



## PROTECTION MONITORING

# Situation of Forcibly Displaced Syrians in Lebanon

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2024

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## Methodology

- Since 2019, UNHCR -in collaboration with different partners- undertakes monthly Protection Monitoring (PM) surveys with the Syrian refugee community residing in all regions of Lebanon. As of January 2024, the Protection Monitoring activity is implemented in partnership with INTERSOS through different data collection tools, including interviews with refugee households and key informants. The PM surveys seek to engage the Syrian refugee population of Lebanon in generating information concerning their situation, support the analysis of trends in the protection environment and assessment of protection gaps and inform effective response to the needs of refugees. It also contributes to the evidence-based advocacy and programming of UNHCR and its partners under the framework of the Lebanon Response Plan.
- The present report is one component of the UNHCR's overarching Protection Monitoring programme in Lebanon, which complements other protection activities conducted by UNHCR and partners. The sampling of households and findings presented in this report are representative both at the national and regional levels. In analysing the protection risks faced by the population, the report integrates UNHCR's age, gender and diversity approach to identify vulnerabilities within the refugee community, thereby informing UNHCR and partners programmatic responses. When specific needs for services, assistance, or information arise during PM interviews, the individuals are referred by UNHCR's monitoring partner to the appropriate specialised services.
- The methodology used in the Protection Monitoring report has recently undergone a revision, transitioning towards a more analytical approach that examines the protection situation of forcibly displaced Syrians in Lebanon from multiple primary reporting sources. The core of the report remains based on data from PM surveys. Additionally, to enhance analysis, a targeted desk review of other existing protection initiatives and surveys was undertaken. This included a variety of thematic protection reports prepared by UNHCR or partner organizations.
- This report provides a summary of the Protection Monitoring findings from all regions of Lebanon in the first quarter (January to March) of 2024, with the information collected using Kobo Toolbox.

## Key highlights

- ▶ The continuation of the hostilities in border areas, combined with restrictive measures, an increasingly challenging socioeconomic situation and a reduction in humanitarian funding and assistance marks the **protection landscape for Syrian refugee households** during the first quarter of 2024.
- ▶ The **escalation of the conflict** in the South and its expansion to other areas such as the Bekaa, continues to impact both host and refugee communities, triggering displacement and expanding the needs, vulnerabilities, and protection risks faced by the displaced and those remaining in conflict-affected areas. This is paired with the disruption of education and healthcare services in some of these locations, as well as a reduction in livelihoods opportunities, damage to infrastructure and casualties among civilian populations.
- ▶ Compared to the peak in new administrative measures targeting Syrian refugees observed in the last quarter of 2023, the levels of new initiatives announced in Q1 2024 remained low. However, many of the initiatives remain in place affecting increasing numbers of refugees in the country. These measures include limitations on movements and/or curfews – mostly reported in the South – rental restrictions, a significant increase in the legal fees applicable for civil documentation and residency and introduction of new or increased municipal fees, which have been accompanied by a rise in negative rhetoric.
- ▶ As per the socioeconomic situation, PM results show a **worsening** in the already challenging situation regarding **affordability of basic needs**. Nearly all refugee households – 98% and 87% respectively – have reported inability to afford food and rent, a significant increase from previous quarters. **Access to healthcare** also rises as a challenge, with more families adopting alternative methods to cover their medical needs and half of them reporting to be financially incapable of accessing health services.
- ▶ The **average income** of refugee households has decreased by 15%, from 22 million LBP in Q4 2023 to 18.6 million LBP (208 USD) in Q1 2024. This level of income comprises a half of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket as reported by WFP in February 2024, i.e., 36.4 million LBP (403 USD).
- ▶ **Food security** emerges as a pressing concern during Q1 2024, with an overwhelming **98%** of respondents struggling to purchase food. Refugee households are increasingly relying on **purchasing food on credit**, leading to a rise of their cumulative debt. In the first quarter of 2024, 88% of families reported using this coping mechanism, compared to a stable trend of approximately 76% in previous quarters.

## Summary figures from Protection Monitoring surveys Jan-Mar 2024



**4,668**

refugee households interviewed, with an average household size of 5 individuals



**41%** women respondents and **11%** female-led households



**13%** youth (16-25 yrs)



**12%** persons with disabilities



**5%** older persons (60+yrs)



**176** referrals made for protection follow-up

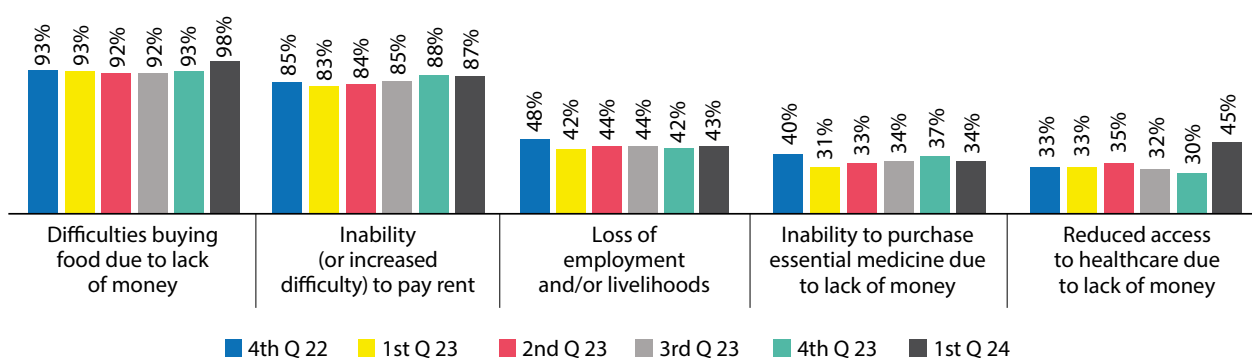
## Operational context

- Throughout the first quarter of 2024, Lebanon has been witnessing various security, social, economic, and political challenges impacting the situation and protection environment of Syrian refugees residing in the country.
- Since the start of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023, the ongoing hostilities in Lebanese border areas have had profound repercussions for both refugees and host communities. As of late March 2024, daily exchange of fire continued to escalate, moving further northward into Lebanon (including strikes in Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel), resulting in a number of civilian deaths, damaging residential areas, public infrastructure and agricultural fields, and displacing over 93,000 people (as per IOM DTM), including Syrian refugees.
- The hostilities have worsened protection vulnerabilities related to livelihoods, access to food, health, shelter and education of Syrian refugees. The internal displacement of refugees is complemented by pendular movements between various governorates as well as some returns to conflict-affected areas, following economic, legal and social hardships in the locations of displacement, as reported by refugees. Among those remaining displaced, hope persists to return to areas and homes of origin once conflict subsides. Yet, there is concern about revitalizing agricultural land and homes damaged by explosions and, for some, contaminated by the use of phosphorous. Displaced Syrians raise additional concerns about ability to access their areas of prior residence, amid local restrictions and tensions.
- Most collective centers are hosting internally displaced Lebanese communities, while the refugees fleeing the hostilities tend to rely on support networks, being hosted by friends or relatives, or rental units. An estimated 25,000 children are affected by the closure of 72 public and private schools in the Southern governorates, while six primary healthcare centers have been closed.
- This is combined with a range of administrative measures imposed on Syrian refugees, including movement restrictions, raids, new taxes, strict registration/legal requirements, rental restrictions and imposition of municipal IDs. Fear of arrest and deportation are on the rise among refugees who inform that they restrict the daily movements and stay indoor to avoid.
- Lastly, the economic context deteriorated further, with increasing living costs, rental fees and more families reporting not being able to afford basic needs such as food. The average income reported by refugees is almost the same as the quantity needed to cover rent and basic household-related costs, and therefore does not suffice to cover food, healthcare or any other needs. While the currency rate in the black market has been relatively stable in the last months, daily costs and rental fees were required to be paid in USD, increasing the financial burden on Syrian households. As per the challenging economic situation, onward movements have increased notably since the beginning of the year and the funding for humanitarian assistance has been heavily reduced, which may expose forcibly displaced communities to additional vulnerabilities.

## Impact of the socio-economic situation & access to services

- As per the information received in the consultations conducted through UNHCR’s PM programme, the **protection situation** for those forcibly displaced in Lebanon **continues to deteriorate** amidst the country’s dire economic crisis. Syrian refugee households endure severe socio-economic challenges that impede their ability to meet basic needs, access essential services, together with an overall worsening of the public discourse and restrictive measures against them.
- UNHCR’s engagement with refugee communities in the first quarter confirmed these findings: the **inability to secure basic needs due to financial challenges and the discontinuation of assistance** were voiced as primary concerns by the refugees. For instance, many refugee families in the North resorted to burning waste – particularly plastic – as a method of heating throughout the winter months. The escalation in prices and the struggle to find employment are among the factors compelling refugees to contemplate relocating to a third country.
- **Food security** emerges as a pressing concern during Q1 2024, with an overwhelming **98%** of respondents struggling to purchase food. This signifies an increase from previous quarters, which remained relatively stable between 92-93%. As reported by key informants in BML, many refugee families are mainly relying on food assistance and buying groceries on credit from supermarkets to overcome this challenge.
- Such hardship is complemented by almost **half of surveyed households (43%) experiencing loss of employment, and 87% unable to pay rent**, which exacerbates their financial precarity. In Nabatiyeh, certain families find themselves in a position where they must trade their assistance cards to cover rent or acquire other essentials. Owing to mounting debts, it becomes more and more common for refugees to have their documents retained by landlords or grocery store owners, as reported by Outreach Volunteers (OVs).
- As per livelihoods opportunities, key informants highlighted that refugees face difficulties in finding jobs due to the tense relationship with the Lebanese community in some areas, while some reported that many employers are prioritizing Lebanese applicants over Syrians.

**Chart 1. Impact of the socio-economic situation in refugee households as per Protection Monitoring surveys**



- In the Southern governorates, the economic situation of Syrian refugees has further deteriorated since the beginning of the conflict in October 2023. Loss of employment has primarily resulted from the disruption of economic activities along the borders due to insecurity, especially in relation to agriculture and construction. As per the findings of the Protection Assessments conducted by UNHCR with Syrians residing in the South in February 2024, food security is perceived as the main concern, while healthcare and shelter are highly prioritized. Overall, the majority of assessed households (83.7%) also reported a loss of livelihoods and increased prices on rent and commodities that exacerbate their already challenging financial situation, and negatively impact their psychological wellbeing.



**We decrease our food consumption so we can pay the rent and avoid being evicted.**

- Syrian refugee residing in Saida district

- **Access to healthcare** presents another critical challenge – financial constraints to access health service providers increased from **32%** in Q2 2023 to **45%** in Q1 2024 as per PM surveys. Throughout all regions, refugees have reported their inability to cover healthcare related costs and/ or purchase medication. This situation has compelled refugees living in the North to avoid visiting doctors and instead seek out alternative medicine or even visit Syria for medical treatment. In Akkar, it has been reported that refugees are mortgaging their assistance cards in return for a loan, to cover their share of hospital fees or to buy medicines. In BML, Syrian refugees who are unable to secure critical medical treatment for their families are often forced to buy medication on credit from pharmacies.
- For refugees residing in the South, accessing healthcare has become even more problematic since, in addition to the shortage of funds, the availability of healthcare services has also significantly diminished following the closure of six primary healthcare centres (PHCC) in Bent Jbeil and Marjeoun. As was underscored by the World Health Organization, the escalation of violence has exacerbated the difficulties in accessing healthcare in Lebanon<sup>1</sup>.
- Across all locations in Lebanon, it was reported that many PHCCs are experiencing shortage of specific medications, such as for cancer, epilepsy, diabetes and other chronic diseases. As a result, some refugees attempt to buy medicines from Syria or obtain medical advice or consultation from Syrian doctors. In the case of required surgeries, the Syrian community works together to collect the amount of money to cover the associated expenses.

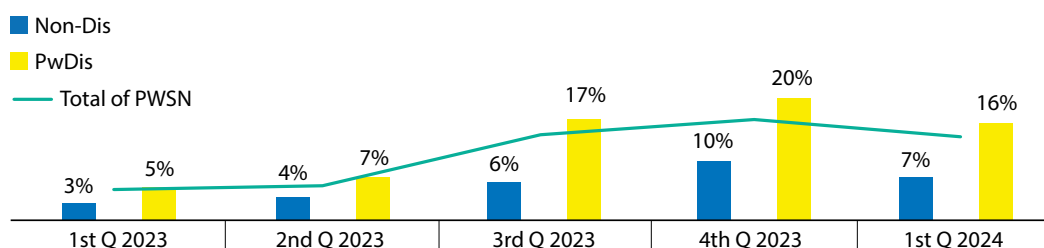


**Our main problem is providing medication and healthcare for our children. We are not able to afford it, and PHCs do not always provide the required services.**

- Syrian refugee residing in El Chouf district

- As illustrated in Chart 2 below, issues regarding access to specialized services have been particularly reported by families with persons with disabilities (PWD), a figure that has been on the rise since the beginning of 2023. Out of those with specific needs, **16%** of PWD report difficulties to access their required services, while this challenge is reported by **7%** of PWSN that do not have disabilities. These challenges are mainly related to difficulties in accessing home-based care and rehabilitation services, indicating a growing gap in essential healthcare provision.

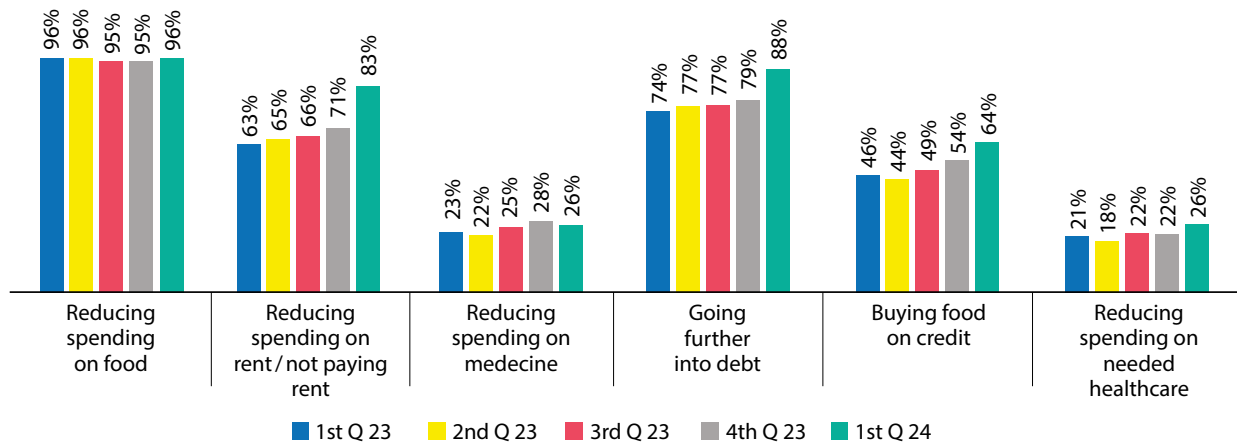
**Chart 2. Persons with specific needs (PWSN) without access to specialized services**



<sup>1</sup> Lebanon: Flash Update # 15. Escalation of hostilities in South Lebanon, OCHA April 5d 2024. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-flash-update-15-escalation-hostilities-south-lebanon-03-april-2024>

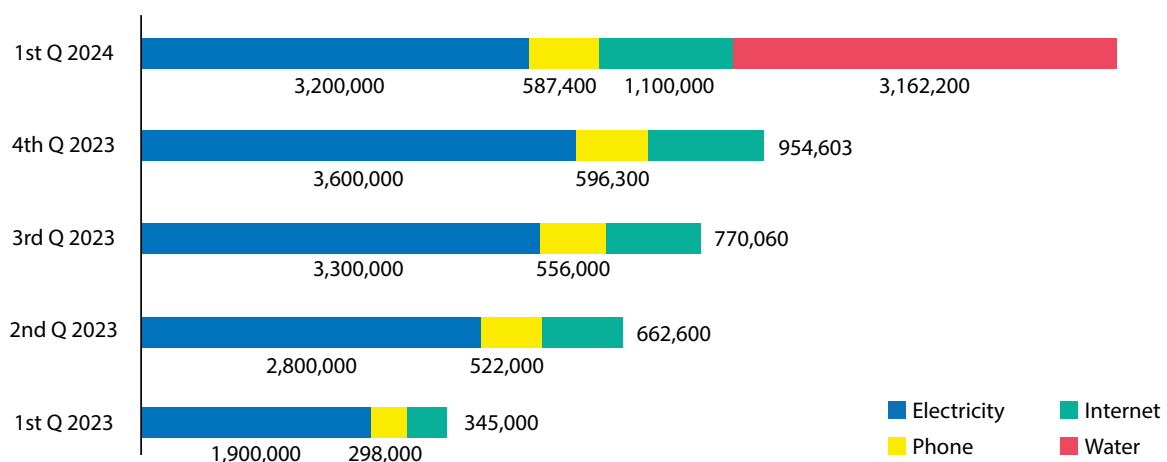
- In response to such economic hardships, many refugees rely on pharmacies to receive healthcare services due to the high fees of other health service providers. Moreover, the vast majority of households (**96%**, as per the PM surveys) have resorted to reducing their expenditures on food and **83%** on rent, while **88%** have had to increase their debt levels to cover basic necessities and cope with escalating living costs. Despite these adversities, increased support from family members reported by the majority of respondents underscores the crucial role of informal support networks in mitigating the impact of the crisis.

**Chart 3. Main coping mechanisms to respond to the economic situation**



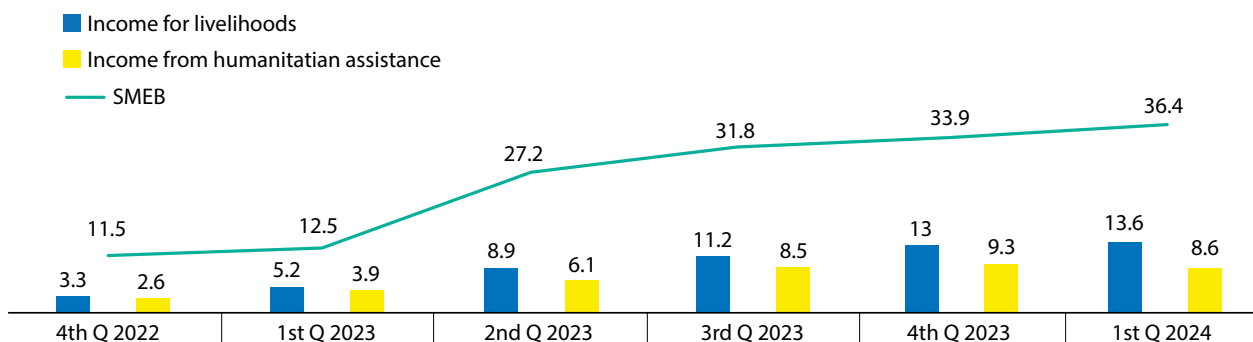
- Financial constraints extend beyond these challenges and include other essential services and utilities. A significant proportion of respondents find themselves unable to afford electricity fees (**80%**), phone bills (**91%**), and internet bills (**89%**). Transportation expenses also emerge as a significant barrier, with 14% of households unable to access crucial services or reach essential locations, particularly impacting access to healthcare facilities. The affordability of electricity expenses is particularly alarming in Mount Lebanon and Beirut, with **91%** of households reporting to not be able to pay for them, followed by South (**82%**), Bekaa at **80%** and North at **64%** during Q1. As per Chart 4 below, the monthly costs of electricity, phone, internet and water for refugee families reached an average of 8 million LBP in Q1 2024.

**Chart 4. Average monthly spendings of refugee households on electricity, phone, internet and water (LBP)**



- The Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB)<sup>2</sup> reported by WFP, in February 2024 reached 36.4 million LBP, approximately 403 USD for a family of five, a continued increase, although at a slower rate than in previous months<sup>3</sup>.
- The average income of refugee households in Lebanon earned during Q1 2024 amounted to 18.6 million LBP (roughly 208 USD), a reduction from last quarter (22 million LBP). This means their income, including from humanitarian assistance, barely covers half of the SMEB, even with the inclusion of humanitarian assistance, while taking part in a dollarized economy where **90%** of refugee households report to pay their rent in USD. Raw affordability indicators<sup>4</sup> show that **63%** of surveyed households ranked either at extreme concern or very low affordability.

**Chart 5. Average income vs SMEB (in millions of LBP)**



- During the first quarter of 2024, Syrian refugee households have reported a **decrease in income from humanitarian cash assistance**. Unlike previous quarters where this income, albeit low, had been gradually increasing in parallel with rising prices and the cost of living, this quarter marks the first decline. This downturn can be attributed to the reduction in funding for humanitarian support observed since late 2023 that affected several agencies, including UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations. Further cuts may expose forcibly displaced households to additional vulnerabilities, even higher levels of poverty, and increased protection risks<sup>5</sup>.



**Our main concern is that humanitarian aid has been cut for many households, which worsens the living situation.” “The aid provided by UNHCR and WFP stopped at the end of 2023, things are much harder for us.**

- Two Syrian refugees residing in El Meten district

- In addition to the decreasing humanitarian assistance, refugee households residing in the southern governorates reported challenges to access humanitarian assistance in this region. According to the UNHCR protection survey conducted in February 2024, only a small fraction (**4.5%**) of respondents reported receiving external assistance to cope with the emergency situation caused by the hostilities at the border. The inability to secure basic needs due to financial challenges and the discontinuation of humanitarian assistance were also flagged by UNHCR outreach volunteers during the first quarter of 2024.

<sup>2</sup> The SMEB is considered as the “minimum amount required to maintain existence and cover life-saving needs. Households with economic capacity below the SMEB are likely unable to access the minimum required to survive” as stated by WFP in Lebanon Food Security & Agriculture Sector, North FSASWG, Meeting 26 March 2024, available at [https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/FSAS-WG-North\\_26March2024.pdf](https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/FSAS-WG-North_26March2024.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> As per UNHCR analysis of Protection Monitoring data and internal raw affordability indicators.

<sup>5</sup> Impact of the Funding Cuts on Operations in the MENA Region, 9 May 2024, available at <https://reporting.unhcr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa-impact-funding-cuts-operations>



- Due to escalating financial challenges, the first quarter of 2024 witnessed an increase in the use of **debt as a coping mechanism** among surveyed refugee households (**88%**). This is notably higher than the relatively stable trend observed last year, which averaged around **76%** as indicated in Chart 3 above.

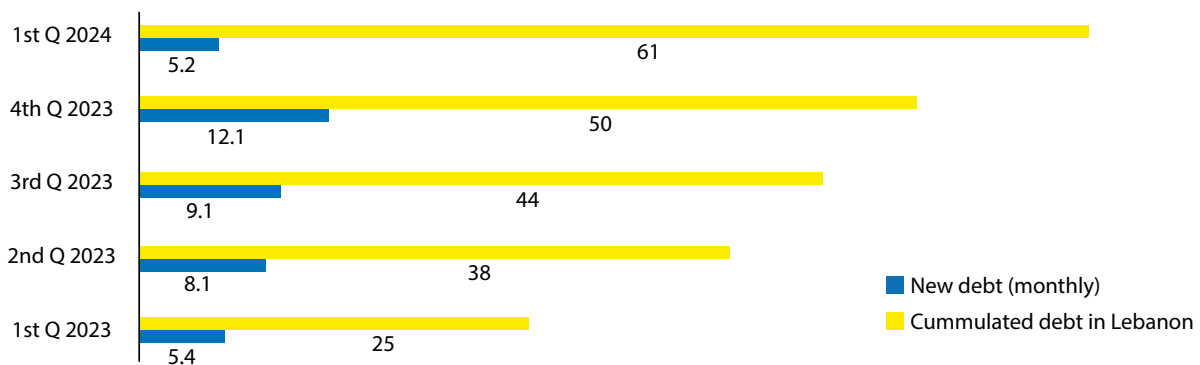


**We have to accumulate more debt to prevent the risk of eviction.**

- Syrian refugee residing in Baabda district

- Despite the increasing reliance on debt, there has not been a corresponding increase in new levels of debt incurred by PM respondents in first quarter of 2024, which has actually decreased (see Chart 6). During the first months of the year, the average cumulative household debt reached 61 million LBP, a **144%** increase from the same period of 2023 (25 million LBP), but only 5.2 million LBP of new debt, compared to the 12 million from the last quarter. The reasons behind this development may be multifaceted – refugees may have reached a ceiling for taking on new debts and may not secure additional loans anymore or households could have managed to consolidate their existing debts which would not reflect as new debt but would still contribute to the overall increase in debt usage. Certainly, the households may have made further economic adjustments, such as reducing expenses, which allowed them to rely on existing debts rather than accruing new ones. Other contributing factors may be related to the overall restricted environment concerning Syrian refugees in Lebanon, that may prevent them from acquiring new (formal or informal) loans.

**Chart 6. New and cumulated debts of refugee households (in millions of LBP)**



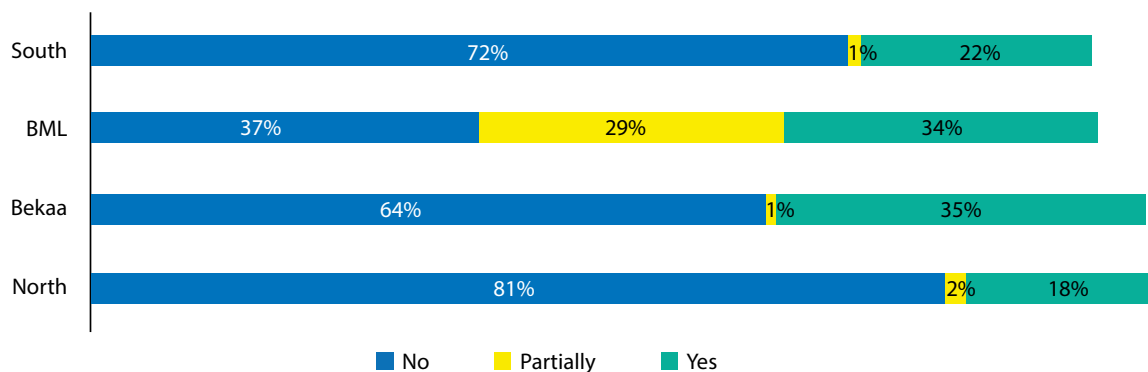
- Overall, the challenging socioeconomic landscape for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is accompanied by **increasing debt** burdens on an already financially strained households and increasing **food insecurity**.

## Housing, rent and evictions

- The country continues to observe a steady rise in rental costs, with a **48%** increase compared to mid-2023. In Q1 2024, the average rent for refugee households raised to approximately 9.5 million LBP or 107 USD at informal market rate (Chart 13). The dollarization of the Lebanese economy can be observed in the currency used to pay rent, with a staggering **97%** of Syrian refugees in Lebanon doing so in USD.
- As demonstrated in the responses received through PM surveys regarding the impact of the economic crises (see Charts 1 and 3 above), **87%** of households reported to be unable or have difficulties to fulfil their rental obligations, which signifies an important increase from previous quarters. During first quarter of 2024, in terms of payment capacity, only **30%** of the respondents were able to fully pay the rent fees on time, while the majority, accounting for **60%**, were not able to pay the rental fees at all, and **9%** could partially afford it. Overall, 55% of households have not paid rent for between 1 to 3 months, putting them at increased risk of eviction.

- The average household-related costs per month totalled 17.5 million LBP in Q1 2024 (rent + household costs), which nearly matches the total income of 18.6 million LBP reported by refugee families.
- Refugee households in the North seem to be those with the most difficulties to pay rent, with **81%** being unable to do so, compared to **72%** in the South and **64%** in Bekaa. In BML **66%** reported to either pay the rent partially (**28%**) or not being able to pay it all (**37%**). Interestingly, BML is the region with higher levels of rent, with an average of 14.7 million LBP in Q1 2024. Worth noting are the increase in costs in the South and BML, which could be explained by the impact of the conflict in border areas and the displacement of thousands of families, raising rental costs.

**Chart 7. Capacity to pay rent, by region in Q1 2024**

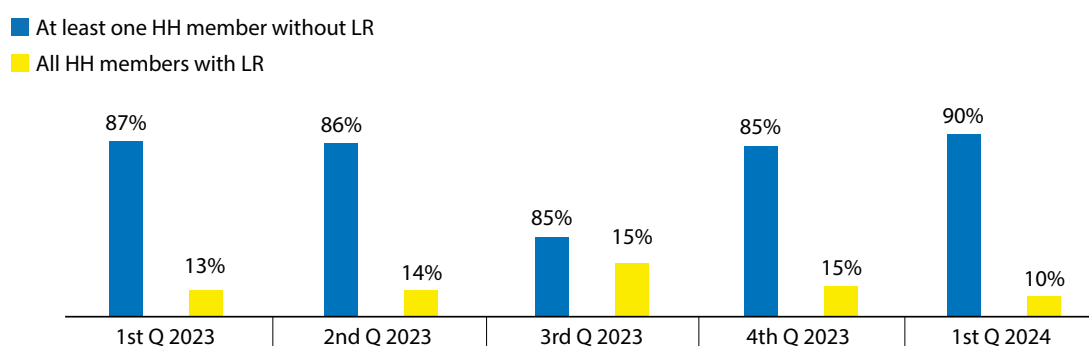


- In all regions, **90%** of respondents were required to pay rent to be allowed to stay at their place of residence, while the remaining respondents were either not required to pay rent because they worked for rent or received shelter assistance from different humanitarian organizations.
- Inability to cover rental fees is an increasing risk faced by the households, mainly in relation to **eviction**. Ad-hoc assessments by UNHCR and partners indicate that the threat of collective evictions appears to be increasing, consistent with the escalation of administrative measures targeting displaced Syrians. Out of all PM respondents, 8% have received eviction notices, while **23%** of the actual evictions taking place were part of a larger collective evictions, particularly in Bent Jbeil, Nabatieh and Zgharta districts. At national level, more negotiations with landlords took place this quarter after an eviction notice (**86%** of households in Q1 compared to an average of **65%** in previous quarters).
- Qualitative reports indicate that many households may also prioritize rent over other expenses, to address growing threats of eviction. As shared by PM Key Informants, others sell their personal belongings to their respective landlords to cover for the rent or opt to reside in rented shops given the lower cost. It is important to mention that the majority of the houses rented by refugees lack basic amenities and are not adequate to maintain healthy minimum living conditions (mould, humidity, repairs required). In general, in the first quarter of 2024 UNHCR has been informed about 26 potential and actual collective evictions, including 22 notices and 4 implemented, affecting more than 500 households. These figures remained consistent with those recorded in the previous quarter, with 27 records of collective evictions (20 notices and 7 actual evictions).
- Difficulties connected with payment of rent and eviction had negative impacts on refugees ranging from psychological distress and increases in debt. **41%** of the respondents reported experiencing psychological distress and an increase in debt as direct impacts of eviction. Additionally, **23%** reported a lack of food and homelessness. Families with members who have disabilities reportedly face greater challenges in paying rent in full, with **79%** encountering difficulties, compared to **59%** of families without disabled members.
- Specifically in Southern Lebanon, rental fees have significantly increased in Q1, as reported in consultations with refugees. The increase in rental prices has been seen as an opportunity by landlords to capitalize on the demand for safe housing in both southern governorates. This has particularly affected displaced households, who found it difficult to manage the financial burden of the new, higher rental fees. Some survey respondents in the South mentioned borrowing money, sharing a shelter with their friends/relatives or working double shifts to avoid eviction. Moreover, there are reports of great difficulties to find accommodation, since there is a reluctance from some landlords to rent their properties to Syrians, given the overall negative climate surrounding displaced communities.

## Legal developments

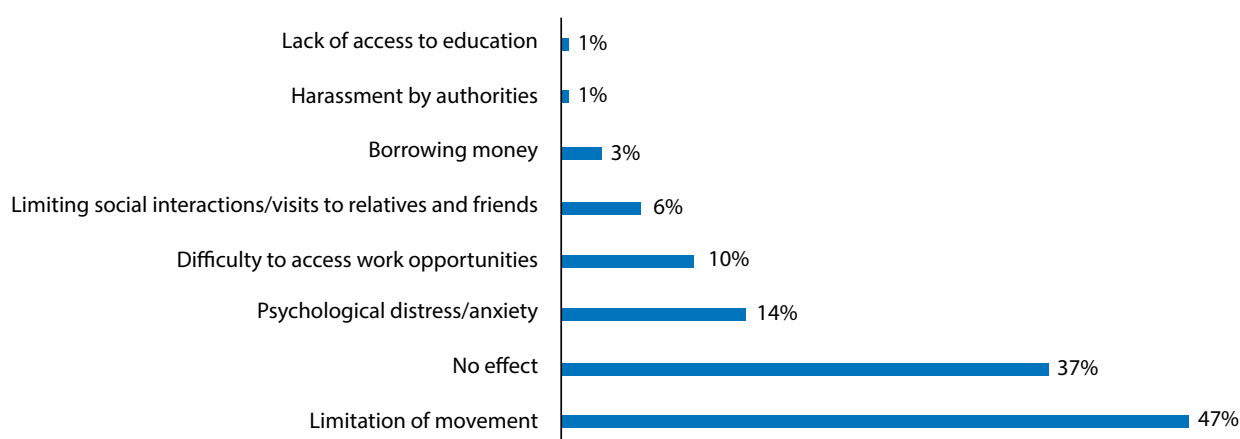
- As per Protection Monitoring results, legal residency continues to remain a significant concern among Syrian refugees in Q1 2024. The share of refugee households that have at least one member above 15 years old **lacking legal residency** has increased from **85%** in previous quarters to **90%** in the first quarter of 2024, including **53%** females and **47%** males.
- One of the reasons for this development may stem from the increasingly intricate process of obtaining residence permits. Factors contributing to this complexity include the ineligibility for residency renewal among certain categories of refugees, the requirement for additional housing attestation documents, and the steep increase in fees associated with the process.
- When it comes to regional distribution, the South continues to be the region with more households having all members with legal residency (22%), also confirmed by the 2023 VASYR results<sup>6</sup>, followed by BML (11%), and only 9% in both Bekaa and North areas.

Chart 8. Trends of legal residency in HH as per PM results



- Both financial constraints and irregular entry to Lebanon continue to be reported as main reasons for the lack of legal residency.<sup>7</sup> Limitations on movement of Syrians and psychological distress are reported as the main impacts of lacking legal residency on refugee households.

Chart 9. Impact of lacking legal residency in Q1 2024 on PM surveyed households



<sup>6</sup> As per presentation of VASYR 2023 Preliminary Findings, available at <https://ialebanon.unhcr.org/vasyr/#/>

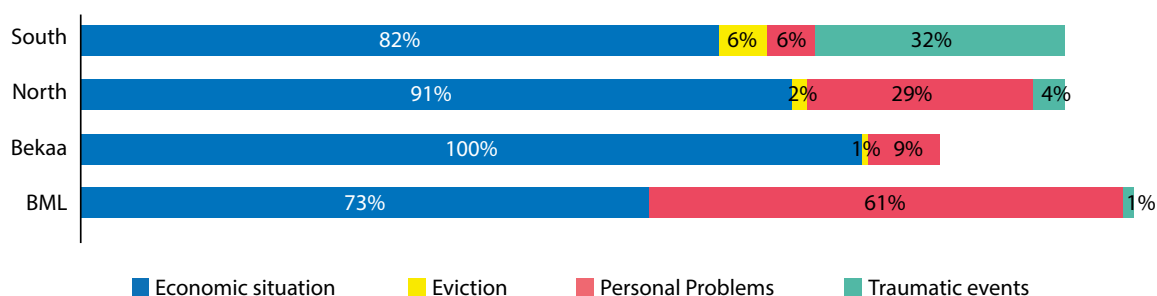
<sup>7</sup> Current residency regulations do not permit Syrians who entered Lebanon irregularly to regularize their situation and stay in the country, they may do upon only upon exit. Syrians who entered irregularly after April 2019 are at risk of deportation based on the High Defence Council decision.

- Following the issuance of the **2024 Fiscal Budget Law** in February, the costs for acquiring civil documentation have increased substantially in Lebanon. According to the new Law,<sup>8</sup> the fees for registering birth, marriage, divorce, and death certificates have been increased to LBP 400,000 (instead of the previous LBP 20,000). The fees at Shariaa courts were also increased following the new Budget Law.
- This increase in fees and taxes caused an additional challenge for refugees seeking to register civil events. Furthermore, the increase has significantly affected legal aid programmes provided by humanitarian agencies and led to a reduction of targets in certain areas by up to 70%. The limited capacity of the Personal Status Determination (PSD) offices, coupled with the scarcity of stamps, continues to be a major obstacle, impeding access to documentation, including birth certificates.

## Mental Health

- As reported by PM respondents, the mental health situation among Syrian refugee households in Lebanon reflects a multitude of challenges and constraints that directly impact the well-being of household members, including children. The prevalence of psychological distress symptoms among PM respondents stands at **25%**, with a spectrum ranging from mild to severe manifestations.
- **Economic hardship** emerges as the predominant trigger for mental distress, cited by **94%** of respondents with psychological symptoms, which hinders many to fulfil daily responsibilities, including self-care and family care.
- **Common symptoms** (reported by **86%** of these respondents) include disturbances in sleep and eating patterns, social withdrawal, low energy levels, loss of interest in activities, frustration, and mood fluctuations. While the majority experience **mild or isolated symptoms**, a notable portion (24%) reports more **severe indicators** such as persistent depressed mood, aggressive behaviour, and **1%** have reported **suicidal ideations**.
- Geographically, variations are observed, with the **North region** reporting the **highest levels of psychological distress**, closely followed by the Bekaa. However, within the North, there is a notable reduction in reports of aggressive behaviour this quarter, contrasting with persistent depressive feelings. In the **South**, an uptick in **reports of traumatic events** as triggers for distress is observed, likely influenced by the ongoing hostilities and security concerns in border areas.

Chart 10. Causes affecting mental well-being, per region



*This was a multiple-choice question and the totals may not add up to %100.*

- Several socio-economic factors, gender dynamics, and disability status intersect with mental health outcomes. Female-headed households report higher levels of psychological distress compared to male-headed households, with a significant portion reporting personal problems as the source of their distress. Additionally, families with members facing disabilities exhibit a higher prevalence of mild symptoms.

<sup>8</sup> The 2024 Fiscal Budget Law.

## Child labour and education

- Refugee children continue to be negatively impacted by the socio-economic crisis in Lebanon, leading to families not being able to send their children to school and forcing many parents to send their children to work instead. Particularly in the South, the situation is further exacerbated by the ongoing conflict.
- Underreporting of **child labor** remains a significant challenge, with only **5%** of families confirming that their children are engaged in labor activities. However, this issue is known to be more widespread. In community consultations during Q1, refugees have reported to UNHCR that children are increasingly engaged in work, particularly in the Bekaa. Moreover, different studies<sup>9</sup> show an increase in the engagement of children in labor activities in Lebanon, driven by poverty, displacement, limited access to education/social protection and its normalization as a mean of survival for vulnerable families. As reported by UNICEF, “**among Syrian refugees, 1 in 3 families said they sent children to work in order to provide resources for the household, with parents reporting that the economic crisis means that frequently the entire family works in order to survive**”<sup>10</sup>.
- As per the results of PM surveys, out of the working children **80%** are not engaged in education. This issue is particularly acute in female-headed households, where **96%** cite work as the primary reason for non-attendance of school, compared to **79%** of male-headed households. Moreover, in the North region, this phenomenon is notably more prevalent, with **28%** of families reporting labour as the reason for their children to be out of school, surpassing the national average of **8%**. This highlights the persistent challenges faced by refugee families in balancing work and education priorities. Financial barriers highly contribute to educational disruption, with **59%** of households reporting education costs as a reason for children not attending school, marking an upward trend from previous reporting periods.



**We are forcing our children to work because we are not able to provide for them a decent life and education.**

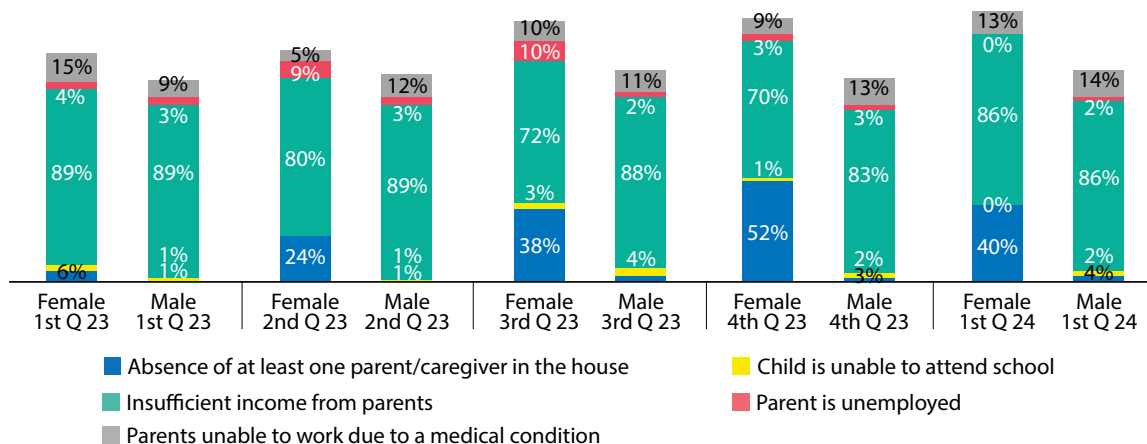
- Syrian refugee in El Chouf district

- Regional disparities in the types of child labor reported are apparent, with higher reports of children working in the streets observed in the North (**31%**), compared to **16%** in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and **5%** in the Bekaa region. However, there seems to be a slight improvement at national level during the first quarter of the year in regard to children working in the streets, reported by **15%** of households in Q1, compared to **18%** in Q4 2022. There was also a reduction in those reporting to work in hazardous conditions (**8%** in Q1 2024, compared to 12% in the previous quarter). As demonstrated by PM results, insufficient income from parents' work continues to be the most cited reason for child labour.
- Protection monitoring data further highlights gender disparities, with the absence of at least one parent or caregiver to be the reason for **47%** of female-headed households to have children engaged in labour, compared to only **4%** of male-headed households. These significant gender disparities have also been reported in the last quarters, which can be explained by the nuanced dynamics of household composition and gender roles within Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon. As observed by Protection Monitors, women identify themselves as the head of household during surveys not necessarily because they are the primary breadwinners, but rather due to their status as single, divorced, widowed, or lacking a present husband. In these circumstances, women often assume the role and identify as household decision-makers out of necessity, regardless of their financial contributions. As a result, the absence of at least one parent or caregiver is more common in female-headed households, as these women bear the responsibility of providing for their families alone. This phenomenon underscores the intersectionality of gender, family structure, and economic vulnerability, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address the specific challenges faced by female-headed households and their children in accessing education and escaping the cycle of poverty and labor exploitation.

<sup>9</sup> Lebanon Child Labour Scoping Study, The Freedom Fund, January 2024, available at [https://www.freedomfund.org/app/uploads/2024/03/LebanonChildLabourScopingStudy\\_2024\\_01.pdf](https://www.freedomfund.org/app/uploads/2024/03/LebanonChildLabourScopingStudy_2024_01.pdf); Child labor in Lebanon: Understanding the mechanisms of poverty reproduction, Raseef22, January 2024, available at <https://raseef22.net/english/article/1096128-child-labor-in-lebanon-understanding-the-mechanisms-of-poverty-reproduction>

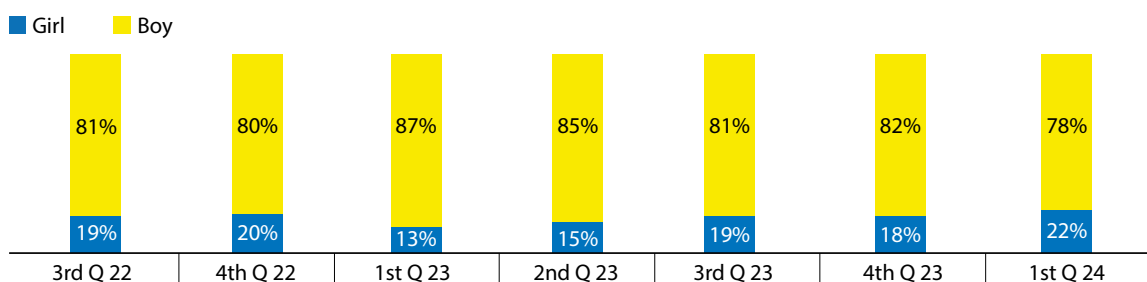
<sup>10</sup> Trapped in a downward spiral. The unrelenting toll of Lebanon's crisis on children. UNICEF, December 2023, available at <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/10866/file/UNICEF%20CFRA%202023%20EN.pdf>

**Chart 11. Main reasons for child labour by gender of the head of household**



Moreover, there's a notable increase in the proportion of parents physically unable to work at national level, rising from **10%** in Q4 2023 to **19%** in Q1 2024, exacerbating economic pressures on households and potentially driving children into the labor market to supplement family income. This might be related to disabilities but also to other medical conditions. Additionally, a concerning trend reveals an increase in girls' participation in the labor force, reaching **22%** in the first quarter of the year. This is potentially driven by seasonal work patterns observed consistently over the past few years.

**Chart 12. Gender of working child as per PM results**



The **emergency response in the South** has also led to educational gaps and constraints affecting children, including from refugee families, in the region. The closure of 72 schools since the start of the hostilities directly impacts over 20,000 children, hindering their access to education.<sup>11</sup> This escalation in closures exacerbates an already challenging environment for refugee children striving to pursue learning opportunities.

## Social tensions and administrative measures

During the first quarter of 2024, many municipalities across the country continued to implement a highly restrictive approach as to Syrian refugees presence. After the peak observed in the last quarter of 2023, with more than 270 municipalities imposing new administrative measures on Syrian displaced, more than 100 were recorded in Q1 2024 by UNHCR.<sup>12</sup> These include movement restrictions, raids, imposition of new taxes, checkpoints, strict registration/legal requirements, rental restrictions and imposition of municipal IDs and add to those implemented in the previous months.

**42%** of PM respondents reported that the imposition of new administrative measures targeted Syrians, with the exception of confiscation of unregistered vehicles, that is applied to all population groups in Lebanon. As to the reported impact of the measures, **82%** of the affected refugee households declared that their freedom

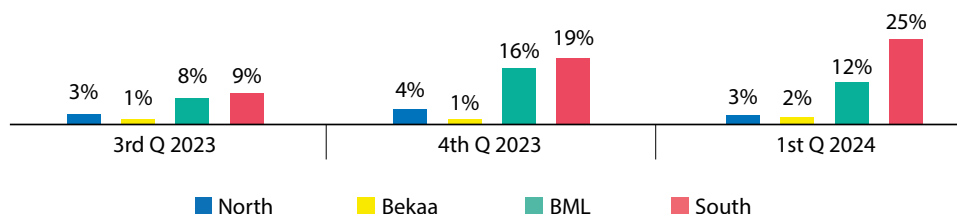
<sup>11</sup> Lebanon at a Glance - Escalation of hostilities in South Lebanon, 18 April 2024, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-glance-escalation-hostilities-south-lebanon-18-april-2024-enar>

<sup>12</sup> The figures related to administrative measures are indicative and only represent the number of incidents that come to UNHCR's attention in a given time. This should not be understood as a comprehensive list, as the situation evolves daily.

of movement is either limited or reduced. Meanwhile, **58%** of respondents have stated that they find it safer to restrict their movement to specific areas and times of the day. Incidents during the implementation of these administrative measures were reported, particularly verbal abuse by **33%** respondents, an increase from an average of 26% during the three previous quarters. Physical abuse allegations conducted by those implementing the administrative measures increased slightly to **14%**, compared to an average of **10%** households reporting this issue in the same period.

- The continuation of the hostilities at the southern borders **displaced** some 90,000 people including refugees, according to displacement tracking as of late March. At the end of February and for the first time since the conflict began, an Israeli airstrike targeted the Bekaa, which was followed by a series of similar incidents in the area which have expanded the conflict-affected area beyond the South.
- **31.9%** of refugees remaining in the in South and Nabatieh governorates reported being impacted by administrative measures, mostly in conflict-affected districts, including limitations on their freedom of movement (curfews) and raids and destruction of personal property.
- In terms of curfews, the analysis of the PM results has observed a rise on how strictly they are enforced, from **72%** reporting strict enforcement in Q4 2023 to **80%** in Q1 2024. The South continues to be the region reporting higher levels of curfews since the beginning of the conflict in October 2023, together with Mount Lebanon, most likely in relation to the ongoing hostilities in the South.

**Chart 13. Distribution of households reporting curfews as of PM results**



- As reported through different Focus Group Discussions conducted in the Bekaa, new curfews were limiting the movement of Syrian families and enforced by mobile checkpoints that confiscate unregistered motorcycles, with a high risk of arrest for those who do not have legal residency. Reportedly, breaching the curfews may lead to penalties and fines.



**We don't feel safe moving in and out of our residence.**

- Syrian refugee in Baalbek district

- Tensions among host and Syrian communities are not a new phenomenon and have been reported throughout Q1 by key informants, media, partners and UNHCR observations. However, only 5% of households reported having experienced individually incidents of social tensions in their community through the Protection Monitoring survey. Out of those, the majority (**86%**) are related to verbal harassment, followed by physical harassment (17%) and an overall negative attitude targeting displaced Syrians. At the same time, 7% of respondents reported a positive approach from the host community, including instances where of reduction of rental fees and postponed payments (**51%**) in response to challenges.
- As to the onward movements, there was an increase in boat departures from Lebanon to Cyprus during the first quarter of 2024. Normally, the winter months are a quiet period regarding boat departures, but since the beginning of the year more than 35 boats were recorded. The majority of passengers are Syrians, with a concerning figure of **26%** children on board being unaccompanied during this first quarter of the year.

<sup>13</sup> Mobility Snapshot - Round 33 / 18-04-2024, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, available at; <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/mobility-snapshot-round-33-18-04-2024>

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