Lebanon Quarterly Protection Update
1 January – 31 March 2024

This quarterly update is intended to provide information on protection risks and trends impacting Palestine refugees in Lebanon. It reflects key protection concerns arising from UNRWA's protection monitoring and is not intended to be exhaustive.

Context update

Cross-border strikes between the Israeli military and armed groups operating from Lebanese territory continued with growing intensity and scope between January and March 2024. Israeli airstrikes increasingly targeted areas north of the Litani River, including Jezzine, and, for the first time, the Beqaa valley and the outskirts of Saida. In addition, an air strike on 2 January targeted a meeting in south Beirut of senior members of a Palestinian faction and an associated Lebanese political and armed group, killing seven individuals. This was the first Israeli strike on Beirut since cross-border clashes began on 8 October 2023 following the outbreak of war in Gaza.

As of 2 April, cross-border fighting had killed at least 331 people in Lebanon, including at least 66 civilians according to UN OCHA.[i] As of 7 April, 18 people including both Israeli soldiers and civilians were reported to have been killed in northern Israel.[ii] The continued escalation has led to large-scale displacement in southern Lebanon, where 93,000 people had been displaced as of 2 April,[iii] and in northern Israel, where approximately 60,000 people were reported to have been displaced.[iv]

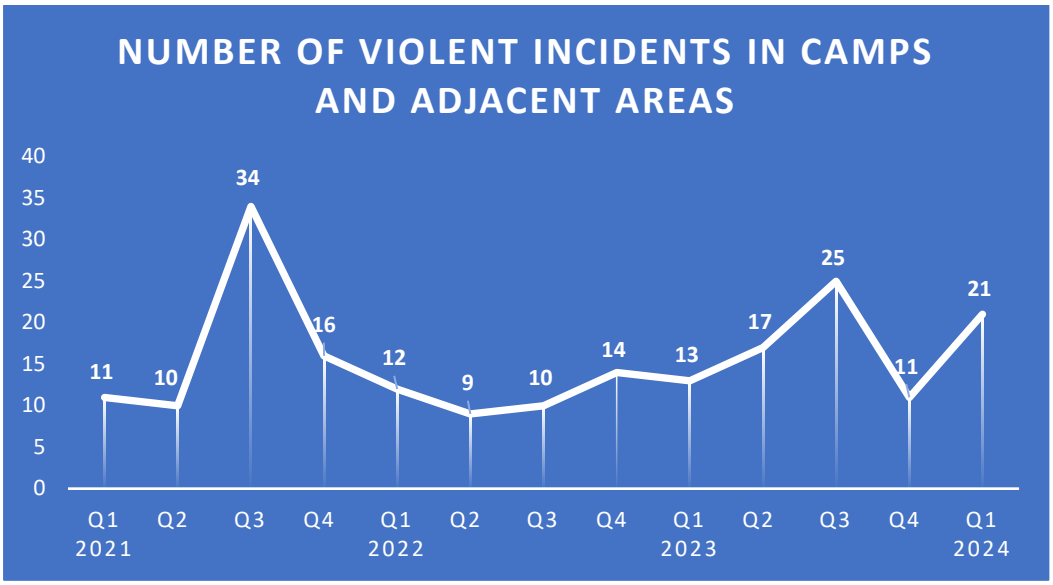
Among other developments during the reporting period, Lebanon's Parliament approved the national budget for 2024 on 26 January 2024, which included substantial rises in fees for obtaining civil documents, such as travel documents, marriage and birth registration documents, and driver's licenses, and for submitting cases to civil courts, including those related to rent, contracts, commercial issues, labour law and criminal matters.[v] Many administrative fees increased up to ten times their previous level, with some up to forty times higher. The fee for issuing an individual civil extract, for example, which was previously less than 100,000 LBP (with some variation depending on the area of issuance), increased to at least 1,000,000 LBP. Furthermore, a shortage of the stamps needed to formalize civil documents has seen prices soar on the black market.

These fee increases threaten to exacerbate economic hardship and create further barriers to obtaining legal and civil documentation. Among surveyed Palestine refugees, 33 percent said that rises in fees charged by civil and/or religious courts has made it more difficult for community members to obtain documents or access necessary legal services.[vi] Given that 72 percent of Palestine refugees in Lebanon considered themselves to be "very poor" or "poor" in a March 2024 survey, with a higher rate likely among Palestine refugees from Syria, increased fees will be difficult for many to afford.[vii] Economic barriers to accessing civil procedures and documentation may have implications for Palestine refugees' maintenance of their legal status, freedom of movement, engagement in the formal labour market, and access to some services. Increased barriers to accessing court procedures also has clear implications for Palestine refugees' access to justice.

Protection trends

Violence in Palestine Refugee Camps and Camp-Adjacent Areas

UNRWA recorded 21 incidents of violence in Palestine refugee camps and gatherings in Q1 of 2024,[viii] 16 of which were caused by personal disputes, with four stemming from criminal behaviour and one from a political dispute. This was the highest quarterly number of incidents recorded since mid-2021, barring Q3 of 2023 when sustained armed clashes occurred in Ein el Hilweh camp. The high number of incidents in the current reporting period was significantly higher than that recorded during the previous quarter (11 incidents), when the outbreak of war in Gaza may have partly suppressed armed violence in Palestine refugee communities in Lebanon. An increase in incidents recorded in Q1 of 2024 is indicative of the main drivers of violence and their persistence, including political tensions, poverty, weak governance and security, and the tendency for personal disputes to escalate due to the political and familial affiliations of those involved.



Registration and Legal Status

During the reporting period, 1,781 Palestine refugees sought counselling from UNRWA on legal issues, a 29 percent increase from Q4 of 2023. Of these individuals, 73 percent were Palestine refugees from Syria, despite this group only constituting approximately 10 percent of the total Palestine refugee population in Lebanon. This reflects the particular vulnerability of Palestine refugees from Syria, only 50 percent of whom hold residency in Lebanon (whereas other Palestine refugees in Lebanon all have legal status by virtue of their registration with the Lebanese government), leaving them liable to detention and deportation. Lack of legal status also impacts access to civil registration and other governmental and administrative services, and bars participation in the formal labour market.

Palestine refugees from Syria also cannot access the same streamlined processes for civil registration that other Palestine refugees in Lebanon enjoy. Instead, they must complete a burdensome and often complex six-step process to fully register civil events. In a 2023 UNRWA survey, only 20 percent of Palestine refugees from Syria who had married in Lebanon reported having fully registered their marriage while only 10 percent of parents whose children were born in Lebanon had fully registered the birth.[ix] These difficulties, combined with the need for individuals to have legal status for most civil registration processes, means that Palestine refugees from Syria face high barriers to civil registration, which necessitates seeking legal counselling.

Gender-based violence (GBV)

In Q1 of 2024, the proportion of Palestine refugees from Syria receiving specialized GBV services from UNRWA rose by 60 percent from the previous quarter.[x] This may partially be a result of UNRWA social service staff's increased outreach to the community leading to greater usage of UNRWA services. However, it also likely reflects deteriorating socio-economic conditions in Lebanon, the comparative lack of support networks for Palestine refugees from Syria, and their particular social and economic marginalization due to legal, social and political factors. Overall, GBV cases remained predominantly female, with 82 percent of cases in this period relating to women and girls.[xi]

Child protection

Difficult economic conditions continued to drive reports of child labour among Palestine refugee children. Fifty percent of Palestine refugee participants in an UNRWA protection monitoring survey said they had noticed an increase in school drop-out among children in their communities across the quarter, likely due to economic hardship.[xii] Palestine refugees in Tyre reported a noticeable uptick in child labour during the quarter, with children employed in occupations such as delivery, collecting trash, market work, and agricultural labour.[xiii] In Q1 of 2024, all the cases of child labour among Palestine refugees that UNRWA received related to children aged 7-15 years old, illustrating the impact of families' acute financial strains even on very young children. Children often work in order to contribute to household income

amid financial challenges facing many households. Child labour can jeopardise a child's educational opportunities and expose them to exploitation.

The use of social media and the potential risks children face online also continued to concern parents. Of surveyed Palestine refugees, 37 percent said they were aware of incidents during the quarter in which children had accessed or shared harmful online content leading to psychological distress, dangerous behaviour, cyberbullying or legal issues.[xiv] The risks associated with unsupervised social media use in particular were highlighted by several survey participants.

Feature: the impact of cross-border escalation in south Lebanon on Palestine refugees

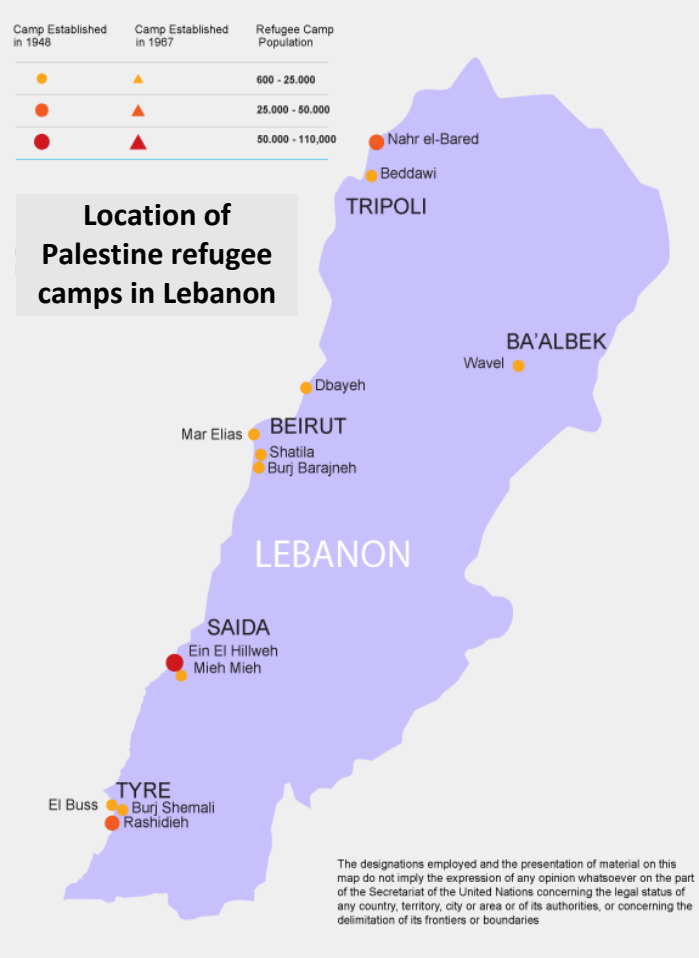
In southern Lebanon, escalating tensions with Israel have led to a surge in Israeli airstrikes and shelling, resulting in significant displacement. By 2 April 2024, the number of displaced individuals had risen to 93,000, marking a substantial increase from the 74,000 recorded just a few months earlier.[xv] Most of these internally displaced persons (IDPs), including Palestine refugees, have sought refuge either in private accommodations or in the limited number of collective shelters. The displacement of Palestine refugees has been relatively minimal, with only a small number of families from border villages relocating to other parts of the Tyre area.

However, this displacement has exacerbated existing challenges for both displaced households and host communities. In Tyre, for example, the influx of IDPs has reportedly driven up rental prices, posing a significant burden for many Palestine refugees who already face high poverty rates.[xvi] Moreover, the overcrowding resulting from multiple families sharing living spaces has heightened protection risks, including the potential for gender-based violence and child protection issues.

The conflict has also had a profound impact on livelihoods, particularly for Palestine refugees employed in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and manual trades. Many have lost their jobs due to the conflict's impact on local economies, including areas heavily affected by artillery fire and airstrikes.[xvii] This loss of income has only worsened economic hardship, especially considering budget cuts to UNRWA's regular cash assistance payments for some Palestine refugees in the first quarter of 2024.[xviii]

Palestine refugees from Syria, who are already among the most vulnerable populations in Lebanon, face additional challenges amid the escalating violence. Social media messages urging Syrian nationals to leave certain areas in south Lebanon have sparked fear among Palestinian refugees from Syria, some of whom feel unable to return to their homes even if they have the opportunity. Limited alternative accommodation options further compound their plight.

The conflict's toll extends beyond the physical and economic realms, taking a significant toll on the mental and emotional well-being of Palestine refugees. Children are particularly affected, with reports of persistent worry stemming from the daily sounds of bombing and Israeli military jets' frequent low-altitude overflights.[xix] Even in areas relatively distant from the conflict's epicentre, such as North



Lebanon, Beirut, and parts of the Beqaa, communities are grappling with heightened distress and fear, exacerbated by media coverage of the conflict in Gaza and the staggering loss of life there.[xx] Concerns about safety, even in designated emergency shelters, loom large, given the frequency with which UNRWA facilities have been targeted in Gaza.[xxi]

Case study: displacement from southern border villages

Mona* is a Palestine refugee who previously lived with her mother, her brother, her brother's wife and their three young daughters in a village in south Lebanon. Their home was less than a kilometre from the border with Israel. Mona's brother, who worked in furniture repair, was the main financial provider for the household. Mona herself received regular cash assistance from UNRWA, which supplemented the family's income.

As cross-border violence escalated after 8 October 2023, life was significantly disrupted for the family. Mona says her nieces were terrified by the sound of heavy bombardment, and her brother took the decision on 10 October to relocate the household. Initially taking shelter with relatives in a town on the periphery of Beirut, it quickly became clear that the apartment was not large enough for everyone. So, the family moved again to an empty apartment owned by another relative in Beirut's southern suburbs.

Since their relocation, Mona and her family have struggled to make ends meet. Her brother lost his job when they left their home in south Lebanon, and the family of seven now largely depends on UNRWA cash assistance to cover essential items and services; UNRWA cash assistance for Palestine refugees from Syria during quarter one of 2024 amounted to USD 25 per person per month and USD 60 per family per month. Two of her nieces are continuing with their schooling online, which has entailed additional expenses for internet access. Mona notes that the family is relying on donations from friends and neighbours for new clothes, while the household's reduced income has left the family worried about their ability to afford milk and diapers for Mona's youngest niece.

While Mona and her family are eligible to use UNRWA services, the cost of transportation to UNRWA clinics and other facilities is a significant barrier. Moreover, Mona says her unfamiliarity with the area to which the family has relocated and the lack of a sufficient local support network has left her and her family members unsure of how and where to access needed services.

Mona says she and her family would like to return to their home, which they have been told is still intact despite the widespread bombing of their village, but cannot do so while armed clashes persist. UNRWA continues to provide them with cash assistance and to monitor their circumstances.

* Name has been changed and identifying details removed to respect the privacy and dignity of the individual.

[i] OCHA, *Lebanon Flash Update #15,* 3 April 2024, available here.
[ii] Reuters, *Israeli military says it has increased its readiness for war in north,* 7 April 2024, available here.
[iii] OCHA, *Lebanon Flash Update #15,* 3 April 2024, available here.
[iv] Reuters, *Israeli military says it has increased its readiness for war in north,* 7 April 2024, available here.
[v] These fee increases are in addition to increases in fees for religious court procedures and some civil court procedures highlighted in our last quarterly report. It should be noted that the increase in fees in religious courts is not consistent across areas, with some areas such as Saida showing significantly higher fees than others.
[vi] In Q1 2024, UNRWA carried out online protection monitoring surveys of 30 Palestine refugees from North and Central Lebanon and the Beqaa (while in person focus-group discussions were able to be held with additional Palestine refugees in Saida and Tyre only). While the sample size means survey results are not representative, the findings indicate some of the key concerns of Palestine refugees in Q1 of 2024.
[vii] Internal UNRWA survey, March 2024.
[viii] UNRWA records violent incidents that take place in public spaces in Palestine refugee camps and adjacent areas that either caused or were likely to cause physical harm. While UNRWA is not always able to verify the registration status of perpetrators and victims, the Agency does not record incidents where it is aware that neither the perpetrator nor affected individuals are Palestine refugees. While UNRWA's records contain all incidents of which it is aware, this list may not be exhaustive.

[ix] UNRWA survey of 340 Palestine refugees from Syria conducted in February-March 2023 (internal).
[x] This comprises GBV case management and/or provision of mental health and medical services related to GBV.
[xi] All GBV data is drawn from internal programme data for Q1 2024.
[xii] Q1 2024, UNRWA online protection monitoring survey, above.
[xiii] UNRWA Q1 2024 focus group discussion with Palestine refugees in Tyre area.
[xiv] Q1 2024, UNRWA online protection monitoring survey, above.
[xv] International Organization for Migration (IOM), *DTM Mobility Snapshot, Round 17*, December 2023, IOM, Lebanon; OCHA, *Lebanon Flash Update #15,* 3 April 2024, available here.
[xvi] This concern was raised by Palestine refugees during UNRWA's Q1 2024 protection monitoring focus group discussions in Tyre.
[xvii] Noted during UNRWA focus group discussions in Tyre area, Q1 2024.
[xviii] On 21 March 2024, UNRWA announced that Palestine Refugees from Lebanon enrolled in the Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP) and additional vulnerable persons (children, elderly, persons with disabilities, and chronically ill persons) would receive $30 per person for January, February, and March 2024 rather than the previous amount of $50.
[xix] UNRWA Q1 2024 focus group discussions with Palestine refugees in Tyre area.
[xx] Q1 2024, UNRWA online protection monitoring survey.
[xxi] UNRWA Q1 2024 focus group discussions with Palestine refugees in Saida area.