

Lebanon

Challenges to civil and legal documentation among communities displaced by the recent conflict in Lebanon

Background

The conflict between Israel and armed groups in Lebanon displaced an estimated 1 million people between 8 October 2023 and the ceasefire on 27 November 2024, including Lebanese nationals, Syrian and Palestinian refugees, also refugees of other nationalities, and migrants. While nearly 903,000 returned to their pre-conflict place of residence, some remain displaced due to various barriers.

This report highlights **post-ceasefire challenges** in accessing civil and legal documentation, based on focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted by the Protection Analysis and Monitoring Task Force.¹ Recognizing the importance of civil and legal documents for accessing essential services - including livelihoods, education, housing, healthcare, and movement - the Government of Lebanon undertook numerous measures to facilitate access to legal documentation for affected populations.²

Despite this, the PAMTF observed **a rise in reported legal documentation issues** between February and June 2025—from 5% of key informants reporting concerns at the start of the reporting period to 25% by the end. To address the barriers and inform sectoral response, the PAMTF therefore sought to gain insight into specific legal challenges facing those who continue to be displaced within Lebanon.

Methodology

Twenty FGDs enhanced with additional legal questions were conducted in June 2025. Three FGDs were held in BML with participants from the Lebanese, Syrian, and migrant communities. Six FGDs were conducted in the South and Nabatieh and 11 FGDs in the Bekaa/Baalbek-

El Hermel region with Lebanese IDPs and displaced Syrians. No FGDs were held in northern Lebanon and Akkar due to the low number of IDPs present at the time of the survey.

Findings

Loss, Damage, or Confiscation of Legal Documents

In all surveyed regions, respondents reported **missing or damaged legal documents** because of the conflict and displacement, with those in the South stating they lost documents during the initial and rapid evacuations. In the Bekaa, mainly Syrians reported that security personnel at checkpoints occasionally confiscated documents from young men. Additionally, one FGD participant in Baalbek-El Hermel shared that the General Security Office (GSO) withheld his documents while he was trying to renew his residency permit and it was never returned. Separately, migrants reported high prevalence and a long history of document confiscation by employers exacerbated by the conflict.

Attempts and Barriers to Replace Documents

Despite the criticality of documentation, FGD participants report **barriers to replacing lost or missing documents**, including high costs, structural limitations, and restrictive frameworks.

Among Syrian participants in all surveyed regions, efforts to replace or renew expired residencies or lost documents have been unsuccessful due to financial constraints and high costs, including for securing supporting documents at the Syrian embassy in Lebanon. In Bekaa, Syrians noted that the process to renew documents at the embassy lacks transparency, further complicating matters. Additionally, many Syrians lack key identification documents—national ID, valid passport, or a valid individual civil extract—which are required for renewing legal residency in Lebanon.

¹ Protection Analysis and Monitoring Task Force is an Inter-Agency initiative focusing on cross-population protection monitoring in Lebanon co-chaired by INTERSOS and UNHCR and include UNRWA, IOM, UNICEF, UNFPA, DRC, IRC, OXFAM, Basmeh & Zeitooneh and SHEILD as members.

² For more details, please see Annex I below.

Finally, in BML, Syrians expressed fear of approaching GSO to renew documents due to their irregular status.

Lebanese IDPs similarly report facing **high replacement costs and structural barriers like destroyed records**. Of note, some participants in BML indicate that many choose not to renew their documents given uncertainty of returning to their villages in the South, as some are still under the control of the Israeli Army or are perceived as unsafe. Lebanese participants reported that they generally adopt a wait and see approach, while noting that property deeds and agricultural records have been most difficult to recover.

Impact of Missing Documentation

Legal documentation, whether current or expired, is essential for accessing livelihood opportunities, schooling for children, securing housing, obtaining healthcare, and proving identity. For Syrians, such documentation is essential for freedom of movement and avoiding arrest and potential deportation.

As a result, the reported lack of documents **heightens existing risks** such as financial instability and housing insecurity of displaced populations. The most vulnerable—children, single women and Syrian refugees—face compounding challenges.

- **Children:** participants reported that migrant and refugee children without legal residency, also Syrian children who lack legal documentation and registration with UNHCR are unable to access education or healthcare. Additionally, children born during displacement risk missing out on proper birth registration, further compounding the challenges faced by affected families.
- **Women:** Syrian women heads of households and single women also face substantial difficulties, with participants indicating they often lack required knowledge of legal processes and would benefit from additional information sessions.
- **Syrian men:** Both male and female participants indicated that compared to other age groups, the young Syrian men who lack legal documents are at significant higher risk of arrest, detention and potential deportation, impacting their freedom of movement. Participants also indicated that a male head of household lacking legal documentation has ripple effects on the household, including financial risk as many jobs require legal documentation. Further, many landlords require Syrians to have valid residency papers

to rent property, particularly in the South, noting that around 80 percent of Syrians lack residency.

Coping Strategies

In response to these barriers, displaced people apply a diversity of ad hoc coping mechanisms. Many Syrians report **self-restricting movement**, to avoid checkpoints or attempting to use their UNHCR documents at checkpoints, with limited success. Some rely on community networks sharing information on checkpoint locations. Similarly, migrants and Syrians indicated they **avoid government institutions and rely on informal networks** or those with legal documents to access assistance and healthcare.

For Lebanese, participants reported choosing not to invest in reacquiring documents until it is possible to return to their hometowns.

Legal Support or Assistance

While organizations are actively providing legal support and awareness-raising, nearly all FGDs reported **limited awareness of legal support** in areas of displacement. Moreover, when support is available, it is **often insufficient** or not tailored to specific needs of the person. Participants highlighted a **need for financial support** to cover legal residency fees (4,900,000 LBP) for renewal of residency based on UNHCR certificate or late birth registration procedures for migrants married to Lebanese husbands, direct legal support, and help with documentation issues.

Recommendations

The below reflects key recommendations developed by legal actors under the Protection sector and are based on the findings of the FGDs conducted. Those include a call for continuation or upscaling of existing legal aid programs and advocacy work implemented by partners.

- Protection actors, to continue prioritizing **legal information awareness sessions and legal aid interventions**, specifically for those facing prolonged displacement. Protection and legal partners should upscale outreach activities to reach and prioritize those lacking legal documentation fearful of approaching authorities, and those considered more vulnerable (young single non-Lebanese women, and non-Lebanese men at high risk of arrest or detention).

- Protection actors, donors and other relevant stakeholders, to continue advocating with relevant authorities including GSO, Registrar Office, Personal Status Department for **safe and transparent renewal procedures and document replacement**.
- UNHCR, relevant stakeholders and donors, to continue advocating with Lebanese authorities **to waive legal residency renewal fees** (currently 4,900,000 LBP) for individuals eligible to renew their residency based on a valid UNHCR registration certificate.
- Protection actors, to continue advocacy with authorities, landlords, school administration, etc. for **acceptance of alternative identification documents** such as UNHCR registration to access services.
- UNHCR, UNICEF and child protection actors, to continue advocating for **clear and facilitated procedures to register births** that occurred without authorized medical supervision—such as those assisted by unauthorized midwives—to ensure that children born under these circumstances are not denied birth registration procedures.
- Legal actors specialized in Housing, Land and Property Rights (HLP), to **upscale legal aid services to Lebanese IDPs** who have lost their property deeds and to report on progress made to sector coordinators.
- UNHCR and relevant partners, to continue **strengthening coordination of legal organizations** via the national level Legal Actors Group under the Protection Sector. This includes mapping and updating legal aid services in the Inter-Agency Service Mapping and fostering communication between legal aid actors to avoid duplication and address unmet legal demands of those most in need.
- Protection actors, to **increase mobile approaches to access legal services** and advocate with PSD for enhanced outreach and mobile approaches to identify and assist cases in need of birth registration and other forms of civil documentation, such as marriage certificates.
- Legal actors, to organize **a joint workshop with government** officials such as GSO, PSD, moukhtars, etc. to share challenges, discuss ways forward and suggest solutions.

ANNEX I. Government decisions to facilitate access to legal documentation during the conflict

February 2024

- GSO announced that Syrians displaced by hostilities in the South can submit legal residency renewal applications in GSO centers of their current place of residence until further notice.

October 2024

- General Directorate of the Personal Status Department (PSD) memo facilitates registration of birth for newborns of displaced Lebanese whose registration falls under the governorates of South, Nabatieh, Bekaa, and Baalbek-Hermel. PSD offices at governorate level are requested to temporarily register and execute birth certificates from the mentioned areas in separate folders to be re-registered later at the relevant Nofous office.
- Lebanese citizens can obtain civil extracts from the PSD department where they reside, rather than corresponding to their civil registry.

November 2024

- GSO memo exceptionally allows applications for renewal of legal residency for Arab and foreign workers across all categories without requiring a work permit provided they have a certified copy of a new work contract and health insurance valid for at least six months. Foreign nationals, including Syrians, who meet these criteria will receive an annual work residency.
- Lebanese Parliament issued a law on suspension of legal, contractual, and judicial deadlines in Lebanon for public and private rights from 8 October 2023 to 31 March 2025, covering formal, procedural, and substantive deadlines for administrative, civil, commercial, and criminal matters, including deadlines for appeals.