

Protection Monitoring Survey Findings

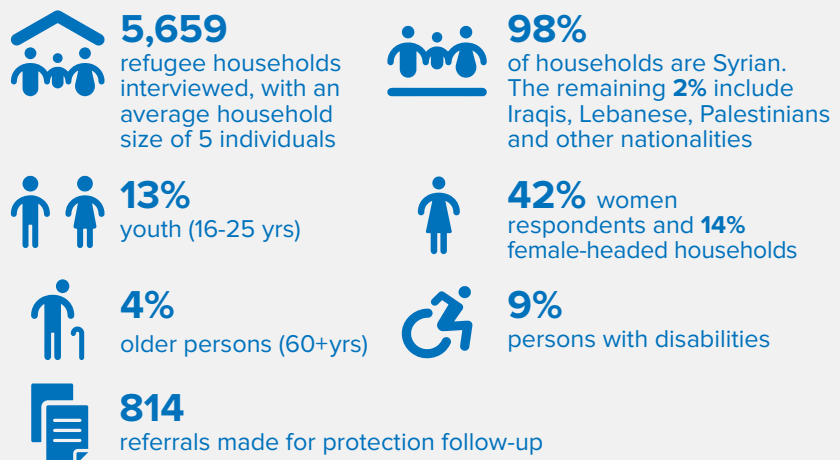
Lebanon – 4th Quarter 2023



Key highlights

- The **protection landscape** during the fourth quarter of 2023 has been marked by the **eruption of the hostilities** in Southern Lebanon, prompting the displacement of thousands of Lebanese and secondary displacement of refugees residing in conflict-affected areas and/or in proximity to the border.
- Restrictive measures against Syrian refugees **significantly increased** throughout 2023 following MoIM circulars and local directives, pre-dating hostilities in the South and impacting refugee access to labour, rent and movement. Total measures monitored by UNHCR in 2023 (>1,000) is more than double those recorded in 2022 (~400).
- Escalation of **hostilities in the South** has further **catysed restrictive measures and tension** against Syrian refugees countrywide, including in the South with at least 26 municipalities applying security-related measures since October 2023. Limitations on movements (mostly night curfews), requirements related to lease contracts, legal residency and imposition of new taxes were cited among the main restrictive measures. The highest number of restrictive measures in Q4 was reported in BML, followed by Bekaa, the South and the North regions.
- **Access to food** and affordable **shelter** are the **top priorities** for Syrian refugees as has been expressed by nearly all respondents during the reporting period. Additionally, almost half of the respondents reported difficulties to **access health care services** and **purchase essential medicine** due to **financial constraints and loss of livelihoods**.
- A significant **increase in rental fees** has been observed since the second half of the year, leading to a heightened risk of evictions and even more limited shelter alternatives. The **levels of debt** cumulated by refugee households **continued to rise**, constituting one of the main coping mechanisms of refugees as they face increase in the cost of living and the challenging economic situation in Lebanon.
- The **average monthly income** of refugee households (22 million LBP) consistently falls below the Standard Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB), which reached 34 million LBP in Q4 for a family of five, highlighting the enduring financial precarity faced by these communities.

Key numbers October to December 2023¹



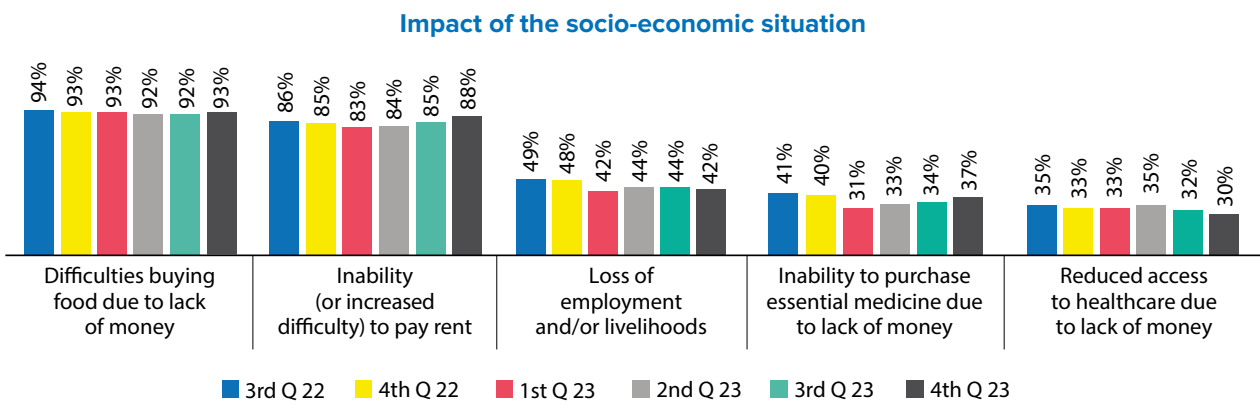
¹ UNHCR conducts protection monitoring surveys with refugee households together with partners SHEILD and INTERSOS on an ongoing basis to analyse trends in the protection environment and risks facing refugees. This survey is one component of UNHCR's overarching protection monitoring programme in Lebanon, 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 fourth quarter (October to December) 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

- The socio-economic situation of refugees in Q4 2023² remained similar to the previous quarter and may be characterized as continuously challenging with no prospects for improvement. The overwhelming majority of refugee households experience severe hardships, in particular when buying food (**93%**) and paying rent (**88%**). Challenges to access health care services and medicine continue to be reported, all caused by the poverty, loss of employment and limited livelihoods.

- Notably, since Q3 2022 the trends in key socio-economic indicators of refugee households have not considerably changed continuing to signal the overall substandard situation of Syrian refugees, the overwhelming majority of whom living below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (see chart 3 below). This development may also mean that the efforts undertaken by the Government of Lebanon and humanitarian community last year have been sufficient for slowing down the deterioration of the economic and social situation of refugees, but not for solving the problem. External factors such as geopolitical events and evolving hostilities along the southern border of Lebanon may contribute to the change of these trends in the course of 2024. Accordingly, careful monitoring and flexibility in adapting the response will be needed in order to take better-informed decisions, mitigate risk and increase efficiency in achieving objectives.



- The impact of the deteriorating economic situation presents variations across different regions. Loss of employment is mainly reported in the North and South regions, while reduced access to medicine and healthcare, accompanied by higher numbers of psychological distress due to the financial complications, are more present in the Bekaa.

- Rent-related issues have been reported across the country, indicating that many landlords were increasing rents or issuing eviction notices, frequently opting to lease their properties at elevated prices to Lebanese nationals who were displaced by the hostilities in the South. Furthermore, restrictive measures have exacerbated the situation, imposing limitations and fees on lease agreements for Syrian refugees.



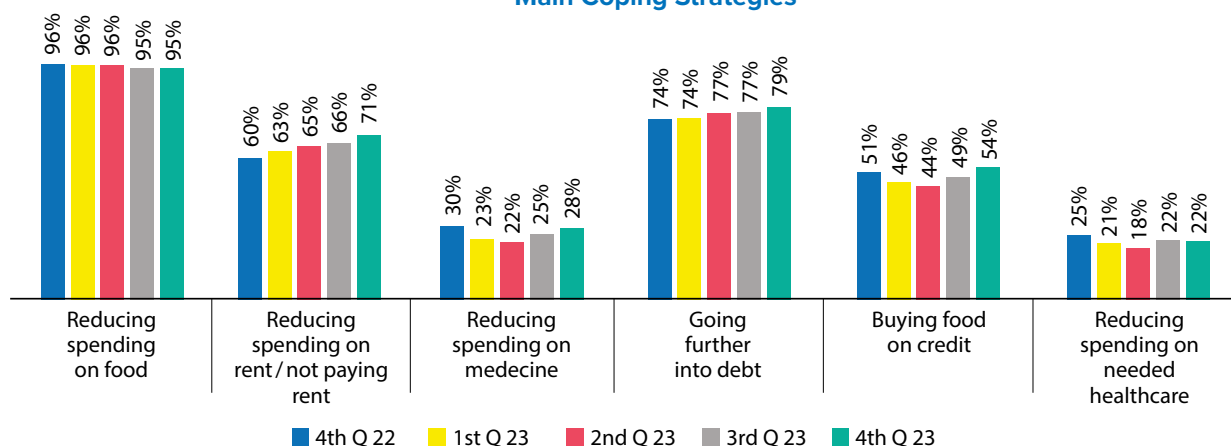
More people from the South have moved to the Bekaa and house rents have gone up, since Lebanese can afford to pay any rent that the landlords may request.

- Syrian refugee in Zahle district

² Minor discrepancies of 1-2 percentage points may exist between the figures in this report and those of previous versions due to a revision in counting methodology and data analysis. The most recent and updated data has been incorporated into this report to ensure accuracy.

- The impact of the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the country differs between female and male-led households in Q4 when it comes to healthcare and medicine acquisition. Female-led households continued in Q4 to be disproportionately affected by adverse economic situation compared to male-headed households, with a higher percentage reporting limited access to healthcare due to financial constraints. Access to healthcare has been limited due to economic reasons for **34%** female-led households, compared to **29%** male-headed households. In addition, there was a significant 6% increase in Q4 (**44%**) in the inability of female-led households to purchase essential medicine compared to the previous quarter. This underscores a worsening financial situation for this demographic group in comparison to male-headed households, **36%** of whom reported a similar inability to purchase essential medicine due to a lack of money.
- There were also significant variations in the access to healthcare services between families having at least one family member with disabilities (**43%**) as compared to families without (**29%**). Families with at least one member with disabilities face greater challenges in accessing healthcare services, indicating potential disparities in healthcare support and resources.
- This reveals the complex interplay of the socio-economic situation with intersectional dimensions such as gender and disabilities, highlighting the additional challenges faced by already vulnerable families. These findings also suggest a need for more targeted interventions and support measures to address the access to health care as well as economic vulnerabilities faced by female-led households and families with disabilities.
- Key informant interviews confirmed that in order to respond to these challenges there is an on-going and informal peer-to-peer support, by which many refugee households are borrowing money and buying medication from Syria, as well as sharing available medicines among themselves. For example, in BML, refugees in dire need of medication are facing difficulties covering healthcare, which compels them to resort to low-cost Primary Health Care Centres and opt for pharmacies as a substitute for traditional doctor visits, primarily due to the financial constraints involved.
- Moreover, accessibility challenges related to care services continue to be flagged by persons with disabilities (PwD). In addition to their financial constraints to access healthcare in general, **17%** report not having access to other required services such as nursing care, rehabilitation, physiotherapy and psychotherapy services, compared to **5%** at the beginning of 2023. Worth noting is the shelter type relation with those reporting to face accessibility challenges: **49%** of persons with specific needs (PwSN) living in non-residential dwelling³ reported to have no access to the necessary care they require, compared to **18%** in non-permanent⁴ and 16% in residential accommodation⁵.
- As indicated in chart 2 below, nearly every refugee household is resorting to reducing their food expenses and going further into debt, corresponding with an upward trend related to buying food on credit. Not paying (or only partial payment of) rent seems to have increased consistently since last year, growing to **71%** in Q4 2023 as compared to **60%** of the families in the same quarter of 2022. This is aligned with the trend of increases in rent fees.

Main Coping Strategies



³ Such as a factory, workshop, farm, active construction site, shop, agricultural/ engine/ pump room, warehouse, or school.

⁴ Such as a tent or prefabricated unit.

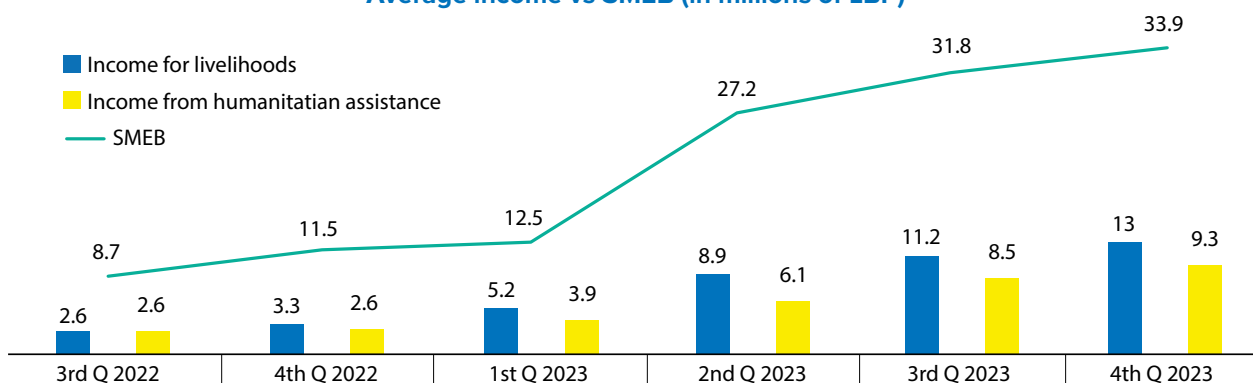
⁵ Apartment, house, concierge room in residential building, hotel room.

- Q4 showed some slow down regarding the growth of the cost of living in previous quarters. As reported by WFP, the cost of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) for a family of five remained steady at approximately **34 million LBP** in the final three months of the year, but has increased by **194%** when compared to the same period in 2022.

- The **average income** earned by refugee households in Q4 2023 amounted to **22,3 million LBP**, comprising 13 million from livelihoods and 9.3 million from humanitarian assistance. If compared with SMEB, the situation of refugees has relatively improved at the end of 2023: while in Q4 2022 the average income of refugees was **51,3%** of SMEB then in Q4 2023 they had 65,8% of SMEB. This development may be a result of the revaluation of the local currency and the dollarisation of the market.

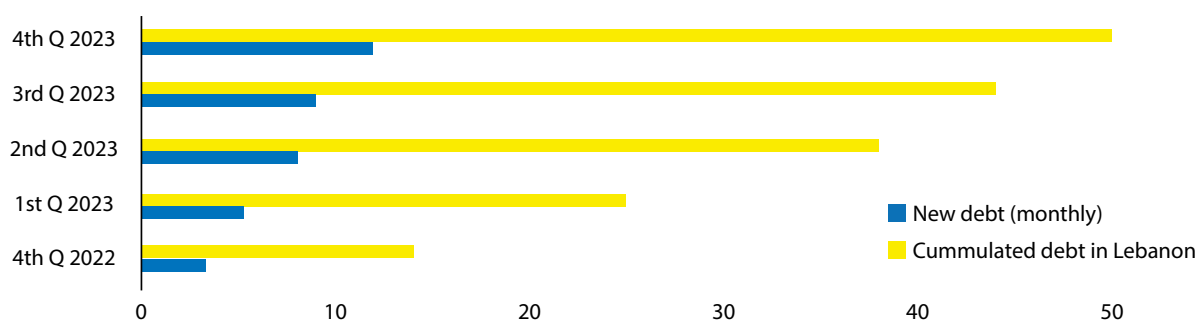
- Nevertheless, the severe economic challenges that refugee families were confronting in Q4 2023 remain as their income barely covers half of the essential SMEB. Raw affordability indicators⁶ show that **54%** of surveyed households ranked either at extreme concern or very low affordability.

Average income vs SMEB (in millions of LBP)



- Over the past year, the struggle to keep pace with these escalating costs is reflected in the staggering growth of debt among refugee households (see chart 4 below). In the fourth quarter of 2023, **the average household debt** soared to **50 million LBP**, indicating a consistent increase from the previous quarter (44 million LBP) and the same period last year (11 million LBP in Q4 2022).

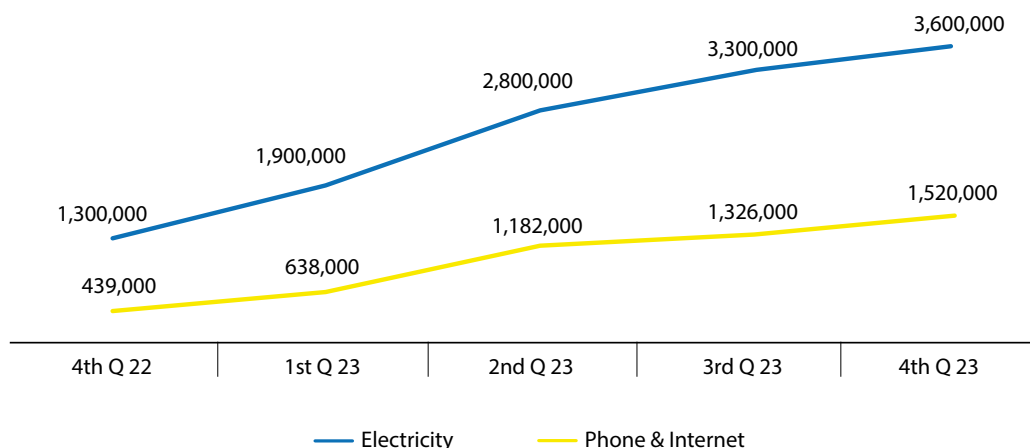
New and cumulated debts of refugee households (in millions of LBP)



- In line with the challenging cost of living, electricity expenses continued to increase in Q4, albeit at a slower rate compared to previous quarters of 2023. **79%** of refugee households reported the inability to afford their electrical expenses, which affects their ability to prepare their residences for the winter, limits the quality of their food preparations and challenges their access to communication, support networks and dignified shelter. Qualitative reports show that the high prices are forcing several households to share their generator memberships.

⁶ As per UNHCR analysis of Protection Monitoring data and internal raw affordability indicators.

Avg monthly HH spending on electricity, phone and internet (LBP)



Mental Health

- The current mental health situation among refugee households is marked by significant challenges, with financial hardship continuing to be the main reason of psychological distress, while the lack of legal residency has substantially increased as a cause of anxiety.
- Additional concerns of refugee households reported through key informant interviews include an overall apprehension linked to the situation in the South and the escalation of the conflict in areas close to the border. Worries extend to the absence of winter assistance, struggles to afford fuel or wood for heating, fear of rising rental fees, and the threat of evictions. Moreover, these families report serious concerns related to the imposition of restrictive measures and fear of raids and deportation mostly among Syrian male youth, who report that obtaining official civil status documents from Syria to formalize their legal status in Lebanon is significantly challenging.

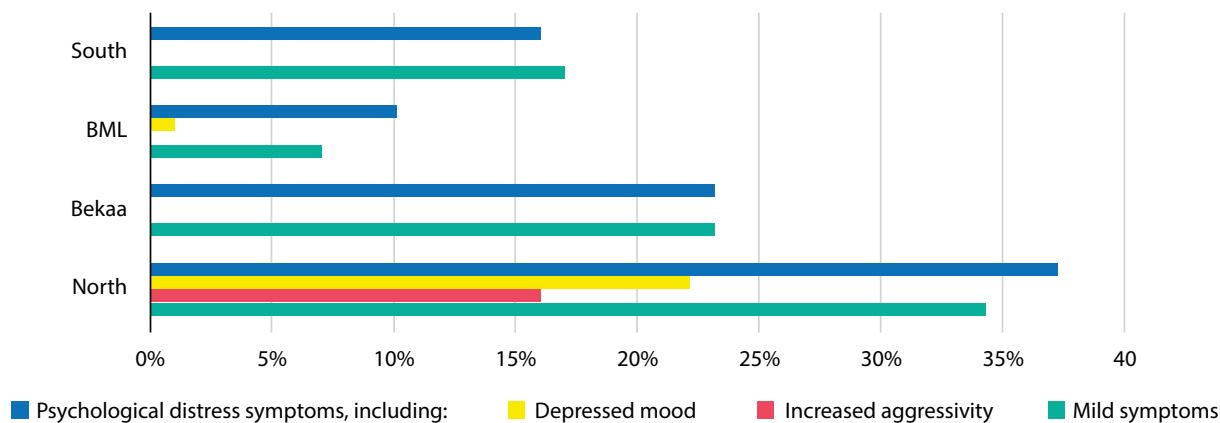


The security situation is taking a toll on the mental well-being of refugees and residents, particularly children, who are constantly fearful due to the sounds of bombs.

- Syrian refugee in Sour area

- A striking **94%** of respondents reported that their mental wellbeing has been adversely affected by the current economic situation. Personal problems were cited by **25%**, while tensions with the host community accounted for **5%** of the reported mental health issues.
- Notably, more female-headed households exhibit symptoms affecting their mental wellbeing compared to male-headed households (**28% vs. 21%**). This yet again underscores potential vulnerabilities and unique stressors experienced by women in refugee settings.
- The protection monitoring findings in Q4 highlighted regional disparities in the level of reported psychological distress, with the North presenting a particularly concerning situation, which could be linked to the poor socio-economic situation, food insecurity and limited job prospects in the region, especially in Akkar. In the North, **37%** of households reported psychological distress, surpassing other regions such as the Bekaa (**23%**), the South (**16%**), and BML (**10%**). The prevalence of symptoms in the North is primarily related to depression (**22%**), aggressivity against others (**16%**), which was not reported in other regions, and mild symptoms such as a lack of sleep, irritable mood, and loss of desire to socialize (**34%**).

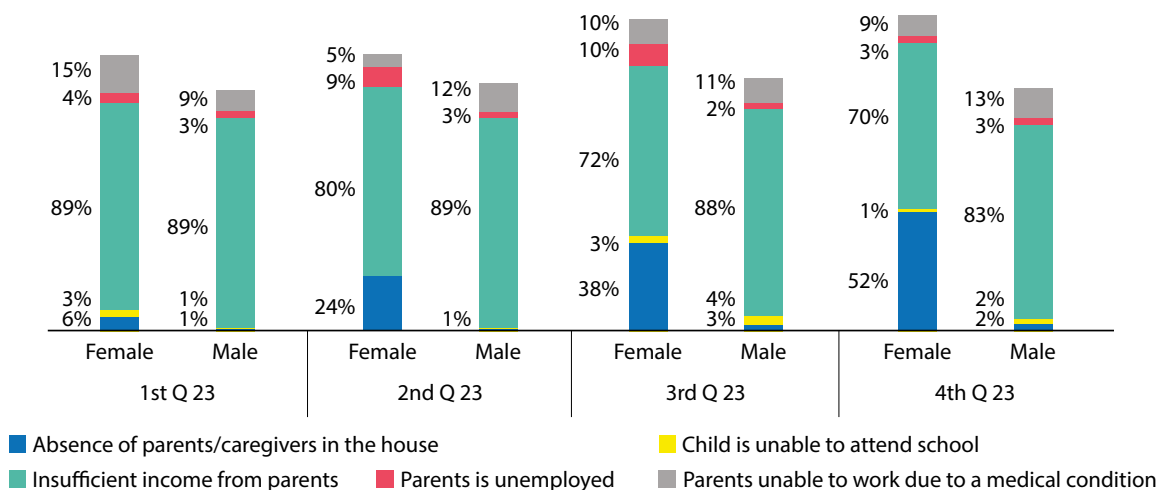
Symptoms of psychological distress per region



Education and child labour

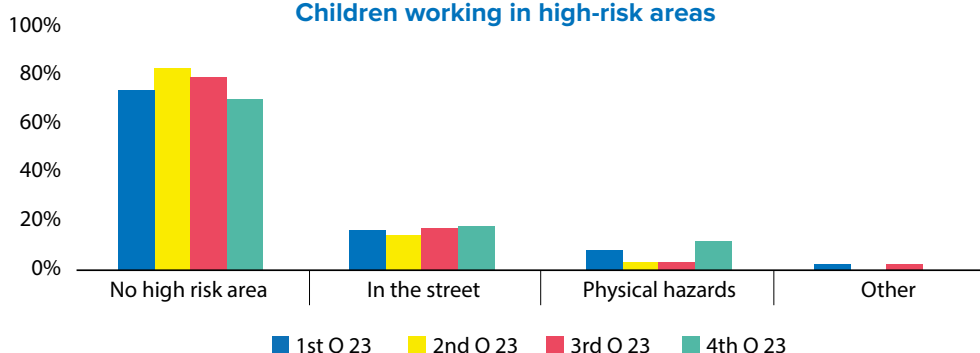
- Financial barriers emerge as a prominent obstacle also in relation to education, with increased indirect costs of education as well as higher fees at secondary level, forcing some refugee households to withdraw their children from school. Data extracted from key informant interviews report that this is mostly due to unavailability of didactic materials and the need of saving on transportation fees to cover other basic expenses, such as rental fees.
- The second shift, predominantly attended by refugee students, began in late November while the morning shift, mostly attended by Lebanese students, started in early October 2023. Additionally, the closure of several schools in Southern governorates as a preventive measure due to the hostilities in border areas indicate the pervasive impact of the on-going conflict on educational access. Between the two governorates in Southern Lebanon, more than 35 schools were closed due to the conflict for longer periods, from which 8 of them are second-shift schools, some of which began teaching online in December. Both the attendance and the number of closed schools fluctuates daily due to security concerns, while the online turnout to the courses is low due to limited internet access and device availability.
- Across the country, data underscores a concerning trend of increased school absences due to child labor. **80%** of families with a working child have reported that their children are not attending school, compared to the annual average of **69%** between Q4 2022 and Q3 2023. These figures are highly conservative estimates, given the known underreporting of child labor cases. Trends of reported child labour fluctuate between low figures such as an annual **5%** through Protection Monitoring and **7%** resulting from VasYR 2023 assessments, while the Child Protection Working Group identifies child labour as the main child protection risk requiring case management. However, high numbers of children engaged in child labour are confirmed by key informant interviews in all regions. For example, in just three municipalities in the North of Lebanon, more than one thousand kids were reported to be working during the month of December 2023.
- The analysis of collected protection data reveals two primary reasons for entering the labor force by children. First, the absence of at least one of the parents or caregivers in the household has increased to **15%** in Q4, compared to an average of **6%** during the rest of the year, suggesting a breakdown in family structures. Secondly, insufficient income, reported by **80%** of cases, underscores the economic hardships faced by refugee families. Limited job opportunities for adults are pushing children into the workforce to supplement family income, while the economic vulnerabilities faced by refugee families contribute to the difficult decision of withdrawing children from school to engage in labor.
- Gender disparities are also apparent, with higher rates of child labour among female-led households (**10%** in Q3 and **8%** in Q4) compared to **4%** of male-headed households (see chart 7). It is important to note that the reported reason to involve their children in labour is due to the absence of at least one parent/caregiver in the household for **52%** of female-led households and only **3%** of males. On the contrary, the majority of male-headed households with a working child (**83%**) is linked to insufficient income, while this is the case for **70%** female-led households.

Main reasons for child labour by gender of the head of household



The increase in hazardous jobs is also raising concerns regarding the safety and welfare of children. In quarter four, **12%** of reported cases of child labor indicated that these children are exposed to physical dangers, such as weapons, hazardous equipment, or machines, compared to an annual average of **5%**. Additionally, the types of work children are engaged in vary throughout the year, corresponding to seasonal employment trends. Common sectors where children are employed include shops, agriculture, street vending, and mechanics.

Children working in high-risk areas

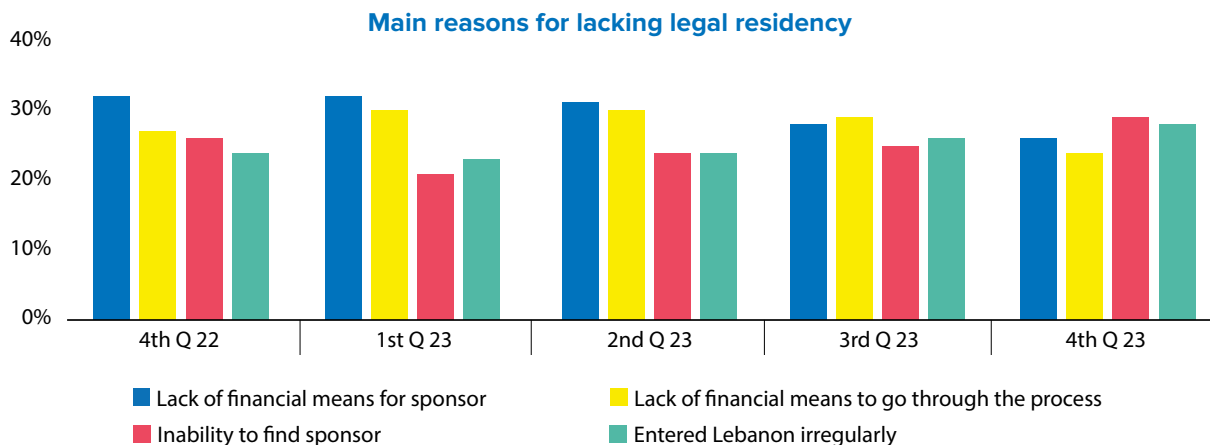


Legal residency

The situation regarding legal residency among Syrian refugees remained consistent in Q4 compared to previous quarters, with merely **15%** of households having legal residency for all members. There are some variations in regard to the regional distribution of these trends. The South is reported to be the region with more refugee households having all their members with legal residency throughout the year, a trend that has also been confirmed by 2023 VASyR findings.

However, many refugee families encounter challenges in obtaining or renewing residence permits due to the enforcement of restrictive measures. For instance, in many municipalities renewing a residence permit involves complexities such as a lease contract, coupled with a municipal fee exceeding \$100, and the necessity of obtaining a statement of residence from the Mukhtar.

Financial challenges persist as a primary cause for lacking legal residency. Simultaneously, reports of an inability to find a sponsor and the fact of irregular entry into Lebanon as reasons for lacking legal residency have increased in Q4. Findings from Protection Monitoring reports indicate a significant increase in the number of individuals seeking to renew their residency based on sponsorship category in 2023, which has been also confirmed by VASyR 2023 data. This surge is primarily attributed to refugees seeking avenues to avoid arrest and deportation, which were rigorously enforced by the authorities in 2023. On irregular entry, this shift does not correlate with a surge in new arrivals but rather underscores the legal difficulties in place since 2019 to obtain residency permits in case of an irregular entry in the country.



- Consultations with refugees indicate that the challenges related to obtaining legal residency in Lebanon have an adverse effect on their well-being. Escalating psychological distress stems from the uncertainty surrounding residency status, with **12%** in Q4 reporting psychological/anxiety issues due to the lack of legal residency, compared to **3%** at the beginning of the year. Limitations on movement, restricted access to work opportunities, and diminished social interactions further compound the hardships faced by the refugee population without legal residency.

Rent and Evictions

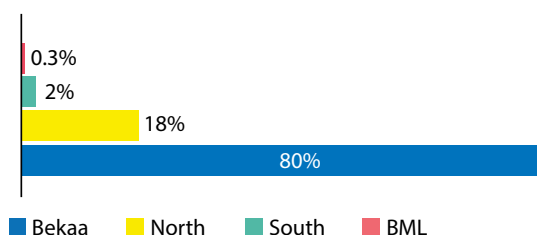


We are obliged to share accommodation in order to pay rent fees.

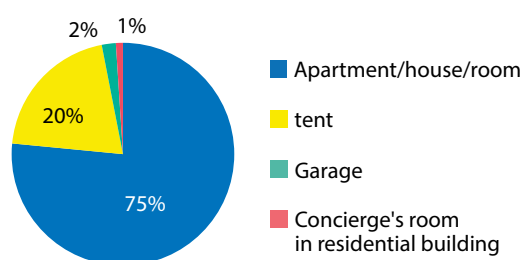
- A Syrian refugee in Baabda

- In the fourth quarter of the year, refugee households faced increased difficulties to pay rent, rising sharply from an annual average of **84%** to **88%**. This increase is attributed to a nationwide trend of escalating rental fees, compelling refugee families to accumulate further debts and increasingly move to shared accommodation with friends and relatives to avoid eviction.
- Challenges to meet rental costs are present across all types of housing and shelter categories. The distribution of housing types during Q4 (see chart 10) mirrors historical trends, with **75%** of refugee families residing in apartments, houses, or rooms, **20%** in tents (ITS), and smaller percentages in alternative settings such as garages and concierge's rooms.

Regional distribution of ITS

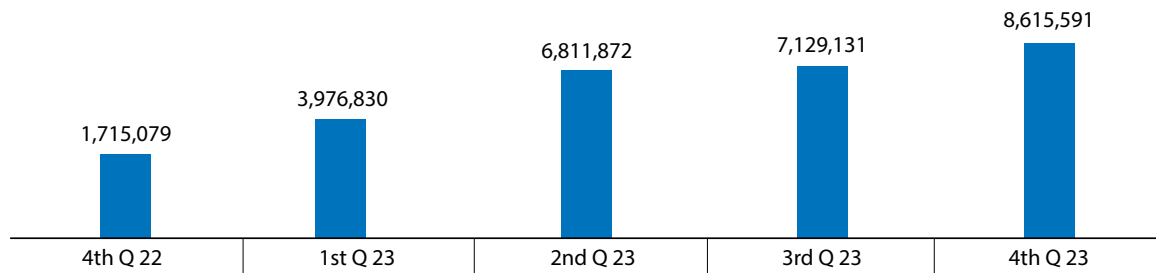


Housing conditions per type



- Importantly, when it comes to accommodation in ITSs, a considerable share of respondents in Q4 were living in the Bekaa (**80%**), followed by North with **18%**, South with **2%**, and a mere **0.3%** in Mount Lebanon (chart 11).
- The collected data indicates that rental costs continued to exponentially raise in Q4, reaching a **400%** increase if compared to the same quarter in 2022 paired with the high costs of electricity. As stated above, part of this rental increase was related to the effects of population displacement from the South.

Average monthly household rent (LBP)



- The Bekaa and South reported that at least 700 individuals have been affected by collective evictions during the reporting period. The primary cause behind these evictions, comprising **63%** of cases, is landlords reclaiming their properties for alternative or personal use. Additionally, **15%** of collective evictions are attributed to refugees' inability to pay rent. Over 2,700 individuals received eviction notices during the final quarter of the year, while reports from key informants on restrictive measures relating to rental agreements, combined with municipal prohibition on using tents for housing in the Bekaa, may result in further evictions. This surge illustrates the extreme difficulties of refugees to secure stable housing arrangements.

Social Tensions and Restrictive Measures

- In the final quarter of 2023, the protection landscape has been significantly shaped by two major events. Firstly, the persistent hostilities in the South have led to a displacement of over 70 thousand individuals, including mostly Lebanese nationals but also some Syrian refugees, and individuals of various nationalities. Simultaneously, the period was marked by restrictive measures against Syrian refugees being more consistently implemented following the Cabinet of Ministers decisions issued in September 2023.
- The beginning of quarter four saw a series of restrictive measures being introduced by municipalities, which included movement restrictions, discriminative taxes and fees, confiscation of documents, threats of eviction, curfews and instructions to register with municipalities. This period also saw a continuation of reports on Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) raids resulting in deportations, with **over 60 incidents** documented in the Bekaa region during October and November. Furthermore, informal tented settlements faced dismantlement following these raids, exacerbating the challenges faced by vulnerable populations. As stated by a Syrian refugee during an interview:

“My wife and children are staying with relatives in an ITS camp in the South. I initially sent them to Bekaa but upon learning about Lebanese army raids in Bekaa, I brought them back to the south, fearing deportation to Syria. Unfortunately, we lack the funds to move outside the South and have been struggling to access livelihood opportunities for over a month”.

- Throughout the entire year, over a thousand restrictive measures have been implemented nationwide, with **81%** affected refugee households reporting to have limited their movements in specific times and/or areas, to avoid complications. The Bekaa experienced the highest concentration of these measures throughout 2023, followed by BML, the South, and the North. Notably, more than half of the restrictive measures took the form of raids, with the majority of incidents being carried out by LAF/LAFI, targeting the places of residence of Syrian refugees across Lebanon. These actions have resulted in the apprehension of at least 2,000 individuals, with 47% of them subsequently deported.
- In Q4, **89 raids** (16% of the annual total) were recorded, resulting in the apprehension of at least 300 individuals, with 41% of them subsequently deported. All raids were conducted by LAF/LAFI, often accompanied by the demolition of tents and confiscation of properties such as shelter kits, electronics and motorcycles.
- Other restrictive measures included the establishment of checkpoints, introduction of new taxes and fees targeting refugees, restrictions on rental of accommodation to Syrians, imposition of municipal IDs and legal residency requirements specifically targeting forcibly displaced people, including Syrian refugees, also establishing bans on the admission of new Syrian refugees in certain municipalities.

- However, fewer new restrictive measures were observed during December 2023 – with the exception of curfews – probably because of the holiday season. During Q4, curfews rose from a stable **3%** of respondents affected to **8%**, with a significant, **72%** of those curfews reported to be strictly enforced and linked to penalties for breaches.
- In the South, an upward and fluctuating trend regarding curfews can be observed since the beginning of the conflict in October 2023: the average from the beginning of the year until September was at approximately **8%**, a figure that doubled to **16%** in October, peaking at **26%** in November, and subsequently decreasing to **14%** in December. At the same time, a dramatic decrease in the support from the host community to refugees in the South was observed, from an annual average of **10%** to **1.6%** between October and December 2023.
- Since 7 October 2023, at least **26 municipalities** in the South have introduced security-related measures restricting admission of Syrian refugees and/or imposing curfews, though their application has been irregular:

Ex. Bazourieh municipality Website (October 2023)

“To Syrian brothers and sisters residing in Al-Bazourieh, please adhere to the following, under threat of legal action against violators: A curfew after 9:00pm, regardless of circumstances; Riding on a motorcycle with more than two people is prohibited; Receiving any person or family of newly displaced individuals, regardless of their relationship or from any other region, is prohibited.”

Ex. Haret Saida (January 2024)

Syrian refugees are not allowed to rent a house unless they have a valid legal residency.

- Direct statements collected in November from refugees confirm that ***“The situation is unbearable; the curfew is strictly enforced after 5:00 P.M. but all we hear is hate speech from the Lebanese around us all day which has restricted our movement, we are stuck in this situation with no solution”*** (A Syrian refugee residing in Bint Jbeil district).
- Even though it is known that several disputes and incidents between host community and refugees occur as a result of the current negative rhetoric, social tensions across Lebanon have been reported only by **5%** of refugee households. The cause of **70%** of these incidents was identified as discrimination against refugees, while others were due to disputes between refugees and host community, competition over jobs or perceived differences in aid distribution between Syrians and Lebanese. Qualitative reports suggest that the relations between host and refugee communities vary depending on the region, while instances of negative social media posts towards Syrian refugees, verbal harassment and various confrontations were reported across the whole country.
- In relation to the impact of the hostilities in the South on refugees, UNHCR continues to monitor and respond to the protection risks of those remaining in conflict-affected areas and those that have been secondarily displaced elsewhere in Lebanon. Reports indicate that the majority of displaced families are being hosted by relatives or renting different types of accommodation, while the causes of displacement are mostly related to having experienced bombardment near their homes, safety of their shelter or precautionary movement.



Ironically, after we ran away from the bombing, there was some bombing yesterday not very far from where we are staying. We were afraid last evening and wondered if the bombing continued where we are currently residing then where could we run away again?

- Syrian refugee woman in Saida district

- Amid unequitable practices, the most vulnerable refugees may be dissuaded from seeking humanitarian assistance, with a cumulative negative impact for Syrian refugees on freedom of movement, right to liberty, access to livelihoods and shelter, and enjoyment of basic services—thereby increasing vulnerability and hindering the ability to support all communities in Lebanon in the future.

For more information please contact: Lara Ramos Yanez, ramosyan@unhcr.org