ministry of Interior (MoIM) encouraging municipalities to report suspicious activities and gatherings among displaced Syrians, to conduct surveys on those living in their jurisdiction, address infrastructure violations in residential areas and close shops operated by Syrians lacking work permits.
- This has resulted in a rise in the implementation of restrictive measures by municipalities throughout the country. The majority of these are related to restrictions of movement, discriminative taxes and fees, confiscation of documents, threats of eviction, curfews, and instructions to registration with municipalities. These developments are increasing the risk for refugees of suffering harassment and being affected by raids, detention, and deportations, and limiting even more their freedom of movement. During Q3, hundreds of raids conducted by Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) across the country resulted in the confiscation of solar panels, Wi-fi routers, and other power-related items, leaving refugees without electricity and internet connectivity. As an example, at least 142 raids were reported to take place in the Bekaa region during the month of September, specifically targeting informal tented settlements (ITS) and confiscating a widespread variety of electronic items.
- Curfews on refugees have been also reported across all regions, imposed mostly at night. Some municipalities have also restricted refugee families from having visitors and limited new rental agreements for newcomers. Additionally, the Protection Monitoring findings show an increase on the stringency of the curfews, with 78% of affected households reporting strictly enforced curfews in September, compared to an average of 57% in the previous two months.
- Incidents regarding verbal and physical harassment against refugees are reported in all areas, in line with the rising anti-refugee rhetoric: 30% of families affected by restrictive measures have experienced some verbal abuse during the quarter. This is also linked to the observed decrease in the support of the host community. Only 3.5% of HH reported to receive support in August and September, compared to a 6% average in the rest of 2023 and 13% in 2021. However, and despite the increasingly restrictive environment, social tensions reports remain low and consistent with previous quarters.
- While the findings of the PM survey do not show a significant increase in the verbal harassment targeting refugees, several key informants reported to experience challenging confrontations with the host community. Despite the overall low trends in the protection survey across the country, qualitative reports show a concerning upward trend of restrictive measures specifically targeting refugees and an increasingly negative public discourse against them. UNHCR continues to monitor protection risks for Syrian refugees, instances of disputes with the host community leading to harassment – which are often unreported – and incidents related to evictions, raids and restrictions across Lebanon.



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