



PROTECTION MONITORING

**Situation of Forcibly Displaced
Syrians in Lebanon**

Methodology

Since 2019, UNHCR, in partnership with various organizations, has conducted monthly Protection Monitoring (PM) surveys with Syrian refugees across Lebanon. As of January 2024, this activity is centralized and implemented by INTERSOS, using household-level and Key Informant interviews, with a sampling methodology that is representative based on the presence of the Syrian refugee population both at national and regional levels. The PM surveys aim to gather information on refugees' situations, analyze protection trends, assess gaps, and inform responses. This supports evidence-based advocacy and programming under the Lebanon Response Plan and incorporates UNHCR's Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) approach to identify vulnerabilities. Referrals for specialized services are made when specific needs arise.

Disclaimer for Q4 2024: The escalation of the conflict in September 2024 has caused massive displacement of people of all nationalities and considerably impacted the operational context in Lebanon. The regular collection of PM data - in particular household visits - was affected by security restrictions, accessibility issues and the need to support the emergency response. The protection trends and information presented in this report combine data extracted from various PM initiatives undertaken by UNHCR and partners in Q4. These include protection observation missions, monitoring of displacement of refugees, rapid need assessments and ad-hoc surveys, intended to analyze the protection situation, intentions and impact of the latest regional and national developments on Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Summary of contents

I. Q4 key highlights

II. Operational context: escalation of the conflict in Lebanon, ceasefire and regional developments

Conflict escalation as of September 2024

- a. Displacement trends of Syrian refugees
- b. Access to housing, health and education services

Ceasefire agreement on November 27 and political transition in Syria as of December 8

- c. Vulnerabilities of returning IDPs and those that remained displaced
- d. Developments in Syria and population movements

III. Protection situation and trends during Q4 2024

- a. Legal developments, administrative measures and raids
- b. Social tensions and socio-economic vulnerabilities
- c. GBV, Child Protection & mental health

I. KEY HIGHLIGHTS DURING QUARTER 4

- ▶ **ESCALATION OF CONFLICT & DISPLACEMENT:** As of mid-September 2024, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) intensified airstrikes on residential areas in Southern Lebanon, Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburbs. This escalation resulted in the displacement of nearly 900,000 people and over 20,000 casualties¹. Displaced Syrian refugees had faced limited housing options, precarious living conditions and homelessness resulting from considerably increased rental fees, restrictions on access to emergency shelters. Additionally, around 360,000 Syrians and 200,000 Lebanese crossed under duress into Syria fleeing the conflict, which led to increased family separations².
- ▶ **CEASEFIRE & RETURNS:** On 27 November 2024 a temporary ceasefire was agreed between Israel and Lebanon. By 31 December 2024, some 861,000 displaced individuals had returned to their original homes, while 123,774³ people remained displaced due to damaged or inaccessible homes and safety concerns. Displaced Syrian refugees have faced challenges in returning to their pre-conflict places of residence, resulting from destruction of their houses, movement restrictions imposed by a number of municipalities (mainly in South), financial constraints, and occupation of their homes by other people. As confirmed by a survey⁴ on intentions of IDPs conducted by UNHCR after the cessation of the hostilities, 35% of Syrian remained displaced.
- ▶ **TRANSITION OF GOVERNMENT IN SYRIA:** The fall of the Assad Government in Syria on 8 December 2024 has renewed hopes among Syrian refugees about returning home. Among the refugee community in Lebanon, there were signs of excitement but also hesitancy. Given the uncertainties, many refugees expressed interest in temporary visits to observe the situation in Syria and make an informed decision. The changes in Syria have also triggered a new wave of displacement, with an estimate of 90,000 new arrivals (Syrian and Lebanese) as of 31 December 2024, including from minority groups. The new arrivals, some of whom are accommodated in informal collective shelters by the host authorities, have faced shortages of basic services including non-food items, water, shelter, electricity, WaSH, and medicine.
- ▶ **LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES:** A number of legal measures introduced by Lebanese authorities in Q4 affected the legal status, documentation, freedom of movement and overall protection environment for Syrian refugees in the country. Furthermore, administrative measures applicable in Q4 restricted refugees' movements and access to safety and basic services both during the conflict and after the ceasefire. Following the ceasefire, at least 35 measures were announced in the South, preventing Syrian refugees to return to their villages of previous residency until further notice, leaving them displaced and vulnerable.
- ▶ **SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PROTECTION VULNERABILITIES:** The escalation of the conflict also triggered increase in prices and job scarcity, forcing people to drain their savings and resort to negative coping mechanisms. Northern Lebanon, BML and the Bekaa received large number of IDPs, straining public services including food supply, healthcare, and education. Access to shelter continued to be challenging, with IDPs faced steep rental prices and discriminatory practices from landlords. Southern Lebanon experienced shortages of essential supplies as a result of areas being inaccessible or still under IDF control. The conflict escalation led to increased GBV risks, family and child violence due to overcrowding shelters, rising child labor from job loss and limited education opportunities.

¹ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix – Mobility Snapshot Round 65, 25 November 2024, accessible through this link: <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/mobility-snapshot-round-65-25-11-2024?close=true>

² Regional Flash Update from UNHCR, November 2024

³ IOM, 2 January 2025, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix – Mobility Snapshot Round 70, available at: <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/mobility-snapshot-round-70-02-01-2025?close=true>

⁴ Protection Working Group Lebanon - IDPs Protection Monitoring Update - Summary of Pilot Findings, December 2024.

II. OPERATIONAL CONTEXT: ESCALATION OF THE HOSTILITIES IN LEBANON, CEASEFIRE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

During the last quarter of 2024, Lebanon underwent multiple paradigm shifts that reshaped its operational context, significantly impacting civilian population and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities:

- **The worsening of the conflict as of mid-September 2024** was marked by an increase in the severity, intensity and geographical expansion of the aerial campaign by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which targeted infrastructure and residential buildings in densely populated urban areas in Beirut, Southern Governorates, North and Baalbek/Bekaa areas.
- The heavy bombardment, daily exchange of fire, targeted attacks and increased insecurity resulted in the **internal displacement** of at least 900,000 individuals, 190,000 of them staying in overcrowded collective shelters.
- The last two months of the year witnessed two major developments: a **temporary ceasefire agreed between Israel and Lebanon on 27 November 2024**, and the **downfall of the Assad government on 8 December 2024**.

The ceasefire agreement prompted a large-scale return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their original places of residence in Lebanon. However, extensive damage to infrastructure and residential areas led to a gradual and uneven process of reestablishment, with some settling in areas heavily damaged by the conflict, while others remained displaced. Meanwhile, the political shift in Syria triggered optimism in some Syrian populations returning to their country, while others remained in Lebanon due to the political uncertainty, high transportation costs, unknown status of their residences and overall insecurity. Yet, it also triggered new arrivals to Lebanon of minority groups potentially related to the previous Syrian regime.

The impact of these developments on **Syrian refugees** in Lebanon was multifold. The conflict had significantly worsened their existing protection challenges, restricted their already limited freedom of movement, access to legal residency, livelihoods, and increased the risk of detention and/or deportation. Due to various administrative restrictions⁵ on movements and returns, the proportion of Syrians moving out of affected areas was smaller as compared to Lebanese. Out of estimated 340,000 Syrian refugees who were residing in the conflict affected areas prior to the start of hostilities, only 100,000 have secondarily displaced as of end of November 2024, as reported to UNHCR. Those who remained in the conflict affected areas were frequently without the financial means to relocate or secure adequate housing in safer areas of the country.

Conflict escalation as of September 2024

The intensified bombardment starting on 23 September targeted large residential areas in Southern Lebanon, Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburbs, and resulted in a death toll of 3,961 people killed and 16,520 wounded since the beginning of the conflict, as reported by the MoPH⁶. UNHCR has become aware of at least 374 casualties among Syrian refugees. The wave of displacement triggered by the impact of the conflict in both Lebanese and Syrian communities overwhelmed collective shelters, leaving many people on the streets. Areas considered relatively safe were congested with families and vehicles from all communities who had not yet found shelter or were denied entrance, as was the case with many Syrians displaced. Three weeks after the start of the escalation, 822 of 1,023 shelters had reached their maximum capacity, as reported by OCHA⁷, while by the peak of the escalations, right before the ceasefire agreement, close to 900,000 individuals were reported to be displaced. In addition to the internal displacement, many people opted to flee from Lebanon to Syria and cross the border seeking safety.

⁵ As of end of November, 40 municipalities have implemented restrictions on Syrians in the affected areas of Bekaa and the South, including limitations on movement and settlement, data collection measures, and the demolition of tents. Additionally, 36 incidents of arrests at checkpoints were recorded in Northern Lebanon, directly impacting the mobility of displaced Syrians and resulting in arrests and deportations.

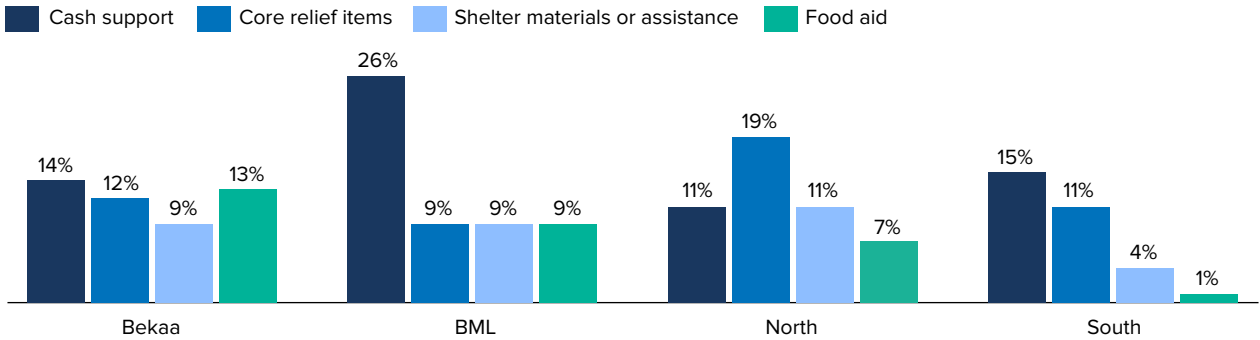
⁶ Government of Lebanon Emergency Committee Weekly Report # 50,29 November 2024. Available at this [link](#)

⁷ Lebanon: Flash Update #34 – Escalation of Hostilities in Lebanon, as of 10 October 2024. Available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/lebanon/lebanon-flash-update-34-escalation-hostilities-lebanon-10-october-2024>

Displacement trends of Syrian refugees

Displacement of Syrians within Lebanon: Since the start of the hostilities, UNHCR has assessed the needs of over 100,000 refugees who were displaced due to the conflict. The analysis of these assessments indicated that most of the displacement among refugees has taken place towards **Akkar, Bekaa, Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates**. Bekaa and Mount Lebanon were the governorates that experienced largest numbers of intra-governorate displacement.

Figure 1. Main priority needs per region of displacement during Q4 (Syrians)

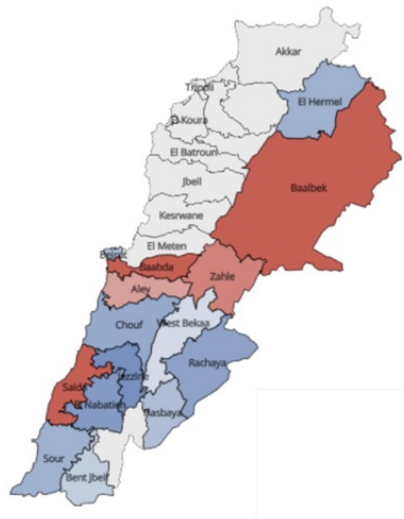


- **Core relief items, shelter and cash support emerged as the most pressing needs in Northern Lebanon.** This can be attributed to the fact that the region hosted high numbers of displaced refugees from the South, coupled with its geographical distance, which likely limited displaced families' access to social networks or pre-existing support structures.

- **Cash support was identified as the primary need in BML and South, while food aid was most required in the Bekaa.** The proximity of these regions to the conflict-affected areas may have facilitated displacement toward known relatives or acquaintances, reducing the need for shelter but increasing the reliance on financial and food support, to sustain these temporary hosting arrangements.

- **Those unable to relocate**—due to lack of funds, resources, or options—had faced with elevated risks of harm for perceived affiliation and proximity to targets, notably in southern areas impacted by the hostilities. The protection monitoring activities have confirmed that the majority of Syrians remaining in conflict-affected areas were located in Saida, Zahle, Baalbek and Baabda. Moreover, as populations relocated, those left behind were often cut off from access to basic services and commodities.

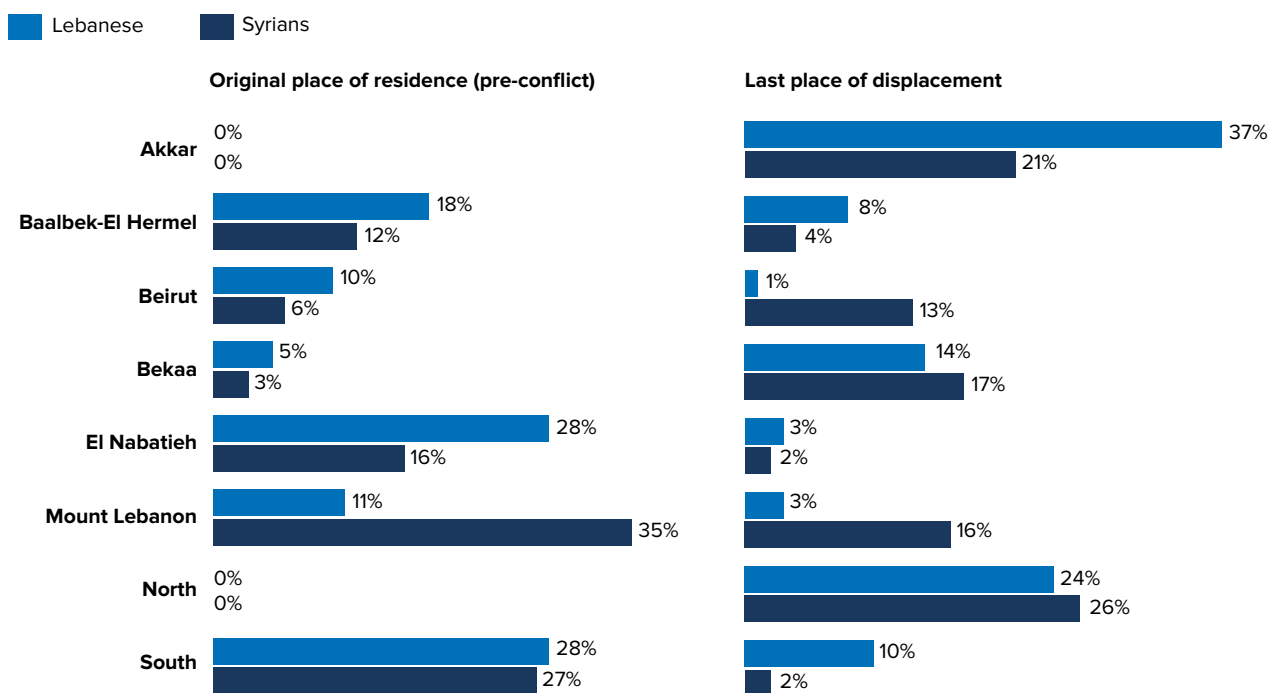
Figure 2. Syrians remaining in conflict-affected areas



The outcomes of UNHCR's rapid assessment⁸ conducted to understand the current location, intentions of IDPs and barriers to return to their pre-conflict places of residence in Lebanon provided distinctions between Lebanese and Syrians IDPs. As per their areas of displacement, the most significant differences were reported in Mount Lebanon and Beirut Governorates, receiving more Syrian IDPs, while the majority of displaced populations in Akkar and South were of Lebanese origin:

⁸ Rapid Assessment on Returning IDPs situation, UNHCR December 2024. The collection of data was carried in the period between 05-12 December 2024 with 2,631 respondents: Lebanese IDPs (41%) and secondarily displaced refugees (58% Syrians, and 1% including Sudanese, Iraqis, PRL and PRS) who were residing outside of collective shelters. The respondents of the survey (almost 2,000) were sampled from UNHCR and partners beneficiaries of protection and shelter assistance.

Figure 3. Areas of origin and areas of displacement prior to the ceasefire



Displacement into Syria prior to December 2024: Since mid-September, the escalation of the conflict has triggered **significant cross-border movements into Syria**, with approximately 562,000 individuals crossing the land border by 25 November⁹. Of those, an estimated 63% were Syrians and 37% Lebanese. This movement has taken place under challenging and often dangerous conditions, while most of the Syrians who left under duress and en route approached UNHCR in Syria, were not known to UNHCR Lebanon. Several airstrikes in the Masnaa crossing point in late October and early November temporarily reduced the flow of people across several border points and required travel by foot, as well as the closure of other official crossing points in Bekaa, as Matraba and Qaa. The latter was temporarily closed between 25 and 31 October.

Despite this, irregular crossings by both Lebanese and Syrians continued. This type of movement increased after the General Security Office (GSO) announced facilitating the exit of Syrian and Palestinian nationals regardless of their legal status or initial entry conditions.

Protection actors¹⁰ have also documented rising instances of **family separation** during displacement. In some cases, mothers and children returned to Syria while fathers remained in Lebanon. Additionally, separated children have been identified across the country, raising further protection concerns.

Access to housing, health and education services

• **Difficulties to access health services:** As of November 2024, the World Health Organization reported that Lebanon's **healthcare system** faced unprecedented challenges due to the ongoing conflict and deteriorating security situation. Out of 153 hospitals across the country, 15 were either non-operational or functioning only partially. Additionally, half of the primary healthcare centers and dispensaries in conflict-affected areas were forced to close, severely limiting access to essential health services. The closures were particularly pronounced in regions like Nabatieh, which experienced a 40% reduction in hospital bed capacity. Attacks on healthcare facilities and personnel further exacerbated the crisis, prompting evacuations and disrupting critical

⁹ UNHCR, 25 November 2024. UNHCR Syria Emergency Response Brief, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unhcr-syria-emergency-response-brief-25-november-2024>

¹⁰ UNICEF, Emergency Response in Lebanon, Available at <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/emergency-response-lebanon>

medical services.¹¹ Focus Groups Discussions conducted by the Protection Working Group¹² with internally displaced populations during the month of November confirmed that they are experiencing barriers related to the high cost of medication and limited access to healthcare services in their places of displacement.

- **Disruption of education:** Similarly, Lebanon’s education sector was affected by the conflict with delays¹³ in starting the school year, conversion of almost half of Lebanon’s public schools into collective shelters¹⁴ and damage of over 300 schools. The start of the school year for first-shift classes, secondary and higher education was delayed until November, while Syrian children attending second shift classes only begun in January 2025, if they had required documentation. The war also had a significant impact on the mental health of children, families and school personnel, likely leading to lower education outcomes. For IDPs participants of various FGD, lack of education during displacement was one of their main concerns. Syrian respondents reported instances of discrimination in relation to accessing education, exclusion from schooling and bullying of Syrian children in schools. Local population in the Bekaa also expressed concerns related to access to education due to the use of many schools as collective shelters.

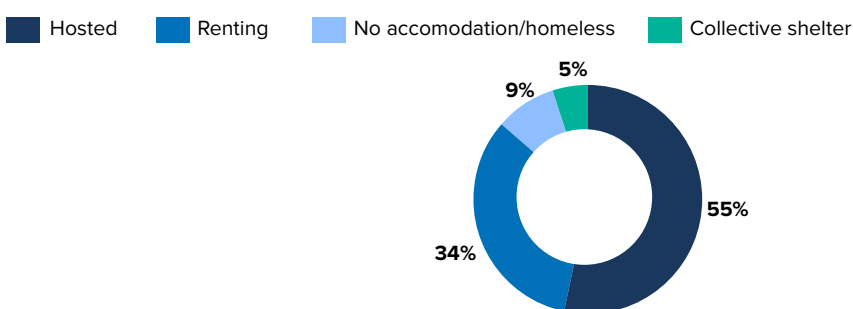
With the escalation of the hostilities, local actors and municipalities worked rapidly to establish **ad hoc emergency shelters**, repurposing public schools and other available facilities to provide temporary accommodation. However, the rising number of displaced individuals exceeded the capacity of these shelters, leaving many to seek refuge in overcrowded informal settlements and share living spaces with limited hygiene and healthcare resources.

- **Limited access to collective shelters for Syrians:** The situation was particularly challenging for displaced Syrians, migrants, and other non-Lebanese populations, who often encountered difficulties accessing collective shelters and securing emergency housing, as Lebanese were prioritized in the response coordinated by the authorities. Syrian families faced a growing risk of eviction due to rising rental prices, opportunistic exploitation, and mounting social pressures to vacate spaces for Lebanese families. Numerous landlords had significantly increased prices following the escalation of the conflict or offered rentals exclusively to women and children. The lack of shelter was further compounded by heightened exposure to physical attacks and abuse for those forced to sleep in public spaces, such as tents or cars. During the winter months, these families faced heightened exposure to harsh weather conditions, physical attacks, and other protection risks, alongside with limited access to essential supplies, including food, water, blankets, medicine, and cash assistance.

As monitored by UNHCR, at least **9% of displaced Syrian refugees** were **homeless** at the end of Q4, while only **5% of those who fled from their areas due to insecurity were hosted in collective shelters**. The majority (55%) were hosted by relatives or friends, while 34% lived under rental agreements in their displacement locations.

This distribution highlights the significant **reliance on informal support networks** and the strain placed on host families, who often were vulnerable themselves. Those reporting not having any type of accommodation may face increased risks of exploitation and violence, while the lack of stability in housing contributes to a sense of insecurity, exacerbating mental health challenges and hindering access to essential services.

Figure 4. Displaced Syrian refugees - type of accommodation



¹¹ WHO, 22 November 2024. *Lebanon: a Conflict Particularly Destructive to Health Care*, available at <https://www.who.int/news/item/22-11-2024-lebanon--a-conflict-particularly-destructive-to-health-care>

¹² Protection Working Group Lebanon - IDPs Protection Monitoring Update - Summary of Pilot Findings, December 2024.

¹³ Escalation of Hostilities in Lebanon - Protection Snapshot #6 (20 October – 4 November 2024), Lebanon Protection Sector

¹⁴ Save the Children. 9 October 2024. *Education Disrupted for Sixth Year for 1.5 Million Children in Lebanon, with Half of Public Schools Used as Shelters*. Available at <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/education-disrupted-sixth-year-15-million-children-lebanon-half-public-schools-used-shelters>

Ceasefire agreement on November 27 and political transition in Syria as of December 8

Following the initial **60-day ceasefire agreement effective from 27 November 2024**, displaced populations within Lebanon began returning to their pre-conflict areas. Estimations show that as of 31 December, 860,740 IDPs had returned to their original cadasters of residence, considerably reducing the occupancy of collective shelters, while 123,774 people remained displaced¹⁵. The main reasons for continued displacement included damaged homes, risk of unexploded ordnance, concerns about safety and security, and pre-paid rent for temporary accommodation during the displacement period. Also, some villages along the border were still inaccessible due to the presence of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and related temporary prohibition of return to these areas.

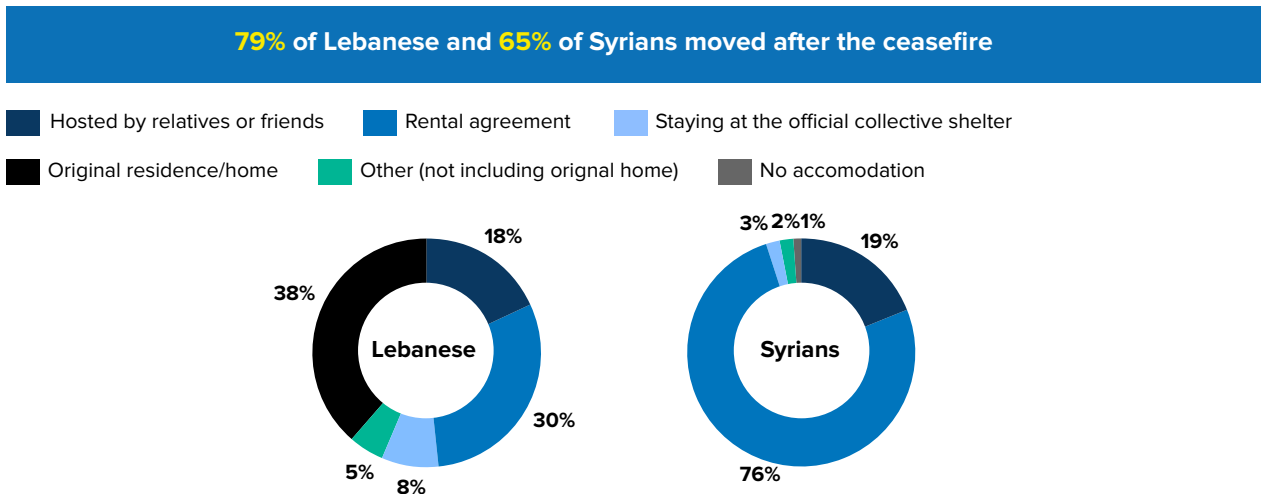
Vulnerabilities of returning refugees and those that remained displaced

Assessments conducted by UNHCR and partners after the ceasefire provide distinctions between Lebanese and Syrians IDPs on the vulnerabilities, risks and needs experienced by both groups. This include the UNHCR rapid assessments on IDPs intentions and the various FGD and KII implemented as a pilot of the Protection Sector PM with IDPs, between the 27 November and 12 December 2024:

- **A smaller share of Syrian respondents (65%, compared to 79% Lebanese) reported to have returned to their original (pre-conflict) places of residence after the ceasefire.** As the main reason for remaining at the place of secondary displacement both groups referred to the **damaged/ inaccessible/overcrowded housing**.
- There were significant disparities in the type of accommodation between both groups, with almost no Syrians reporting to reside in their pre-conflict residences and 37% Lebanese doing so. This is largely attributed to the **restrictions on Syrians seeking to return, imposed by many municipalities in the South, as well as the challenges they face in reclaiming their homes.** A considerable number of homes that were occupied by Syrian refugees before were repurposed, or rented out to other people. These factors have made it exceedingly difficult for Syrian refugees to re-establish themselves in their pre-conflict places of residence.
- Respondents across the FGDs and the KIIs indicated that many landlords in the South are not allowing Syrian tenants to return, not even to collect their belongings, with reports that some landlords sold the furniture and belongings of tenants while they were displaced. Some **Syrian refugees returned only for temporary visits.** Increase in commodities and rental prices in both areas of displacement and origin were also reported.
- Syrians indicated limited **freedom of movement due to their lack of legal residency**, which impacted their ability to return and increased their risk of arrest. Other significant challenges reported included difficulties to obtain valid residency permits in Lebanon, access birth and marriage registration.

¹⁵ IOM, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix – Mobility Snapshot Round 70, 2 January 2025, available at <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/mobility-snapshot-round-70-02-01-2025?close=true>

Figure 5. Type of accomodation of IDPs after the ceasefire



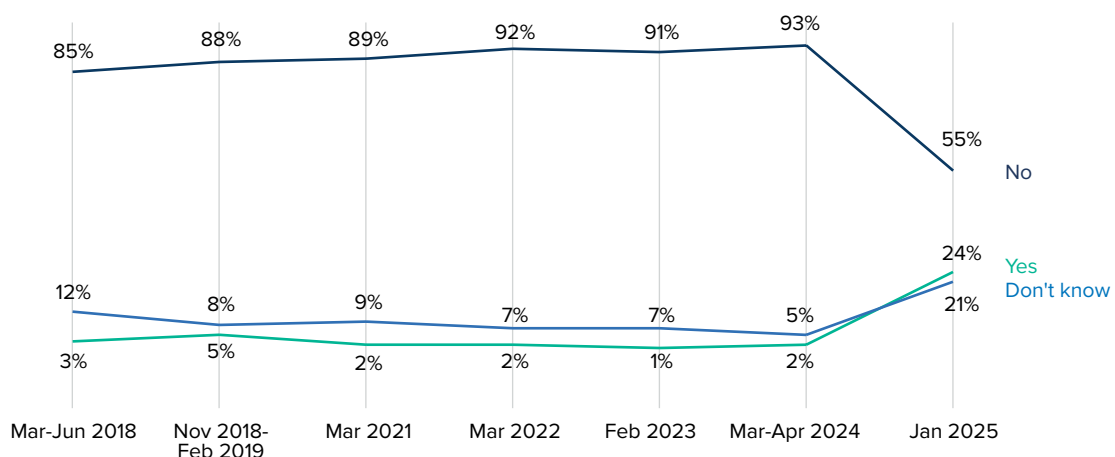
Developments in Syria and population movements to Lebanon

On 8 December 2024, the Government of Syria collapsed following an offensive by non-state armed groups. This major political shift has reshaped Syrian refugees' perceptions of return, as analyzed in the 10th Regional **Flash Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions¹⁶ (RPIS)** on Return to Syria. The results of the survey indicated a renewed sense of hope among refugees regarding the possibility of returning home.

The collapse of the Assad government has played a significant role in shaping refugees' return intentions. According to the RPIS, 55% of respondents in Lebanon indicated that this development was an important factor in their decision to potentially return. Many cited a reduced fear of arrest, exemption of military service, hope for reunification with extended family members, as well as feeling homesick as some of the reasons.

Compared to the findings from 2024, the number of refugees expressing a concrete intention to return has significantly increased. 24% of respondents indicated an intention to return to Syria to rebuild their lives within the next 12 months (compared to only 1.2% in July 2024), representing a significant increase. Among those considering return, 89% expressed a preference to return to their place of origin, particularly in Aleppo, Homs, and Idlib.

Figure 6. Intentions to return to Syria in the next 12 months



Graph extracted from RIPS, February 2025

¹⁶ IUNHCR, 6 February 2025, *Flash Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria*, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/flash-regional-survey-syrian-refugees-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria-february-2025>

Despite this shift, **many refugees remain hesitant**. 55% percent of respondents indicated they have no intention of returning within the next year, citing concerns over availability of housing, livelihood opportunities, safety and security, and access to essential services. Among the 63% of respondents who own a property in Syria, 86% reported that their homes were either fully or partially destroyed or uninhabitable, further complicating their ability to return.

The survey also revealed that 61% of refugees consider "Go-and-See" visits crucial before making a final decision on return and assess the security situation, inspect their properties, and reconnect with family members they had lost contact with since the beginning of the war. Since their initial displacement from Syria, 23% of respondents reported having visited Syria at least once, while 7% stated that they or a family member had travelled to Syria after 8 December 2024. However, among those who returned for a visit, 75% ultimately decided to come back to Lebanon, indicating that conditions are still precarious and may not be suitable for their long-term return.

While some refugees expressed optimism, others preferred to wait until the situation stabilizes to make an informed decision about returning. The main barrier to return identified by respondents include the uncertain security situation in Syria, the availability of essential services, economic opportunities, the restoration of property, and the legal status and documentation required to facilitate re-entry. Many are unable to return due to high transportation costs, damaged homes in Syria, and the fact that their children are already enrolled in schools in Lebanon. The Government of Lebanon indicated that as of end of December 2024 just under 10,000 Syrians have returned from Lebanon to Syria since 8 December¹⁷.

The fall of the Syrian Government has also triggered new displacement, with individuals fleeing Syria into Lebanon. By the end of December, approximately 90,000 new arrivals had entered Lebanon including some 69,000 Syrian nationals, primarily settling in the Hermel area of Baalbek Governorate¹⁸, but also in other locations in the country. With the influx of new arrivals, they face severe shortages of essential services and basic needs, including non-food items, water, electricity, WASH, and medicine, with many residing in temporary and/or collective shelters.

III. PROTECTION SITUATION AND TRENDS DURING Q4 2024

Legal developments, administrative measures and raids

The applicable legal framework for Syrian refugees in Lebanon has undergone changes during the last quarter of 2024, reflecting both national policy shifts and evolving regional dynamics.

93%¹⁹ of Syrian families in Lebanon have at least one member in their household lacking legal residency, exposing them to high risks of arrest and deportation, limiting their access to services, education, civil documentation and work opportunities. Still, during period of heightened escalation, legal documentation restrictions were not heavily enforced by the authorities. After the ceasefire, the North in particular witnessed a return to strict enforcement of restrictions on Syrians without valid legal residencies at checkpoints. This resulted in persons self-restricting their movements, using alternative roads to avoid checkpoints or being arrested at checkpoints. In other areas such as the Bekaa, challenges continued for those lacking legal documentation, particularly when crossing checkpoints, as well as during raids, group arrests and deportations. In the South, previously hosting the highest percentage of those with residency, Syrians witnessed difficulties to obtain new or renew current legal documents, and were often met with unexplained delays when processing renewals, or having their renewal requests refused altogether.

¹⁷ UNHCR, 13 December 2024, UNHCR Regional Flash Update #3: Syria Situation Crisis, available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-crisis-regional-flash-update-3>

¹⁸ UNHCR, 2 January 2025, UNHCR Regional Flash Update #8: Syria Situation Crisis, available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-crisis-regional-flash-update-8>

¹⁹ VASyR 2024: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

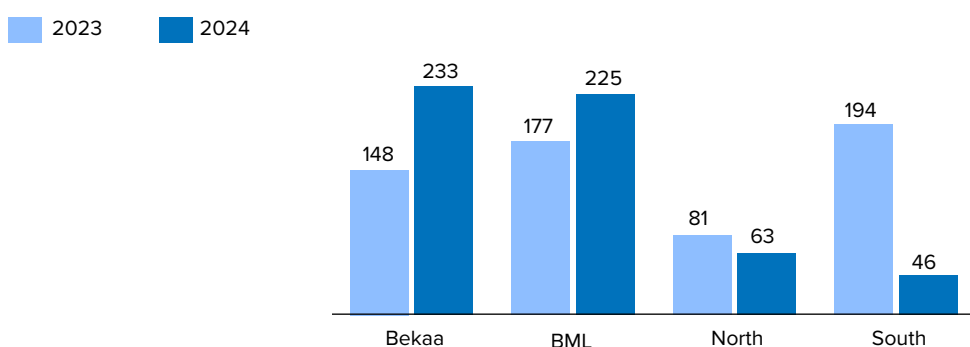
Some of the key legislative and policy measures introduced by the Lebanese authorities during Q4 that affected the legal status, documentation, freedom of movement and overall protection environment for Syrian refugees in the country include:

- **Revised -entry regulations:** the GSO amended the entry regulations for Syrian refugees on November 28th, introducing a new procedural step requiring clearance for certain short-term stays, clarifications on entry category requirements and reducing the stay durations for some categories, such as parents of Lebanese nationals (from one month to 15 days) and spouses of Palestinian refugees (from six months to one week). Re-entry to Lebanon is also conditional on individuals not receiving re-entry bans upon exit. UNHCR community sources reported that Syrian refugees traveling to Syria were given entry bans, despite having legal UNHCR residency documents, both before and after the ceasefire.

- **Restrictions on new arrivals:** On 14 December 2024, the GSO issued an internal circular suspending several entry categories, including the category for visiting foreign embassies. As established in the circular, Syrian nationals may only enter Lebanon when holding a transit visa with proof of onward travel, or possessing a valid annual or permanent residency permit, such as a courtesy permit or sponsorship. It is important to note that sponsorship is not an entry category (based on previous decisions issued early 2024); individuals who are outside of Lebanon cannot enter the country via sponsorship. However, those who are already inside Lebanon are still able to renew their stay based on sponsorship, and in case they exit Lebanon they may re-enter if their residency is still valid. Furthermore, obtaining work-based residence permits is expensive and cumbersome.

Moreover, risks of discrimination and arbitrary arrest for Syrians persisted during 2024, while **administrative measures** imposed by local authorities restricted access to areas and services for those moving during the conflict and after the ceasefire. Throughout the year, UNHCR recorded at least 567 administrative measures by 240 municipalities affecting Syrians, including movement restrictions, checkpoint arrests, taxes/fees affecting refugees, imposing municipal IDs, data collection and restrictions on rental of accommodations and livelihoods.

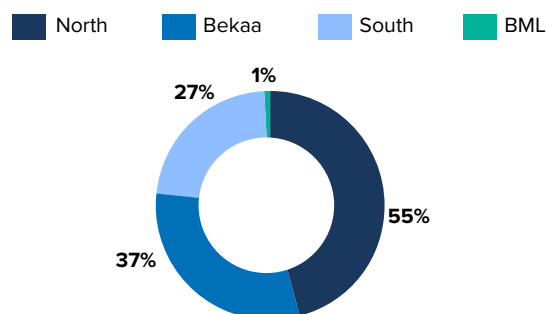
Figure 7. Restrictive measures (# of municipalities)



Compared to 2023, both the North and BML regions experienced an increase in the number of administrative measures related to Syrian nationals.

This may be related to the surge in anti-Syrian rhetoric after the assassination of a Lebanese Forces party member during Q2 but also due to these areas receiving large numbers of displaced populations, prompting local authorities to implement stricter measures. Conversely, municipal restrictions were less stringent in the South during Q4, where the intense impact of the conflict disrupted local governance structures and led many residents to flee due to the conflict. However, the last months of the year witnessed increased restrictions on access to housing for Syrians returning to their original places of residence after being displaced from the South, that exacerbated the risk of homelessness.

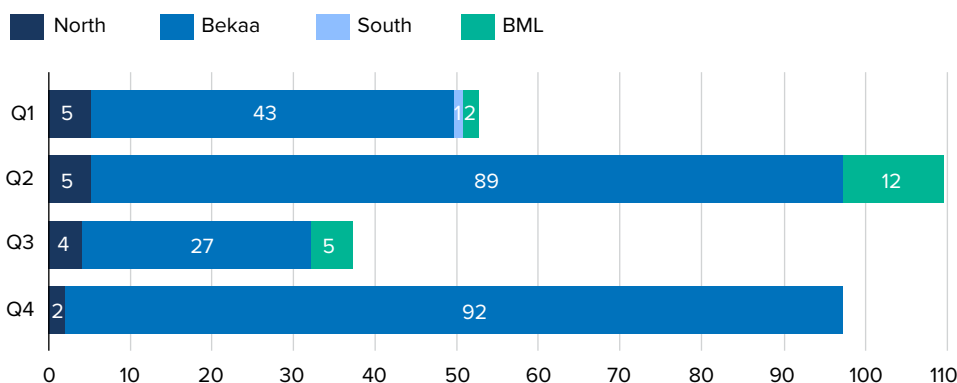
Figure 8. Regional measures during Q4



In the South, upon the declaration of the ceasefire, 35 restrictions against Syrian refugees were announced by at least 25 municipalities and 8 non-state actors. These restrictions instructed **Syrian refugees not to return to their villages until further notice**. For example, the city of Bint Jbeil and its surrounding villages (Aynata, Kounin, Tebnin, Chaqra, Jmayjmi, Safad, and Srifa) have prohibited all Syrians from returning to the area. Families who tried to return only to retrieve their belongings reported that their access was denied and were expelled from the area. Some other municipalities like Nabatieh Habboush, Kfarroumen, Kfartebnit, Doueir, and Harouf informed Syrians that they could only return if they had valid legal work permits.

Raids executed by law-enforcement agencies and LAF on Informal Tented Settlements (ITS) mainly took place in the Bekaa (92 incidents) and some parts of Northern Lebanon (2) during Q4, reaching a peak in December 2024. The raids frequently resulted in the arrest and deportation of many Syrian individuals.

Figure 9. Reported raids per region 2024



- 87% of all reported raids in 2024 occurred in the **Bekaa region**. The highest numbers were recorded in Q2, coinciding with a surge in violence against Syrians following the assassination of a Lebanese Forces party member, and in Q4, as per the ceasefire. During Q4, the occupation of previously vacated tents was explicitly prohibited by the LAF, while curfews in northern, western, and central Bekaa were strictly applied to Syrians. Raids continued to occur after the ceasefire with LAF forces raiding ITSs and dismantling unoccupied tents.

- In the **North**, Q4 was characterized by heightened enforcement measures, increased raids, and growing vulnerabilities for Syrian refugees lacking legal documentation. Notably, prior to the ceasefire, KILs reported that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) were not enforcing very strict measures for Syrians traveling within Lebanon. Following the ceasefire, a shift in enforcement was apparent, as key informants saw a significant increase in the number of checkpoints established and Syrian individuals stopped at these checkpoints. KILs conducted in the North reported that around 70% of people who tried to enter Lebanon were denied entry due to a lack of valid residency documentation. It was also revealed that the entry denials disproportionately affected males, as the majority of those crossing the border were males travelling in and out of Syria for short durations.

Attempts to undertake **onward movements** persisted throughout Q4, with Cyprus remaining the main destination. However, Q4 of 2024 recorded the lowest number of such movements compared to previous quarters, with Q1 reporting 35 movements, Q2 recording 28, Q3 declining to 13, and Q4 reaching just 7 movements. The trend showed a consistent decrease from Q1 to Q4, with the significant drop in Q4 primarily attributed to military operations, heightened vigilance by Cypriot coastguards, and an increase in returns and pushbacks of intercepted boats. Meanwhile, the number of actual and attempted boat departures from Lebanon, along with the number of passengers, increased by 28% in 2024 compared to 2023.

Social tensions and socio-economic vulnerabilities

Socio-economic vulnerabilities, rent and evictions

Though the conflict was concentrated in certain areas in Lebanon, its consequences affected the entire country. The escalation of the hostilities created increased pressure throughout all regions, driving up prices, creating job scarcity, and forcing people to rely on their savings. Moreover, people had to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as reduced spending on essentials like food and, in some cases, resorting to child labour.

The relative safety during Q4 in **Northern Lebanon** allowed for the regular collection of quantitative data with Syrian and Lebanese, through the Protection Monitoring Task Force established by the Protection Working Group at the sub-national level. Key informant²⁰ interviews and household assessments conducted prior to and after the ceasefire with Syrian individuals, UNHCR Outreach Volunteers, civil society groups, school directors, and members of the local host communities, revealed a number of important aspects pertaining to people's economic circumstances:

- 30% of KII²¹ respondents indicated a need for Core Relief Items (CRIs) such as blankets and mattresses, 25% highlighted that there was a gap in food supply, and 20% reported unmet health needs, particularly regarding access to medication and health care services.
- The socio-economic situation also affected the ability to secure shelter, with 15% of KII respondents indicating that they faced steep rental prices, and discriminatory practices such as demands for several months' rent paid in advance. Moreover, the KIIs revealed wage discrimination between Syrian and Lebanese workers respectively earning 5 and 10 USD per day.

The **Bekaa region**, similar to northern Lebanon, experienced a large influx of both Lebanese and Syrian IDPs due to the conflict, placing significant strain on already weak public services such as healthcare and education. Areas like Baalbek, Hermel, and West Bekaa witnessed considerable displacement, job losses, infrastructure damage, disrupted services, increasing the need for shelter, food, and medical aid. Following the ceasefire and despite the end of active conflict, extensive damage to infrastructure and the agricultural sector has worsened food insecurity, leaving many in urgent need of support.

Southern Lebanon was particularly devastated by the conflict, with many people fleeing to relatively safer areas, while others were unable to leave. Many border villages experienced shortages in essential supplies such as food due to the inability of supplies to reach those areas. **The ceasefire saw an almost overnight flood of IDPs returning to the South.** However, many of the border regions and towns were under the control of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) still rendering it impossible for those living there to return.

As monitored during the week prior to the ceasefire, Beirut and Mount Lebanon (**BML**) governorates hosted the largest number of displaced individuals, with 62% of the total IDPs in the country²². Those residing in collective shelters were mainly Lebanese IDPs, while most displaced Syrians stayed in private rentals or with family and friends. Both groups expressed urgent needs for essential items, including mattresses, blankets, heaters, and fuel. After the ceasefire, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)²³ highlighted that those remaining continued to face severe challenges, including food insecurity, healthcare gaps, and financial hardship despite a reduction in IDP numbers. Many displaced families living in private accommodations were forced into lower-quality housing, and several reported relying heavily on humanitarian aid to survive. Overall, both KIIs and FGDs underscored how the economic crisis, worsened by the conflict, continued to impact displaced communities.

In 2024, a total of 89 collective evictions were recorded by UNHCR across Lebanon, impacting at least 1,100 Syrian households. The Bekaa region experienced the highest number of collective evictions, followed by the North, while the South and Beirut-Mount Lebanon regions reported significantly fewer incidents.

²⁰ Protection Monitoring Task Force, Northern Lebanon, 41 Key Informant Interviews conducted between October and November

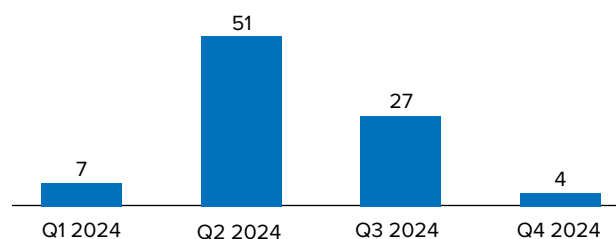
²¹ Ibid

²² IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix – Mobility Snapshot Round 65, 25 November 2024, accessible through this link: <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/mobility-snapshot-round-65-25-11-2024?close=true>

²³ Protection Working Group Lebanon - IDPs Protection Monitoring Update - Summary of Pilot Findings, December 2024.

Q4 recorded the lowest number of verified actual eviction cases compared to the rest of the year, likely due to the conflict and the change in regime in Syria as many displaced Syrians who previously feared persecution or retribution now perceive a lower risk in returning to Syria if they have no viable options in Lebanon. This shift has altered the dynamics of forced displacement, as some Syrians facing eviction may now consider repatriation a more feasible alternative than before.

Figure 10. Number of collective evictions per quarter 2024



In 2024, a total of **1,270 individual eviction incidents** were recorded by UNHCR across Lebanon, impacting at least 1,285 Syrian households (5,699 individuals). BML region accounted for the highest number of eviction cases, representing 47% of all recorded evictions followed by the North 26%.

Social tensions

Notwithstanding many acts of solidarity from host communities, rising inter- and intra-communal tensions became widespread by the end of the year²⁴. These tensions included divisions among various Lebanese communities, with displaced families facing suspicion of political affiliations and accusations of preferential treatment. Such tensions led to incidents, denial of rental spaces, and vigilante justice.

The tensions were frequently fueled by political disagreements, competition over resources, and cultural differences. Notably, these issues were not always limited to Syrians and Lebanese; in some instances, Lebanese IDPs also faced friction with their host communities, particularly during peak periods of displacement. Tensions escalated during increased bombing campaigns, when local residents feared newcomers might be targeted. Prior to the ceasefire, tensions between Lebanese and Syrian IDPs were high across all regions. A key factor driving these tensions was the use of schools as collective shelters for IDPs, with Lebanese parents demanding that schools be reopened to begin the new school year. Furthermore, arrests of Syrians on espionage charges, widely circulated on social media, fueled suspicions and heightened security risks for Syrian families, potentially limiting their movement and access to aid.

GBV, child protection & mental health

Increased child protection needs, risk of GBV and family separation

Since the conflict began, safety and security concerns have been widespread, particularly for internally displaced persons, including also refugees. Risks of gender-based violence (GBV), family conflicts, and violence against children have increased, largely due to overcrowded living conditions and limited shelter options²⁵. Displaced children, both from Lebanese and Syrian communities, have experienced heightened anxiety. Key informants have highlighted the need for child protection services, as well as awareness-raising efforts on children's safety, parenting, and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

- The prolonged conflict has **exacerbated risks of GBV**, with displaced women facing emotional and intimate partner violence, especially when sharing overcrowded shelters. Lack of adequate conditions in those shelters, such as lack of lighting, privacy, and security measures, heighten risks for women and girls.
- **Family separation** has been reported by key informants, as some Syrian respondents indicated that they have sent their wives and children to Syria during the airstrikes in Lebanon, while they remained in the country.

²⁴ *Escalation of Hostilities in Lebanon - Protection Snapshot #6 (20 October – 4 November 2024), Lebanon Protection Sector*

²⁵ *Escalation of Hostilities in Lebanon - Protection Snapshot #5 (September- 19 October 2024), Lebanon Protection Sector*

- Job losses due to displacement forced many Syrian families to **send their children to work**, as they struggled to afford raising living costs and meet basic needs. Displacement before the ceasefire and the limited access to education across Lebanon significantly contributed to child labour: in the North, 20% of displaced Syrians relied on their children for income generation, who earned as little as 4-6 USD per day²⁶. This figure decreased to 15% after the ceasefire. The areas of Nabatieh and Saida witnessed rises in cases of child labour, with adults citing the closure of factories and loss of jobs as the main contributing factor.
- Access to education in the South was particularly limited due to the high number of damaged and destroyed schools, compared to other areas. MEHE did not replace these schools with alternative ones and recommended AM and PM enrollment, attended by refugee children, in other operational schools. Documentation remained a main barrier to access education. UNHCR community sources reported an increase in child labor, correlated to being out of schools.

Mental health and psychosocial support

Disruptions in education and the lack of stable shelter also compounded children's safety and mental health concerns. As analyzed through the Protection Working Group Assessments with IDPs, psychological distress has been prevalent among secondarily displaced Syrian refugees, driven by violence, displacement, and the impacts of war. Mental health issues such as panic attacks, substance abuse, and child neglect were reported, underscoring the urgent need for psychosocial support.

- In the South, discrimination and administrative measures caused significant distress for Syrian refugees returning to their pre-conflict places of residence, leading to sleep difficulties, social isolation, and aggressive child behavior.
- In Bekaa, Beirut and Mount Lebanon (BML), refugees reported facing post-conflict trauma, while their displacement further strained mental well-being.
- Despite these challenges, as per the KIs with IDPs conducted in the North, only 15% were aware of available mental health services, with awareness especially low among the 85% living outside collective shelters.

Following the ceasefire, mental health may have improved for those able to return home, while those who remained displaced continue to experience distress. Syrian refugees also reported reduced stress due to political changes in Syria but continued to live with trauma and fear of renewed conflict. However, the uncertainty and volatile context in the region is triggering a sense of fear and insecurity.

²⁶ Based on 25 KIs conducted before the ceasefire in the North, by the Protection Monitoring Task Force

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