



# Situational Analysis - Lebanon

## October 2024



*Last updated 30 October 2024*

## Displacement and Shelter Literature Review

Since the outbreak of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces in October 2023, conditions have deteriorated sharply, with airstrikes leading to widespread displacement. As of October 28, **834,746** internally displaced people (IDPs) have been recorded (IOM DTM, 2024). However, based on the 2006 experience, Lebanese authorities estimate that the total number of displaced persons exceeds **1.2 million** (OCHA, 2024). Numbers are expected to increase following relocation orders issued by Israeli forces, demanding residents in more than two dozen villages in southern Lebanon to relocate north of the Awali River, approximately 50 km into the country (SCI, 2024).

As of October 24, 2024, a total of 3,679 IDPs were registered in one of UNRWA active shelters. This number has slightly decreased from the previously published situation report, as some IDPs have returned to their homes in the camps, while others have secured alternative housing arrangements, either by being hosted by relatives or through rentals. The situation of Palestine refugees displaced by the hostilities in Lebanon is extremely dire, with many arriving with little or no belongings (UNRWA, 2024). As of that date, three Palestine refugee camps had been affected by Israeli forces' airstrikes: Ein El Hilweh camp near Sidon, El Bass camp in Tyre, and Beddawi camp north of Tripoli (UNRWA, 2024).

According to the IOM, and as of October 28, around **49%** of displaced individuals are residing in host settings, with **281,115** co-living with non-IDP families and **124,160** residing separately. Approximately **23%** of individuals are housed in **1,015** collective shelters, while **26%** have opted for rental housing. A smaller portion, about **1%** of IDPs, have relocated to their secondary residences. Additionally, **1%** are living in precarious conditions, including unfinished buildings, tents, parks, or on the streets (IOM DTM, 2024).

Most displaced people urgently need assistance, having fled without basic necessities, while the communities and shelters hosting them also require significant support (MSF, 2024). Many of the collective shelters are located in buildings not intended for long-term habitation, such as schools, warehouses, or unfinished structures, exacerbating already poor living conditions (IOM DTM, 2024). These shelters are often at full capacity, and while some have proper showers, sanitation, hot water, and heating, others lack these basic facilities. Many displaced individuals are staying with host families in overcrowded conditions (SCI, 2024).

Repurposed shelters need infrastructure improvements to provide essentials like clean water, sanitation, and heating. Food security is a major concern, with 82% of families struggling to access adequate food, hygiene supplies, drinking water, and cash support.

Proper sanitation is critical to prevent disease, especially in overcrowded settings (IRC, 2024). Mental health support is also essential to help residents cope with high levels of stress and anxiety (IRC, 2024). Access to education for displaced children is another pressing issue, particularly as some shelters occupy former schools (SCI, 2024). Needs are especially acute for those living in tents, where food assistance is identified as a top priority by nearly all respondents (IRC, 2024).

UNHCR has reported that thousands of Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian nationals are fleeing to Syria due to Israeli airstrikes. As of October 28, approximately **440,000** people have crossed the border from Lebanon into Syria to escape the airstrikes, with the majority being Syrians, alongside Lebanese and Palestinian refugees (UNHCR, 2024). The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and UNHCR have been distributing core relief items to people at Syrian crossing points, offering essentials such as food, water, hygiene kits, blankets, and winter clothes (UNHCR, 2024).

Migrant workers in Lebanon, particularly during periods of conflict, face severe marginalisation and exclusion from state support systems. There are an estimated 176,000 migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, mostly women from Ethiopia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Kenya, who work for low wages (The New Humanitarian, 2024). Many of these workers find themselves without a safety net as they are displaced alongside Lebanese citizens (Al Jazeera, 2024). The kafala system, which ties workers to employers, often worsens their precarious situation, leaving them stranded without documentation or shelter (Al Jazeera, 2024). While some embassies have repatriated their citizens, many workers cannot afford the cost of returning home, especially those from countries also experiencing conflict, such as Sudan and Ethiopia. As a result, many migrants are forced to live in parks or on the streets, with limited access to basic amenities like showers and toilets (Al Jazeera, 2024).

## Long-Term Implications for Lebanon

### 1) Public Health Crisis

The overcrowding of IDPs in makeshift shelters and inadequate living conditions is likely to lead to a long-term public health crisis. Collective shelters are not designed for long-term habitation and often lack access to clean water, proper sanitation, and hygiene facilities, increasing the risk of infectious disease outbreaks such as cholera, tuberculosis, and respiratory illnesses.

Given the strain on Lebanon's healthcare system, already weakened by economic crises and a lack of resources, the ability to contain outbreaks will be limited. Inadequate medical infrastructure, including insufficient hospital beds, overworked staff, and shortages of medicines, may exacerbate mortality and morbidity among both displaced populations and host communities.

- **Mental Health:** The psychological impact of prolonged displacement, compounded by the trauma of conflict, will likely lead to an increase in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (WHO, 2021). Mental health services are scarce in Lebanon, and as the crisis persists, access to mental health care will remain limited, especially for vulnerable populations, including children, women, and the elderly (Anera, 2022).

## 2) Education Sector Crisis

The education sector in Lebanon has faced significant disruptions between 2019 and 2023, resulting in children attending only about 270 days of in-person teaching instead of the expected 600. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, students were expected to complete 10.2 years of schooling, but due to learning gaps, they effectively received only 6.3 learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS). The pandemic further compounded this issue, leading to an additional loss of 1-1.2 LAYS. Data from the 2022 Early Grade Reading Assessment indicated a marked decline in learning outcomes, particularly in public schools (World Bank, 2023).

Lebanon's public schools, catering primarily to lower-income Lebanese and non-Lebanese students, already lagged behind private schools. The pandemic exacerbated this divide, as public schools lacked resources for remote learning. Following COVID-19, private schools resumed regular functioning, while public schools faced further disruptions due to teacher strikes stemming from economic challenges. Consequently, public school students lost an additional 0.4-0.5 LAYS during 2022-2023, leaving their learning levels comparable to those in countries like Yemen and Iraq (World Bank, 2023).

Since the outbreak of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces, at least 500 public schools—about half of Lebanon's total—are now being used as collective shelters. This marks the start of the sixth year of significant educational disruptions, with the World Bank estimating that recovery will take generations. Children in Lebanon have endured multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, the Beirut port explosion, economic downturns, and the teachers' strike in 2023 (SCI, 2024).

The occupation of public schools by displaced individuals disrupts Lebanon's already fragile education system, preventing thousands of children from accessing in-person learning. Overcrowded conditions and the lack of alternative shelters contribute to long-term displacement, effectively turning schools into semi-permanent shelters. This situation deepens the learning gap between public and private school students and further reduces LAYS.

The strain on educational resources, combined with the occupation of facilities, diminishes Lebanon's ability to recover from years of disruptions, with generational consequences that stifle future opportunities for students and undermine social and economic recovery. Additionally, this exacerbates tensions between displaced populations and host communities, creating potential for social unrest.

To mitigate these impacts, immediate action is necessary to provide alternative housing solutions. Repurposing unused or unfinished buildings into functional shelters and

accelerating the construction of temporary housing will relieve pressure on public schools. Prioritising the reopening of schools and ensuring the safe relocation of displaced individuals will restore access to education and protect Lebanon's long-term social stability. Financial and logistical support from international partners is crucial for effective implementation.

### 3) Social Fragmentation and Increased Tensions

The mass displacement of over 1 million people is likely to exacerbate existing social tensions between various population groups, including Lebanese citizens, Palestinian refugees, and Syrian refugees. The strain on host communities, who already face high levels of unemployment, inflation, and poor access to services, will contribute to competition over limited resources such as food, housing, and jobs.

- **Socioeconomic Inequality:** Over time, the protracted nature of displacement will further deepen socioeconomic inequality, particularly as wealthier segments of the population have better access to private services and secure living arrangements. Vulnerable groups will suffer more from poverty, exploitation (e.g., child labour, gender-based violence), and unequal access to resources. This growing disparity between social classes and groups, alongside tensions between displaced populations and local residents, heightens the risk of social unrest and instability.
- **Community Relations and Hostility:** Long-term cohabitation in host settings intensifies friction between host families and IDPs, especially in already overcrowded or resource-scarce areas. This leads to both intergroup and intragroup tensions, escalating into local conflicts, violence, and hostility toward refugees and displaced persons. Such divisions erode community resilience and social cohesion, ultimately destabilising Lebanon's already fragile political landscape.

### 4) Housing and Infrastructure Decay

A long-term displacement crisis, with over 872 collective shelters and more than 133,872 individuals opting for rental housing, will further erode Lebanon's already precarious housing sector. The massive demand for housing, coupled with the destruction of existing infrastructure due to airstrikes, will create a housing shortage that may persist for years.

- **Urban Planning and Shelter Overcrowding:** The existing shelters, many of which are repurposed from schools or warehouses, will continue to degrade due to overcrowding and overuse. Without proper maintenance and investment in urban planning, Lebanon may face large-scale urban decay, particularly in lower-income areas where displaced populations reside. Informal settlements, such as slums or tent camps, may proliferate, leading to a rise in unsafe living conditions and further marginalising already vulnerable populations.
- **Long-term Housing Market Disruption:** The high demand for rental housing, combined with inflation and limited economic opportunities, drives up rental prices, leading to significant disruptions in the housing market. Middle- and low-income families face increasing difficulty in securing affordable housing, which contributes to higher rates of homelessness and the growth of informal living arrangements.

The influx of displaced persons accelerates the gentrification of certain urban areas, pushing poorer populations further into marginalised spaces.

## 5) Economic Decline and Job Market Strain

The influx of displaced populations will have profound economic consequences. Lebanon's economy, already in severe decline due to a combination of political instability, financial collapse, and the ongoing war, will face increased pressure from the need to provide for the displaced populations.

- **Labour Market Overload:** The displaced population competes for scarce employment opportunities in an already saturated labour market. The informal economy, growing in response to the crisis, absorbs some of the displaced workforce, but with low wages, poor working conditions, and a lack of legal protections. This increased competition for jobs exacerbates poverty rates, while unemployment rises further, particularly among youth, women, and other marginalised groups.
- **Agricultural Impact:** Displacement from rural areas, especially in the south, may lead to a decrease in agricultural productivity, as displaced farmers lose access to their lands. This will negatively impact food security and increase Lebanon's reliance on food imports, further straining the economy and driving up the cost of living for both displaced and non-displaced populations.

## 6) Safeguarding Concerns

Displaced individuals, particularly those in collective shelters, face heightened safeguarding risks, exacerbated by crisis conditions and overcrowding. Such environments, often repurposed schools, warehouses, or other temporary structures, lack the safeguards necessary to prevent exploitation, abuse, and neglect. Safeguarding vulnerabilities are critical among vulnerable groups such as women, children, and elderly individuals, who are at increased risk of gender-based violence, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation (Sphere, 2018). Given the extreme fragility of the "do no harm" principle in these crisis contexts, it is essential that all humanitarian responses mainstream safeguarding protocols from the outset. This involves setting up reporting and referral systems, training all frontline workers in safeguarding measures, and creating clear pathways for displaced individuals to report concerns safely. Mainstreaming these practices can prevent harm, protect the dignity and rights of displaced persons, and create a more secure environment for vulnerable groups.

## 7) Migration and Regional Security

The ongoing conflict has already resulted in cross-border migration, with 258,000 people fleeing from Lebanon into Syria as of October 2024. If the conflict persists, this trend is likely to continue, affecting regional stability.

- **Regional Migration Flows:** Lebanon's internal displacement may evolve into cross-border displacement as the conflict persists. Syrian and Palestinian refugees

who previously sought asylum in Lebanon may return to Syria, which is still grappling with post-conflict recovery. This return places additional strain on Syria's already fragile infrastructure and services, further destabilising the region.

- **Security Concerns:** Mass displacement and migration create security challenges, as displaced populations are more vulnerable to exploitation, recruitment into armed groups, and radicalisation. In a region already fraught with conflict, these factors exacerbate instability both in Lebanon and its neighbouring countries.

#### 8) **Dependency on International Aid**

The protracted nature of the conflict and the resulting displacement will necessitate sustained international humanitarian assistance. However, reliance on aid without parallel efforts to strengthen national systems and infrastructure may weaken Lebanon's long-term resilience.

- **Aid Dependency:** Over time, the country may become increasingly dependent on international aid for basic services such as shelter, food, healthcare, and education. While such aid will provide immediate relief, it risks creating a dependency cycle in which national institutions are weakened rather than strengthened. This dependency can slow down Lebanon's recovery and reconstruction efforts, making it harder for the country to rebuild its economy and infrastructure in the long term.
- **Reduced International Support:** As global humanitarian funding faces competing demands from crises elsewhere, Lebanon may experience a reduction in aid over time. This reduction leaves the country vulnerable to further economic collapse and social unrest if alternative solutions for long-term resilience are not implemented.

In summary, the crisis in Lebanon reflects a complex interplay of public health, education, housing, economic, and social challenges, compounded by mass displacement and the ongoing conflict. The strain on the country's healthcare system, education sector, and infrastructure—already weakened by years of instability—has led to a critical situation where public health crises, housing shortages, and social fragmentation exacerbate long-term vulnerabilities. The overlapping crises, such as overcrowding in shelters, degradation of educational outcomes, and rising socioeconomic inequality, further undermine Lebanon's resilience, particularly as its economy faces increasing strain and competition for resources intensifies tensions between displaced and host populations. Lebanon's dependency on international aid, without robust efforts to strengthen its national systems, risks deepening long-term vulnerabilities and stalling recovery.

To mitigate these effects, Lebanon must prioritise reinforcing its healthcare, education, and social protection systems through sustainable, locally driven initiatives. A focus on fostering economic opportunities for displaced and host populations, supported by coordinated efforts from the international community, will be crucial in reducing aid dependency and rebuilding resilience. Additionally, strengthening social cohesion through community-based programmes, alongside investments in mental health and

employment services, will help address the social fragmentation and improve long-term stability in the country.

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