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Protection Monitoring

Situation of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

1st Quarter 2026

Methodology

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

The present report analyzes protection trends affecting Syrian refugees in Lebanon during the first quarter of 2026 (January-March). The escalation of hostilities on 02 March 2026[i] has also impacted refugee households, many of whom were forced to relocate to safer areas within Lebanon or, in some cases, compelled to return to Syria due to force majeure, citing a lack of viable alternatives. Refugee families identified as displaced were not involved in the PM surveys but instead were engaged in a rapid needs assessment and referred to humanitarian assistance as part of the UNHCR Displaced Refugees Tracking Tool.

The PM data was gathered through two primary methodologies:

- **Household Surveys (HHS):** **2,825 HHS** were conducted across all governorates in Lebanon, covering **13,727** household members including youth, women-headed households, and households with older persons or persons with disabilities. Of these, 24% were in person and 76% remote via phone. In March, **989** Syrian refugee households were reached through PM surveys, of which **189 (19%)** reported displacement linked to the escalation in hostilities. Displacement was most pronounced among households originating from the South, with 62% of contacted households in these areas reporting displacement.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KII):** **110 KIIs** (55% male, 45% female) were conducted to verify findings, complement quantitative data, and provide deeper qualitative insights.

Additionally, protection monitoring outcomes are validated by triangulation with community sources, field expert insight, protection observations, UNHCR monitoring of displacement and cross-border movements, and a range of secondary data published by other UN or INGO partners during the reporting period.

Key Highlights

Overall, Q1 findings point to a deterioration of the protection environment, driven by secondary displacement caused by the escalation of hostilities, and continuous legal insecurity remaining as a central protection concern for Syrian refugees.

The escalation in hostilities displaced around 1 million people, including thousands of Syrian refugees who faced challenges with accessing collective shelters (CSs) and assistance, increasing their vulnerability and reliance on informal support. By the end of March, 663 CSs hosted nearly 140,000 people, including over 1,000 refugees of all nationalities. The vast majority of displaced Syrian refugees remained outside formal shelter systems, including in host arrangements or highly precarious settings (tents, vehicles, public spaces), significantly increasing exposure to protection risks and limiting access to basic assistance. Although precise figures on displaced Syrians were not available by the end of Q1, an estimated 280,000 Syrians were residing in conflict-affected areas and were considered at risk of displacement.

Renewal of legal residency remains problematic: 81% of refugees above the age of 15 had no valid legal residency at the end of Q1, primarily due to inability to cover fees associated with renewing residency and finding a sponsor. The near-equal distribution across genders (49% male, 51% female) suggests that barriers to residency renewal are structural in nature, rather than gender specific. The lack of legal residency remains the primary structural protection risk, directly affecting freedom of movement, access to services, and exposure to detention and exploitation.

Socio-economic deterioration and systemic barriers to basic needs: Access to essential services and economic stability considerably deteriorated in Q1, with the proportion of refugee households unable to meet more than half of their basic needs increasing from 62% pre-escalation to 82% post-escalation.

Shelter access constraints: Instances of preferential admission of Lebanese IDPs in collective shelters in locations like Tyre, Saida, and Ain El Mrayseh have further restricted refugees' access to formal shelter options.

Shifting child labor patterns: Economic pressures associated with the nationwide emergency have contributed to a shift in child labor patterns, with households increasingly resorting to negative coping mechanisms. Reported child labor rose from 25% pre-escalation to 30% post-escalation, largely driven by the loss of adult livelihoods. While street-based activities declined, children have reportedly shifted towards work in wholesale and retail sectors. This trend is linked to prolonged school closures, limited access to remote learning due to connectivity and device constraints, and heightened safety concerns.

Educational disruption: The repurposing of public schools as CSs has impacted access to education, contributing to an increase in the proportion of Syrian refugee children out of school from 34% pre-escalation to 48% post-escalation. While online learning modalities were introduced as a mitigation measure, their effectiveness remained limited due to constraints in internet connectivity and access to devices.

Rising psychological distress: Psychological distress increased from 18% in Q4 2025 to 38% in Q1 2026, driven by the escalation in hostilities and compounded by persistent legal and socio-economic vulnerabilities. This trend reflects the cumulative impact of conflict-related trauma, displacement, and prolonged exposure to adverse coping conditions, further heightening protection concerns and mental health needs.

Operational Context:

Despite some positive developments in Q4 2025, including the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) facilitating increased access to education and the Ministry of Labour's (MoL) efforts to regularize Syrians and other foreign workers in the formal sector, the protection environment deteriorated in Q1 2026. By the end of March 2026, the protection context was shaped by interconnected dynamics:

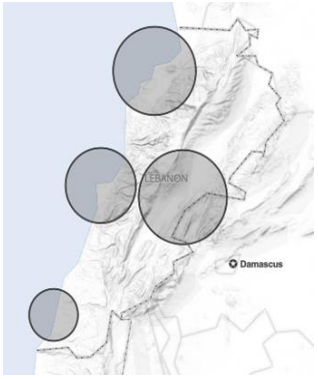
- **Escalation of hostilities and social tensions:** Intensified conflict resulting in civilian casualties, widespread infrastructure destruction, and heightened social tensions, exacerbating existing sectarian divisions.

- **Mass internal displacement:** Between early March and the ceasefire declared on 16 April, 1 million people were displaced. The scale and speed of displacement overwhelmed shelter capacities, resulting in overcrowding and increased risks of GBV, child protection concerns, and barriers to accessing assistance.
- **Return under force majeure to Syria:** More than 230,000 Syrians crossed into Syria during the reporting period. This movement reflects deteriorating conditions in Lebanon rather than improved conditions in Syria, highlighting increasingly constrained protection space.
- **Macroeconomic pressures:** Regional economic tensions, including disruptions to energy supply routes, contributed to rising fuel and commodity prices, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations and increasing reliance on negative coping strategies such as child labour, debt accumulation, and exploitative work.
- **Heightened risks in shelters:** The rapid shift to collective shelter accommodation heightened risks for refugees, including women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Overcrowding, lack of gender-sensitive facilities, and perceived inequities in assistance have contributed to increased marginalization of non-Lebanese displaced populations.
- **Emerging Housing, Land and Property (HLP) crisis:** Widespread destruction of housing in the South, Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburbs is expected to result in a protracted HLP crisis. Even in the event of a sustained ceasefire, anticipated restrictions linked to militarized buffer zones are likely to impede safe and sustainable returns for displaced populations, including refugees.

Situation of post-December 2024 arrivals

More than one year after the three waves of post-December 2024 arrivals, displacement into Lebanon continues, although at much lower scale if compared to the same period in 2025. At the end of March 2026, the post-December 2024 population was estimated at 132.000 individuals, including around 27,000 individuals recorded following a targeted recording procedure. The largest concentrations remain in Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel, followed by Akkar and the North. These areas are experiencing sustained pressure on housing, basic services, and livelihood opportunities. **Overcrowding and increased demand for housing** have contributed to rising rents and heightened competition over limited resources, particularly in border regions already facing structural vulnerabilities.

Throughout Q1, post 2024 arrivals continued to face acute protection risks, primarily driven by limited access to legal residency and civil documentation due to the lack of a procedure for registering their presence in Lebanon.[ii] Many entered through unofficial routes or were unable to regularize their stay, resulting in pervasive fear of checkpoints, arrest, and deportation. This has led to widespread adoption of self-imposed movement restrictions, particularly among men and adolescent boys, significantly constraining access to livelihoods and essential services.[iii]



Women and girls face compounded risks, including restricted mobility due to safety concerns, increased exposure to harassment, and limited safe access to services, including GBV support. Overcrowded living conditions and lack of privacy further exacerbate these risks, while also contributing to increased psychosocial distress.

Economic vulnerability remains severe. Movement restrictions and legal barriers to employment limit access to formal labour markets, pushing households towards informal and often exploitative work arrangements. These conditions increase exposure to abuse and reduce households' capacity to meet basic needs.

Children are disproportionately affected, with continued disruptions to education and increased exposure to child labour as households adopt negative coping strategies. Barriers to school enrolment, limited access to learning resources, and economic pressures are contributing to school dropout and engagement in hazardous work.

Overall, post-2024 arrivals consistently report limited prospects for either regularization of their stay or return, reflecting a situation of protracted uncertainty. Legal insecurity, economic marginalization, and social exclusion interact to reinforce vulnerabilities over time, underscoring the need for sustained, protection-centred interventions.

Returns and cross-border movements

At the end of Q1 2026, more than 600,000 Syrians were confirmed or presumed to have returned since December 2024, reflecting an increase from 501,604 at the end of Q4 2025. Of these, 68,891 individuals were supported by UNHCR to voluntarily repatriate, while the majority returned spontaneously to Syria[iv].

The humanitarian context shifted significantly following the escalation of hostilities on 2 March 2026, which resulted in a three-fold increase in movements from Lebanon to Syria. Between 2 March and 12 April, approximately 277,000 individuals crossed into Syria through official land borders, including 234,000 Syrian nationals. Syrians departing during this period include those known and not known to UNHCR; as well as those who had planned to return, alongside those fleeing airstrikes and deteriorating security conditions in Lebanon. Only 67,300 (29%) of those crossing reported an intention to return permanently, while the remainder described their movement as temporary or conditional, dependent also on the evolving security situation in Lebanon.[v] Due to the advent of conflict and increased movements to Syria due to force majeure, UNHCR instigated a pivot to its returns programming to take this into account at the end of the reporting period.
PM household-level data further confirms that return intentions increased toward the end ofQ1 coinciding with the escalation of hostilities.

> *Many Syrians returned to Syria, as the CSs are mainly hosting Lebanese IDPs, leaving them with no alternative accommodation", – female Lebanese social worker - El Meten district*

Intentions to return to Syria continue to be highly fluid, dependent on individualized considerations, including family circumstances and practical concerns tied to the situation in Syria and Lebanon. Among those expressing an intention to return, timelines remain short-term and fluid.

The types of support needed to enable return included: financial assistance (41%), transportation support (31%), and housing support (13%), reflecting evolving priorities compared to Q4 2025 and underscoring the financial constraints associated with return.

Among households intending to return, most indicated plans to return to areas of origin—primarily Homs (19%), Damascus (19%), Idleb (18%), and Aleppo (17%)—with 97% reporting intentions for permanent return. However, these intentions remain constrained by prevailing conditions in Syria.

Consistent with previous quarterly PM findings, return intentions remain heavily influenced by conditions inside Syria, with 95% of respondents referencing barriers in Syria. The most commonly reported obstacles include lack of adequate shelter (46%), limited livelihood opportunities (27%), and concerns related to the security situation (16%).

> *If life here is hard, in Syria it is even harder", – male community leader, Baddawi North*

In parallel, a small proportion of households (5%) cited factors in Lebanon acting as barriers to return, including family ties (33%), established socio-economic presence (30%), and outstanding debts (18%).

Refugees continue to express a need for information to make informed decisions to return, with top three priority issues related to access to services (25%), security conditions (22%), and livelihood opportunities (20%) in areas of potential return.
Overall, the PM findings indicate that, despite increased cross-border movements at the end of Q1, many of these took place largely under *force majeure* conditions as a result of the ongoing hostilities in Lebanon, rather than sustainable return, underscoring the continued need for protection-oriented responses and informed decision-making support in line with UNHCR return principles.

Onward Movements

Despite the escalation of hostilities, available evidence indicates that sea onward movements represent a marginal share of overall movement dynamics, with IOM estimating that maritime departures accounted for approximately 1% of total Syrian exits from Lebanon.[vi] Consistent with this, PM Key Informants (KIs) reported **no instances of irregular sea travel** during the reporting period, suggesting that this route is not widely pursued.

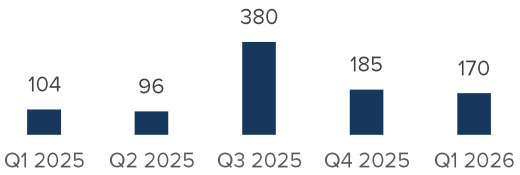
The continued low incidence of maritime movements is likely influenced by a combination of factors, including the high risks associated with sea crossings, strengthened maritime control measures by Syrian, Lebanese and Cypriot authorities, also evolving conditions in Syria, which have reduced certain push factors linked to return-related risks. Overall, mobility patterns remain predominantly land-based, with irregular maritime movement not constituting a significant coping or migration strategy for affected populations during this period.

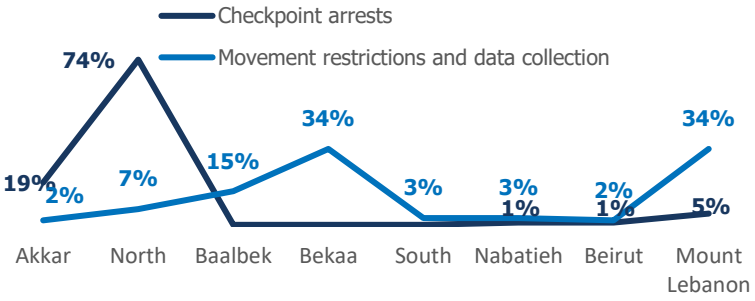
Administrative measures and protection environment

Protection incident data[vii] and PM findings both indicated that administrative measures[viii] affecting Syrian refugees remained widespread, with **170** administrative measures reported in Q1 2026 (8% less compared to Q4 2025). The analysis of geographic and thematic trends in Q1 flagged that there is a gradual shift from predominantly movement-related restrictions toward more **economically driven administrative constraints**, while localized security-related movement measures remain significant in conflict-affected areas.

In general, the protection environment in Q1 was characterized by persistent restrictions on freedom of movement, housing, livelihoods, and access to services, alongside exposure to arbitrary enforcement practices, detention risks, and financial pressures on vulnerable refugee households.

Reported administrative measures

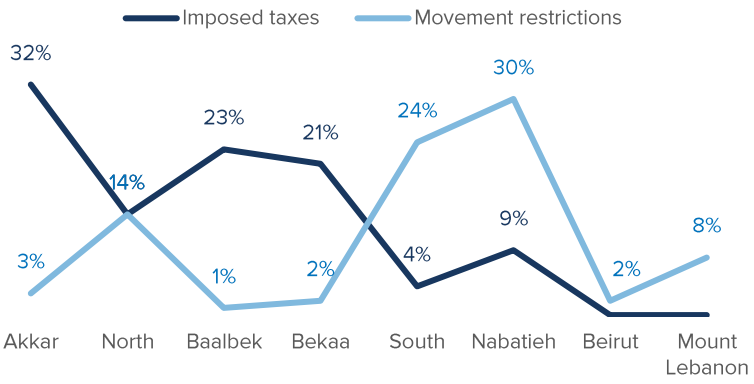




Of the total recorded measures, 80 incidents (47%) were related to arrests at checkpoints, while the remaining 90 incidents (53%) were implemented at the municipal level. The observed increase in data collection exercises and restrictions on rental arrangements appears to be linked to displacement movements following the escalation in hostilities in March.

> *You must pay the municipal fee, it is more important than food", – Syrian female Shawish in Qaraoun*

PM findings indicate that restrictions on movement, access to services, and housing continued to be prevalent, particularly in areas affected by displacement and heightened insecurity. Movement restrictions remained widely reported at governorate level, particularly in Nabatieh (30%) and the South (24%), while taxes and fees emerged as the most frequently reported measure at the national level (11%), increasing from 6% in Q4 2025. Taxes and fees were most frequently reported in Akkar (32%),



Baalbek (23%), and Bekaa (21%), suggesting that a high concentration of refugees combined with limited service provision capacity are key factors influencing local governance practices.

> *I told my Lebanese neighbor that the new tax imposed by the municipality was not fair. She responded by telling me that I could return to my country and that they would be relieved without us", – Syrian single head of household in Ainata*

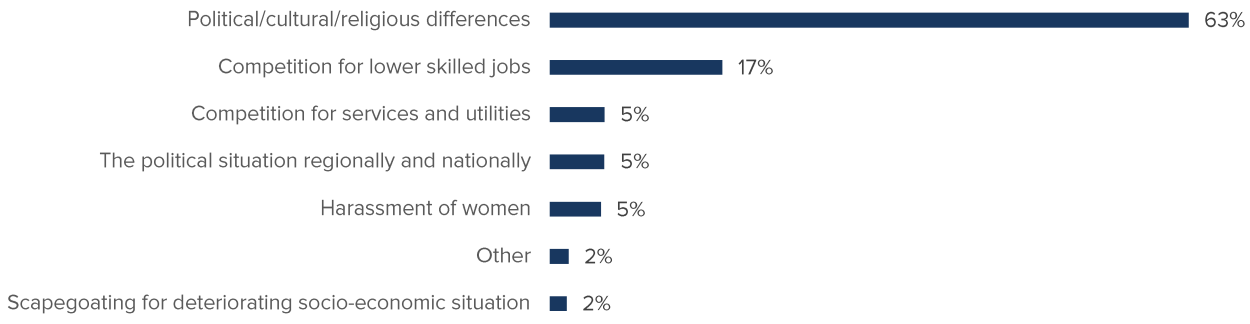
Protection Trends

Social cohesion and community tensions

Reported social tensions between refugee and host communities remained limited but persistent in Q1. Overall, **5%** of assessed households reported an **increase in tensions** with host communities, while 3% indicated having experienced violence in the 30 days prior to data collection. Although these proportions remain relatively low, they point to underlying and localized friction in certain areas.

Among households reporting increased tensions, the primary drivers were linked to perceived political, cultural, and religious differences (63%), followed by competition over lower-skilled employment opportunities (17%) and limited access to services and utilities (5%). This indicates that tensions are primarily driven by structural and perception-based factors, rather than isolated incidents.

Main Sources of Inter-Community Tensions



> *Some Lebanese patients refuse to sit next to Syrian patients at the dispensary due to stigmatization based on nationality", – Lebanese female health worker Staff, Beirut district*

Overall, while indicators suggest that social tensions were not widespread in Q1, they remain a relevant protection concern, particularly in contexts of economic hardship, competition over resources, and large-scale displacement. These dynamics underscore the importance of targeted social stability and community-based interventions to mitigate risks of further deterioration in social cohesion.

KIIs highlighted significant geographic disparities in social cohesion and community tensions across Q1. More acute tensions were reported in Nabatieh, Tyre, and Aynatha, characterized by growing mistrust, verbal harassment, and increased pressure on refugees to leave. In northern areas, including Halba, Abdeh, and Qobet Shamra, relations ranged from neutral to tense, often driven by competition over low-skilled labor opportunities. In Beirut and ML, particularly in Ain Bzhel, Hrajel, and Msytbeh, tensions were primarily linked to perceived cultural differences and prejudice based on nationality.

In contrast, Bekaa and Baalbek presented a more diverse picture, with both tension and cohesion observed. In Hermel, KIIs reported fragile relations, including instances of verbal harassment. However, in locations such as Rayak, Mjdal Anjar, and Taalabaya, relatively stronger social cohesion was noted. These more positive dynamics

were attributed to long-standing coexistence, intermarriages, and economic interdependence, particularly in the agricultural sector—highlighting the role of shared livelihoods in mitigating tensions and supporting community cohesion.

Following the escalation of hostilities, KIs identified emerging and shifting drivers of tension. In Saida and Tyre, tensions were increasingly associated with perceived inequities in aid distribution, with assistance reportedly prioritizing Lebanese households. In Borj Hammoud, informal segregation within CSs along political or religious lines was reported as a coping mechanism to manage tensions, while also reflecting underlying social divisions. In northern areas, economic stressors—including rising rents and disputes over unpaid rent—were frequently cited as contributing factors to tensions between refugee tenants and host community landlords.

Overall, while large-scale incidents of violence remain limited, findings indicate the persistence of localized tensions shaped by economic hardship, perceived inequalities, and broader socio-political dynamics. Without targeted interventions to strengthen social cohesion, promote inclusive service delivery, and address structural drivers of tension, these dynamics may continue to pose risks to community stability and peaceful coexistence.

> *"When any security incident happens in the area, Syrians are often the first to be suspected, with locals asking, 'Maybe a Syrian is involved, when are they going back?", – Lebanese KII in Abassieh, Tyre*

Legal residency and civil documentation

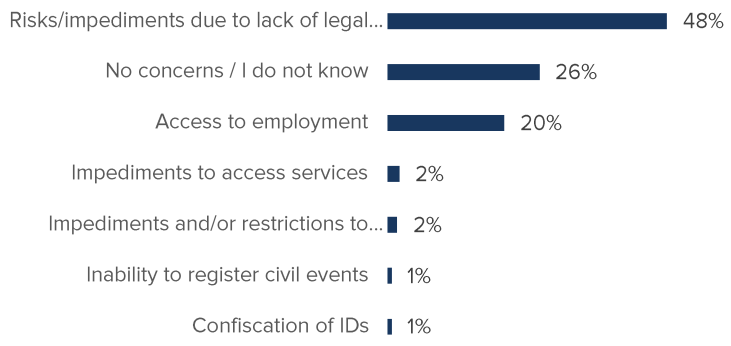
Legal residency remains one of the most significant and systemic protection concerns affecting Syrian refugees across assessed locations in Lebanon. Household findings indicate that **81%** of refugees aged 15 and above **lacked valid legal residency** in Q1, reflecting persistently high levels of irregular status and limited access to legal stay. The near-equal distribution across genders (49% male, 51% female) suggests that barriers to residency renewal are structural in nature, rather than gender specific.

While levels of basic civil documentation remain relatively high, critical gaps persist in access to documentation required for acquisition or extension of residence permits - ID, valid passport, and civil extract for children. The majority of refugees report holding Syrian-issued identity documents, primarily national IDs (62%) and civil extracts or family booklets (29%). However, only a small proportion possess travel documents, with 2% holding valid passports and 4% holding expired passports. A very limited number of individuals reported holding alternative documentation, such as laissez-passer (1%), while 1% reported having no documentation at all.

These documentation gaps significantly increase the risk of irregularity and contribute to legal insecurity, limiting freedom of movement, access to services, and livelihood opportunities. Overall, constraints in accessing or maintaining legal residency continue to drive protection risks and reinforce multi-dimensional vulnerability among refugees.

The protracted nature of displacement is reflected in the high proportion of refugee households with children born in Lebanon (68%). While the majority of these children reportedly hold Lebanese birth certificates (81%), notable gaps persist, with 10% relying on birth notifications and 1% lacking any documentation. The completion of the birth registration in Lebanon is necessary to register the birth in Syria and accessing Syrian civil documentation. These documentation gaps continue to pose risks related to legal identity, access to services, and longer-term legal status.

Household Concerns on Legal and Civil Documentation



In response to advocacy efforts, the Personal Status Department introduced temporary measures on 31 March 2026 aimed at facilitating continuity of civil registration for non-Lebanese populations, including refugees. These

measures included the redistribution of registration functions from non-operational districts to functioning offices (e.g. Zahle covering Bekaa) and the relocation of records (e.g. Nabatieh records transferred to Saida), improving access to documentation services in conflict-affected areas.

Despite these efforts, barriers to legal residency remain widespread and systemic. Complex administrative procedures and financial constraints continue to limit access to renewal of residence permits. KIs in West and Central Bekaa indicate that rejection and non-processing rates for residency applications may reach 90–95%, reflecting highly restricted pathways to legal stay. Also, while the General Security Office extended the regularization window for Syrian workers until 30 June 2026, access to the work-based regularization pathways has remained rather limited for the majority of Syrian refugees.[ix] Syrians remain largely unable to overcome a combination of interrelated barriers, including structural and administrative constraints, financial costs, limited system capacity, and information gaps. Additional challenges stem from the absence of viable pathways for those engaged in informal employment, inconsistencies in implementation, and persistent concerns regarding potential penalties, all of which continue to hinder access to regularization. Furthermore, current requirements rely on formal employer-sponsored arrangements with high fee requirements and complex administrative requirements in a predominantly informal labor market, making them difficult to implement effectively, particularly in sectors reliant on seasonal, temporary, and daily labor.

The lack of legal residency has significant protection implications. Refugees frequently report adopting self-imposed movement restrictions due to fear of arrest at checkpoints, contributing to de facto confinement. These dynamics disproportionately affect men, who are perceived to be at greater risk of arrest. In areas such as Deir El Ahmar, the presence of permanent checkpoints reinforces these restrictions, even in the absence of active enforcement.

> *"Refugees limit their movement and avoid checkpoints because they fear being stopped or deported", – female volunteer in Berqayel Municipality, Akkar*

Limited freedom of movement further constrains access to livelihoods, healthcare, and education, exacerbating socio-economic vulnerability. At the same time, irregular status increases exposure to protection risks, including exploitative labor conditions and heightened vulnerability to raids targeting individuals without valid documentation.

Overall, persistent barriers to legal residency and civil documentation continue to drive a range of interconnected protection risks, reinforcing exclusion, limiting access to rights and services, and deepening vulnerability among refugees.

Access to Shelter, Basic Services, and Livelihoods

Shelter Conditions

Qualitative findings from March indicate **a deterioration** in shelter conditions for Syrian refugees following the escalation, particularly in terms of access constraints, exclusion, and heightened protection risks. KIs reported barriers to accessing CSs, including instances of preferential admission practices favoring Lebanese IDPs, for example, in Tyre, Saida, and Ain El Mrayseh. This has limited access for Syrian refugees to formal shelter options.

As a result, a proportion of Syrian households have resorted to alternative and often inadequate shelter arrangements, including informal settings such as unfinished buildings, vehicles, or open spaces. Significant gaps in inclusion and accessibility were also identified within CSs. Most facilities lack adequate infrastructure to accommodate persons with disabilities and older persons, constraining their access to safe and dignified shelter and increasing their exposure to protection risks.

As of 30 March 2026, over one million individuals were displaced within Lebanon due to the conflict, including approximately 140,000 individuals accommodated across more than 660 government-designated CSs. Overcrowding and prioritization of access for Lebanese nationals[x] have further constrained shelter availability for non-Lebanese populations, leading many secondarily displaced Syrians to rely on host communities, private rentals, or other substandard shelter arrangements.

Assistance was primarily directed toward Lebanese families, leaving Syrian refugees dependent on individual initiatives and informal support", – Lebanese individual initiator - Tyre

Heightened shelter vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees are further exacerbated by evictions, escalating rental costs, and limited access to legal safeguards, contributing to increased risks of homelessness, exploitation, and the adoption of negative coping mechanisms. Concurrently, informal settlements emerged in several locations, including Baalbek, where internally displaced populations relied predominantly on self-support due to insufficient humanitarian assistance available at the start of the escalation.[xi]

KIIs also indicated patterns of cyclical displacement, particularly among those households who were unable to secure affordable accommodation following the repetitive displacement orders or denied access to CSs. These households frequently remained in public spaces for periods of 24–48 hours, and even longer, and subsequently were enforced to return to unsafe areas due to the absence of viable shelter alternatives. This trend highlights gaps in equitable access to shelter assistance and elevates exposure to protection risks, including insecurity, exploitation, and repeated displacement.

Ongoing attacks in Tyre have created a constant sense of fear and instability, leaving many families unable to relocate due to lack of financial means", – female single head of household - Maarake

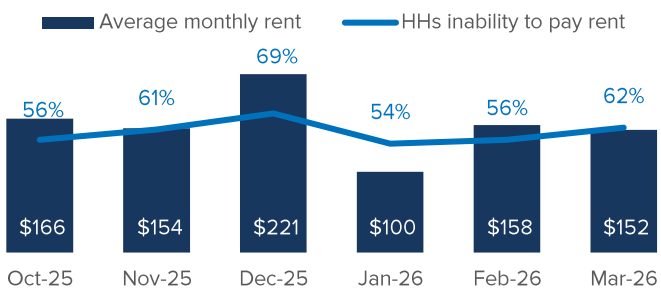
Findings from assessed Syrian refugee households indicate continued shelter vulnerability during Q1 2026. Approximately 31% of households reported being at risk of eviction, despite relatively low levels of reported eviction events (1–4%). While a majority of households (67%) did not identify immediate shelter concerns, this may mask underlying structural vulnerabilities, as many continue to reside in informal or insecure or substandard housing arrangements.

In parallel, the inability to afford rental payments remained consistently high, ranging between 54% and 62% across Q4 2025 and Q1 2026. This suggests a persistent affordability gap between refugee household income and rental costs, which endures irrespective of fluctuations in average rent levels.

Access to Services and Basic Needs

Access to essential services remained constrained throughout Q1 2026 and further **deteriorated** in March. Over one-third of households (35%) reported being unable to access healthcare, reflecting a 12% increase compared to Q4 2025. While access to education showed a slight improvement (12%, up 3% from Q4 2025), barriers to education persist.

Household capacity to meet basic needs declined significantly over the same period. The proportion of households unable to cover more than half of their basic needs increased from 62% at the beginning of Q1 to 82% in March 2026, indicating a deterioration in economic conditions following the escalation.



This deterioration occurred against a backdrop of already severe socio-economic vulnerability among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, with VASyR 2025 findings that 73% of Syrians were living below the Minimum Expenditure Basket and 60% below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket. Vulnerabilities were further exacerbated by a reduction in humanitarian service delivery in conflict-affected areas in the south due to access and security constraints. As a result, affected refugees were increasingly reliant on overstretched services and informal coping mechanisms in Q1, deepening their exposure to socio-economic risks.

Priority needs remained primarily concentrated around food and shelter. Food and nutrition (34%) and rent/shelter (31%) were consistently reported as the most urgent needs, followed by health-related expenses (19%), broadly in line with trends observed in Q4 2025. This reflects sustained financial pressure on households, compounded by reduced income-generating opportunities.

Qualitative findings from March further highlight structural barriers to accessing services. In locations such as Marjeyoun and Hasbaya, KIs reported severe disruptions in essential services, including water and electricity. Where assistance is available, distribution appears uneven, with reports indicating that support is often channeled through municipalities and primarily reaching Lebanese populations. This has limited access for Syrian refugees, many of whom rely on informal networks or overstretched humanitarian actors.

Additional constraints such as high transportation costs, lack of legal documentation, and the reduced operational presence of humanitarian actors in high-risk areas, continue to restrict access to available services. These barriers disproportionately affect individuals with limited mobility and those facing movement restrictions.

Moreover, the KIs flagged about the reliance of Syrian refugees on informal mechanisms, such as word of mouth and WhatsApp, to obtain information about services. This creates a risk of disparities in awareness of and access to available services and assistance programs, particularly for already marginalized groups.

> *"IDPs with physical disabilities encounter difficulties, as CSs are not adequately equipped to meet their needs, limiting safe and easy access", – female Lebanese KI - Chouf district*

Access to Livelihoods

Access to livelihoods among Syrian refugee households remained relatively high during Q1 2026, with 71% of respondents reporting **engagement in income-generating activities**. However, employment was predominantly informal, irregular, and lacking basic safeguards. Most assessed households relied on seasonal (44%) and part-time work (31%), while only 25% reported full-time employment. Livelihood opportunities were largely concentrated in low-skilled sectors, primarily construction (41%), followed by services (32%) and agriculture (20%). This distribution indicates a continued reliance on daily labor and physically demanding activities, often associated with heightened exposure to exploitation and unsafe working conditions.

Despite relatively high levels of participation, economic vulnerability remained significant. While 42% of households reported receiving humanitarian assistance, of whom 74% indicated ongoing support, this suggests that income from available livelihood opportunities is insufficient to meet basic needs, reinforcing dependency on external assistance.

A comparison of pre- and post-escalation data indicates a deterioration in livelihood access following developments in March. The proportion of households engaged in income-generating activities declined from 74% in January–February to 65% in March, reflecting reduced access to employment opportunities. In parallel, a shift in the composition of available work was observed. Engagement in construction declined slightly (from 42% to 39%), while participation in service-related activities, including hospitality and retail, increased from 30% to 40%. Agricultural work also decreased (from 22% to 17%), narrowing income opportunities for vulnerable households. These shifts are likely linked to insecurity and movement restrictions, which have disproportionately affected sectors such as construction and agriculture that require physical access to worksites. As a result, households appear to be increasingly relying on less stable and often lower-paying service-based activities, contributing to reduced income stability.

Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare **remained severely constrained** for Syrian refugee households throughout Q1 2026 and further deteriorated in March. Overall, 51% of households reported being unable to access healthcare services, increasing to 54% following the escalation.

Barriers to access were predominantly financial, with 96% of households citing cost as the primary constraint. A smaller proportion (4%) reported the absence of available health facilities, particularly in underserved or high-

risk areas. These findings indicate that, while services may be present, affordability and geographic limitations significantly restrict effective access.

High levels of household indebtedness further compound these challenges. During Q1, 89% of households reported having accumulated debt, primarily driven by expenditures on food (43%), housing (38%), and healthcare (14%). This reflects the competing financial pressures faced by households and the limited capacity to absorb health-related costs.

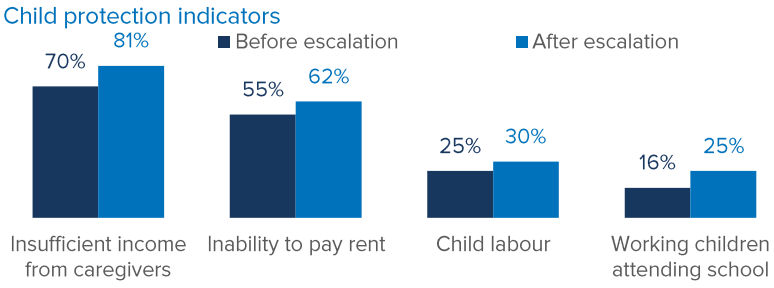
Among households incurring debt for healthcare, reported consequences included interruptions in access to medical services. A majority indicated experiencing lack of response or delayed care from providers (61%), while 23% reported denial of additional treatment due to unpaid bills. These barriers suggest disruptions in continuity of care and increased health risks, particularly for individuals requiring ongoing or chronic treatment.

Child Protection

The PM findings in March 2026 flagged that escalation of hostilities has **exacerbated existing economic vulnerabilities**, leading to an increase in the use of child labor as a coping strategy. Reported prevalence rose from 25% prior to the escalation to 30% thereafter, with increases particularly noted in Beirut, ML, Bekaa, and North. This trend appears closely linked to reduced household income and limited access to livelihood opportunities for adults.

> *Child labor among Syrian children has increased recently, as many are no longer attending school, particularly displaced children, and their parents have lost their jobs in their areas of origin", – Syrian female refugee community leader- Jbeil district*

KI findings indicate that conflict-related disruptions have significantly affected adult employment, with many Syrian workers experiencing job losses, reduced working hours, or restricted access to workplaces. This reduction in earning capacity has increased reliance on children's income-generating activities. For example, in Bhanine (North governorate), community sources reported a noticeable increase in child labor, attributed to restricted mobility and reduced access to employment for adult men who previously worked in Beirut, the South, and parts of Bekaa. In contrast, in Tyre (South governorate), child labor was reportedly not observed in March. This reduction is not indicative of improved conditions but rather reflects a contraction in available livelihood opportunities due to insecurity, business closures, and displacement, which have limited opportunities for both adults and children to engage in work.



> *Those who are barely able to meet their household needs end up sending their children to work", – Syrian male shawish - Dalhamiyet Zahle*

In addition to changes in prevalence, shifts in the nature of child labor were also reported. Engagement in street-based activities, such as selling items or begging, declined from 30% pre-escalation to 24% post-escalation, potentially reflecting increased insecurity in public spaces. Conversely, participation in wholesale and retail activities increased from 22% to 29%, suggesting a shift towards less visible forms of labor.

> *The one who learns a trade at a young age gains more opportunities", – Syrian female community leader – Baalbek*

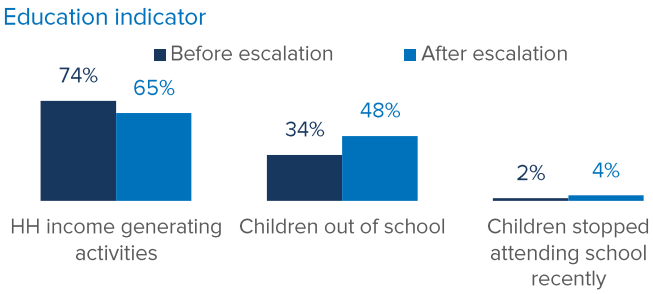
KIs in B/ML further reported an increase in child labor linked to the influx of displaced populations and the growing number of out-of-school children. In Borj Hammoud (El Metn district), limited access to internet connectivity and appropriate devices has constrained participation in remote learning, contributing to increased reliance on child labor as a coping mechanism.

> *Even children who go to school are working; almost every child contributes to the household income", – Moukhtar – Bebnine, North*

Education

Access to education was disrupted during Q1, particularly in the South, B/ML, and Bekaa. Disruptions were primarily driven by school closures due to insecurity and the repurposing of public schools as CSs for IDPs. These trends are reflected in household-level data, with the proportion of households reporting children out of school increasing from 34% prior to the escalation to 48% thereafter.

The same chart provides that the percentage of households engaged in income-generating activities has decreased from 74% before the escalation to 65% afterward. Moreover, the percentage of households reporting that children stopped attending school recently increased from 2% to 4% over the same period. The data shows a direct and inverse correlation between household income generating activities and children engaged in education. As household income generating activities decrease, the percentage of children out of school increases.



> *Child labor among Syrian children has risen, particularly due to school closures during this period, as schools are being used to host IDPs", – female Syrian Refugee community leader - El Meten district*

Displacement among Syrian refugee families has further compounded barriers to school attendance. Interestingly, despite these constraints, the proportion of working children reported as attending school increased from 16% in January–February to 25% in March. According to KIIs in Bekaa, this likely reflects nominal enrolment or partial participation—such as engagement in remote learning modalities—rather than regular and sustained attendance.

However, while remote learning has been adopted as an alternative modality, it was constrained as refugee children faced challenges related to limited access to digital devices, unaffordable internet packages, and unreliable connectivity, which restricted their effective participation in online education. Moreover, the increase in the percentage of children engaging in child labor while attending school, likely reflects increased economic strain on household income due to a loss of adult livelihoods because of the conflict and displacement.

Gender-Based Violence

Perceived levels of GBV remained low during Q1, however, KIs and information from GBV actors[xii] suggest that **GBV risks remain present and are underreported**. Syrian women and girls continue to face a range of gender-specific protection risks linked to harassment in public spaces, economic vulnerability, discriminatory social norms, and negative coping strategies adopted under prolonged displacement and financial stress.

Restrictions on movement among women and girls were widely reported as a self-protection measure. In North and Akkar, including Batroun, Arqa, Deir Ammar, Qobbet Shamra, Tall Hayat, Mejdlaya, Saadine, Abou Samra, and Baddawi, KIs indicated that women and girls often avoid leaving their homes after sunset due to fear of harassment or assault. This trend is particularly evident in agricultural areas such as Sahel Akkar and Saadine, where poor lighting, isolated roads, and limited security presence increase perceived insecurity.

In urban areas, including Beirut and Tripoli, KIs reported frequent instances of verbal harassment and prejudiced behavior targeting Syrian women and girls in public spaces, including transportation and markets. Similar concerns were reported in ML locations such as Baysour and Watta Al Msaytbeh, where biased treatment in healthcare settings was also observed, at times discouraging access to essential services.

Economic pressures were reported to contribute to harmful coping strategies. In Baalbek and Bar Elias, early marriage was identified as a mechanism used by some households to mitigate financial strain, often with associated protection risks, including school dropout and exposure to domestic violence. In Beirut (Tariq El Jdideh), KIs also reported an increase in divorce rates among young refugee couples and a growing number of female-headed households facing heightened socio-economic vulnerability.

Women engaged in informal labour, particularly in agriculture in the South and Baalbek (including Ghazieh, Tyre, Abbasieh, Nabatieh, Habbouch, Ali El Nahri, and Baalbek), were reported to face exploitation, including unequal pay and exposure to verbal and physical abuse. Women without male support—such as widows or those whose spouses are absent—were identified as particularly at risk of harassment, exploitation, and discriminatory treatment by landlords and employers, particularly in North. Lack of legal residency further compounds these risks by limiting access to protection mechanisms and reporting channels.

KIs highlighted domestic violence as a persistent but largely hidden concern. In areas such as Machha and Borj Hammoud, economic stress and insecurity were cited as key contributing factors. In Saida, Ain El Mrayseh, Nabaa, and in CSs, overcrowding, lack of privacy, and emotional strain were reported to increase intra-household tensions and psychological abuse. In some CSs, risks related to power imbalances—particularly linked to informal leadership structures—and potential sexual exploitation and abuse were also identified.

> *"Domestic violence has been reported, directly linked to both the economic hardship and the insecurity caused by the war", – female Lebanese social worker at the PHC El Meten district*

Variation in perceived GBV risks was noted across locations. Lower reported concern was observed in areas such as Marj, Qaraoun, Kamed Al Loz, Ferzol, and Chmestar, where women were generally described as able to move more freely, although some mobility constraints remain linked to broader insecurity. In contrast, higher-risk environments were reported in Saida, Tyre, Ain El Mrayseh, Nabaa, Borj El Brajneh, Mina, Qobbet Shamra, and Tabbaneh, where factors including harassment, overcrowded shelter conditions, and economic pressure contribute to increased protection risks. In Marjeyoun, Hasbaya, and Chebaa, KIs noted that GBV risks—particularly domestic violence and early marriage—are rarely reported and are often addressed within households due to stigma and limited access to safe reporting mechanisms.

> *"The CSs lack sufficient lighting, especially at night, creating serious security risks, particularly for women", – female Syrian Refugee community leader – Nabaa, El Meten district*

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

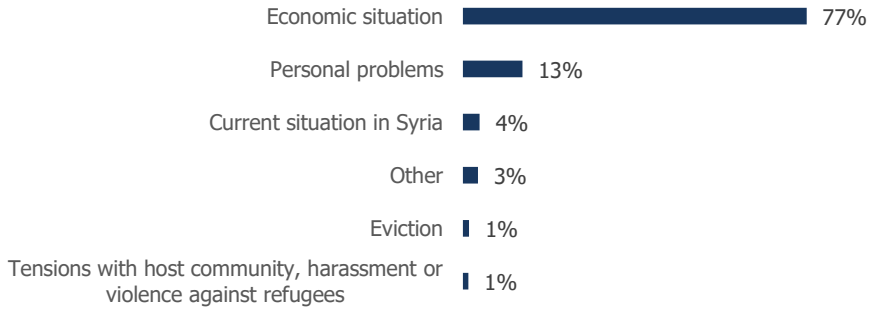
In Q1, reported levels of mental health and psychosocial distress increased significantly compared to Q4 2025, rising from **18%** to **38%**, indicating a deterioration in the overall protection environment for Syrian refugees. These distress levels were already elevated prior to the escalation (37% in January–February) and increased further in March (**40%**), suggesting that the escalation intensified pre-existing vulnerabilities rather than introducing new stressors.

Psychological distress during Q1 appears closely linked to persistent structural challenges, including economic hardship, legal insecurity, and movement restrictions. KIs highlighted that fear of checkpoints and lack of legal documentation continue to limit freedom of movement, particularly among men, while women face increased caregiving responsibilities and social isolation.

Following the escalation in March, distress became more acute in conflict-affected areas, where displacement, overcrowding, and limited access to adequate shelter further strained household coping capacities. In some locations, reported exclusion from shelter assistance and resort to substandard living conditions contributed to heightened stress and exposure to protection risks.

Across all areas, economic hardship remained the primary reported driver of distress (77%), consistent with pre-escalation levels (78%) and only marginally decreasing post-escalation (74%). This underscores the sustained impact of poverty, unemployment, and inability to meet basic needs. Other contributing factors, including personal and family-related issues (13%), decreased compared to Q4 2025, while stressors related to the situation in Syria and past trauma were reported less frequently.

Top contributors to P\sychological Distress



Overall, while distress levels increased during Q1, findings suggest a consolidation of drivers around economic pressures, with financial hardship emerging as the dominant factor shaping psychosocial wellbeing among affected populations.

> *There is a clear gap in support for Syrian families outside CSs compared to Lebanese in the same situation, with discrimination based on nationality", – female Lebanese KI - Ain El Mrayseh, Beirut district*

For more information, please contact arjupin@unhcr.org

[i] On 02 March 2026, the humanitarian situation in Lebanon escalated rapidly from localized tension and ceasefire violations to a full-scale national emergency. The intensified military operations of Israeli Forces and displacement orders affected thousands of Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian refugees, also migrants and stateless persons, enforcing them to flee their homes to other parts of the country.
[ii] UNHCR, Lebanon Fact Sheet, February 2026.
[iii] ANERA, Lebanon Situation report, March 2026.
[iv] UNHCR Facilitated Return of Syrian Refugees – Lebanon, 30 April 2026.
[v] UNHCR Syria: Flash Update #2 - Middle East Situation, 13 April 2026.
[vi] IOM Lebanon - Cross Border Movement (26-31 March 2026).
[vii] Since January 2026 UNHCR launched the Protection Incidents Tracking Tool (PITT) that allows to systematically collect data about incidents that may have protection implications.
[viii] These measures include curfews, movement restrictions, increased checkpoint enforcement, data collection requirements, imposition of local identification measures, restrictions on access to livelihoods and housing, as well as additional municipal fees and taxes.
[ix] Daily Beirut: Do Syrians get work permits in Bakeries? May 2026.
[x] Lebanon - Protection Snapshot: Displacement Post -Escalation (16-30 March 2026).
[xi] Ibid.
[xii] GBVIMS Q1 2026 Analysis of the Impact of the Conflict on Gender-Based Violence Risks and Needs.