



## IDPs Protection Monitoring Update Summary of Pilot Findings

December 2024

### Introduction

The present report provides key findings and protection risks identified through the first round of the **Protection Monitoring (PM)** with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).<sup>1</sup> The pilot exercise was coordinated by the PM Reference Group<sup>2</sup> of the Protection Working Group and implemented by UNHCR in collaboration with INTERSOS and SHEILD.

The methodology for data collection was based on the use of standardized and structured questionnaires for Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The target groups for the pilot exercise included **Lebanese IDPs** and **secondarily displaced Syrian refugees** residing outside of collective shelters in the Bekaa, Beirut Mount Lebanon and South governorates. A total of 13 assessments were conducted (8 Focus Group Discussions and 5 Key Informant Interviews), with up to 70 IDP participants. Unless otherwise specified, findings refer to both Lebanese and Syrians IDPs.

The collection of data took place in the period between the last week of November and first week of December 2024. Accordingly, the findings of the report encompass protection trends and risks identified post ceasefire<sup>3</sup> and before the collapse of the Assad government in Syria on 08 December 2024.

### Results and recommendations of the Protection Monitoring assessments:

#### KEY FINDINGS ON SAFETY, SECURITY AND CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

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##### 1. Barriers to safe return to the pre-conflict place of residence for Lebanese IDPs and Syrian refugees.

Across all the focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII), the majority of IDP respondents indicated that they continue to face **challenges related to displacement and return to their pre-conflict places of residence, both for those remaining to be displaced and IDP returnees**. As confirmed by a survey on intentions of IDPs conducted by UNHCR after the cessation of the hostilities, 21% of Lebanese IDPs and 35% of Syrians did not return to their original places of residence in the country and remained displaced. For Lebanese IDPs, the **damaged and destroyed homes** were a major factor affecting their ability to return home. Also, respondents flagged challenges related to their present unsafe living conditions such as unfinished apartments, or tents, often shared with other families. The most common **concern reported through the FGD among Syrians was the restrictions to return announced by 27 municipalities following the ceasefire, particularly in the South**. 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. There were also reports that some landlords sold the furniture and belongings of tenants while they were displaced. Some Syrian refugees returned for temporary visits when the situation had calmed down, though many wished to return permanently due to a strong sense of belonging to their original place of residence.

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<sup>1</sup> The establishment of the Protection Monitoring system for IDPs was agreed by the national Protection Working Group to ensure quality protection analysis of the situation of IDPs across populations following the escalation of hostilities along the Southern border in October 2023 and consequent development of the conflict in Lebanon.

<sup>2</sup> The Reference Group on Protection Monitoring is a group of UN agencies and INGOs with specific mandates and dedicated budget for protection monitoring. It was established by UNHCR and NRC as Protection Sector lead agencies at the end of 2023. The Reference Group is co-chaired by UNHCR, IOM and NRC, and includes representatives of DRC, INTERSOS, IRC, SHIELD and UNRWA.

<sup>3</sup> A ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah was announced on 26 November in the evening, effective as of 27 November 2024.

## 2. Uncertainty regarding the situation in Syria and concerns related to freedom of movement.

During the FGDs, refugee participants raised the issue of return to the country of origin several times; however, **most of them remained uncertain if they would return to Syria in the future, as they currently consider their country of origin to be too unstable and unpredictable** in terms of the different scenarios that may unfold after the fall of the regime<sup>4</sup>. Some refugees residing in Informal Tented Settlement (ITS), expressed their wish to be resettled to a third country instead.

The KIIs in BML indicated that **Syrians face security concerns related to freedom of movement**. The FGDs in the Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel reported that some Syrian men fear potential detention and arrest by the Lebanese Armed Forces. The FGDs in the Bekaa and South indicated that **Syrians lacking legal documentation face significant challenges when trying to obtain valid residency permits in Lebanon, as well as difficulties to access birth and marriage registration**.

### Recommendations

- Provide assistance (legal, financial) to facilitate returns for Lebanese IDPs and secondarily displaced Syrian refugees to their pre-conflict places of residence. (*National and Sub National PWG, UNHCR, LAG*).
- Scale up legal assistance for those in need, with a focus on helping people re-acquire legal documents, assisting those who have been denied access to their pre-conflict places of residence and/or have been evicted from their homes. (*National and Sub National PWG, Protection Partners, LAG*).
- Implement peaceful co-existence programmes and undertake advocacy to address restrictive measures against Syrians.

## NEED FOR GBV, CHILD PROTECTION AND MHPSS SUPPORT

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### 3. Increased child protection needs, risk of GBV and family separation.

Safety and security concerns for all IDPs populations have been reported, including women and girls who indicated not feeling safe when leaving their homes, and an increase in **GBV, family conflicts and violence against children** due to overcrowded and limited shelter. Both Lebanese and Syrian IDPs reported a perceived rise in anxiety among IDP children after the conflict, with many remaining close to their mothers for both safety and comfort. Key informants indicated that there is a need for Child Protection services, awareness raising activities on children's safety, educating families about parenting, and PSEA (Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse).

Participants from the South and BML governorates have indicated **sending children to work to supplement household income and meet basic needs**, especially among Syrian participants, **while family separation has been reported in BML**. Some Syrian respondents reported that they have sent their wives and children to Syria during the airstrikes in Lebanon, while they remained in the country.

### 4. MHPSS challenges for IDPs as a result of the uncertainty and violence and destruction of the war

Participants from all the FGDs and KIIs reported an increase in **psychosocial distress** resulting from the conflict, displacement and uncertainty and a need for psychosocial support. This was the case for all groups including both Syrians and Lebanese, as well as men, women, girls and boys. This was particularly acute in the South and for Syrians, as discrimination was also a significant source of distress. Respondents from the FGDs conducted in the South reported having trouble sleeping, social isolation, and have noticed aggressive child behavior. Respondents from the Beirut/Mount Lebanon (BML) region have indicated that IDPs suffer from psychological distress linked to the post conflict situation and restrictions, while their children face separation anxiety. In all regions, both Lebanese and Syrian **IDPs reported to face challenges processing the uncertainty and impact of the war**.

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<sup>4</sup> UNHCR is undertaking further monitoring of the intentions of Syrians as the situation develops. For more information, the UNHCR Regional Refugee Community Feedback about Developments in Syria can be accessed at <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-regional-refugee-community-feedback>

## Recommendations

- Implement measures to prevent and respond to GBV and child- abuse, improve awareness among communities of GBV and CP services available (*PWG with CP & GBV WG*).
- Prioritize protection of children through access to education protection from child labour, abuse and exploitation. (*National and Sub National PWG, Protection Partners, LAG*).
- Support family reunification processes through child protection and family reunification programmes. (*National and Sub National PWG, CP/GBV PWG, Protection Partners, LAG*).
- Strengthen first responders and front liners to provide PFA and psychosocial support across all sectors and improving referrals to MHPSS actors. (*MHPSSTF with PWG*).
- Scale up provision of PSS in the most conflict affected areas particular South, Bekaa and South Beirut for people experiencing ongoing psychosocial and mental health related issues due to the war and displacement. (*MHPSSTF with PWG*).

## KEY CHALLENGES TO ACCESS BASIC NEEDS, SHELTER AND WASH

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### 5. Damage caused by bombardment on residential buildings and infrastructure, including water services.

For both Syrian and Lebanese IDPs, the damaged and destroyed homes were a major factor affecting their ability to return home. Also, respondents flagged challenges related to their current unsafe living conditions such as unfinished apartments or tents, often shared with other families.

Many areas in the South experienced heavy damage to infrastructure because of bombing, and unexploded ordnances (UXO) pose serious risk to people's safety. Participants in the Bekaa and South indicated **challenges accessing water**; respondents from Kfar Denis - all of whom were Lebanese - reported costs of 40 USD per month to access water through trucking.

### 6. Increase in commodities and rental prices in both areas of displacement and origin. Lack of available housing and overcrowded shelters, as many are sharing their living spaces.

Paying for rent is another huge hurdle that families face, **as rental prices have considerably increased in both areas of displacement and areas of origin**. Landlords often ask for several months' rent in advance, while rental fees increased substantially after an announcement that 500 USD/month rent assistance would be provided by non-state actors in BML.

Across the FGDs and KIIs, it was clear that **many people share living spaces in order to reduce accommodation costs**. In many areas in Southern Lebanon, **IDP returnees face a lack of vacant dwellings due to the considerable damage caused by bombardment on residential buildings and infrastructure**. Areas that were not affected by the direct impact of the conflict are indirectly affected by hosting large numbers of IDPs resulting in **overcrowding and pressure on the housing market as well as disruption to basic services and the functioning of markets**.

Participants across all FGDs and KIIs reported continued **financial burden to meet basic needs, in both pre and post conflict displaced areas**. People struggle to pay for basic and necessary commodities such as food, water, heating fuel, shelter, and healthcare. For example, respondents from southern Lebanon indicated that they need heaters, heating fuel, cooking gas, blankets, and better food parcels. **Syrian respondents also reported instances of unequal access to humanitarian aid**, especially in relation to access to food assistance and collective shelters.

Participants from all FGDs as well as key informants stated that many IDP families and secondarily displaced Syrian refugees had to reduce their spending, even going so far as to reduce expenditure on food. Many Syrians work several jobs, most of which are low paying. Also, most participants have reported sharing living spaces to reduce rental costs.

## Recommendations

- Provide support to IDPs for rehabilitation of damaged houses and scale up Cash for Rent programs. (*Shelter WG with (National and Sub National PWG)*).

- Through market research, help identify alternative and affordable housing with proper protection from the elements and safety standards for displaced people. (*Shelter WG with (National and Sub National PWG)*).
- Implement UXO and other risks awareness activities, including risks from damaged buildings/ infrastructure.
- Prioritise advocacy with authorities and social cohesion activities to address the reported discrimination and exclusion of Syrians from humanitarian aid.
- Reinforce the disaggregated reporting by population group (Syrian, Lebanese, others) of access to humanitarian aid, and monitor and address gaps.
- Support access to basic needs such as food and non-food items/multisectoral cash. (*Food and Basic Assistance WG*).
- Facilitate access to employment opportunities through job fairs and vocational training, as well as supporting small businesses and start-ups.) (*Livelihood WG with National and Sub National PWG*).

## KEY CHALLENGES TO ACCESS HEALTH AND EDUCATION SERVICES

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### 7. High cost of medication and limited access to affordable healthcare services in both places of displacement and return.

Participants and key informants indicated barriers related to the **high cost of medication and unavailability or limited access to affordable healthcare services in both places of displacement and return**. The situation is even more challenging for people with chronic illnesses due to medical expenses.

### 8. Challenges to access education during displacement and upon return.

The majority of informants responded that the **lack of education for children**, both during their displacement and when returning to their original locations, was one of their main concerns. Syrian respondents reported instances of discrimination in relation to accessing education and exclusion from schooling for their children and bullying of Syrian children in schools.

#### Recommendations

- Improve access to healthcare through rehabilitating Primary Healthcare Centres (PHC), providing access to affordable medicine, and providing awareness about available healthcare services. (*Health WG with PWG*).
- Provide information to displaced families about available formal and non-formal education pathways and refer children to the appropriate/available pathways (*Education WG with PWG*).