

LEBANON

Forced displacement

Anti-refugee rhetoric is on the rise in Lebanon and pressure on Syrian refugees to return is increasing. Refugees are being pushed back to Syria, through a combination of restrictive government policies, dire humanitarian conditions, and discrimination.

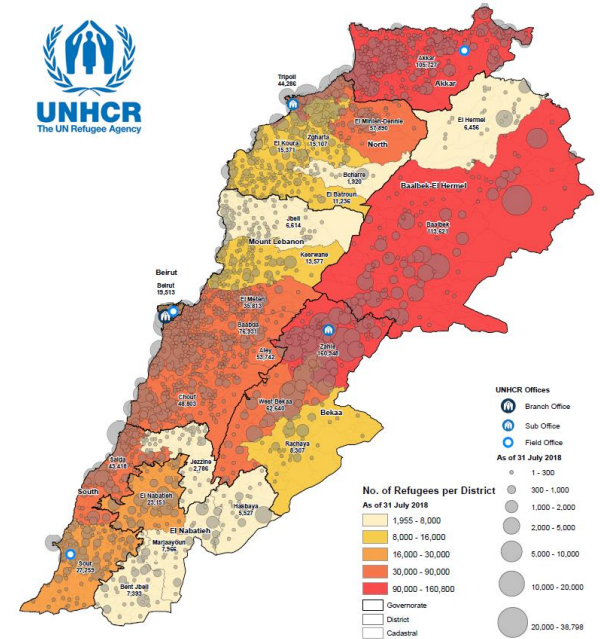
The Higher Defence Council declared in mid-April that all “semi-permanent structures” built by Syrian refugees using materials other than timber and plastic sheeting in informal tented settlements (ITS) must be deconstructed. The authorities had set a 9 June deadline for Syrian refugees to bring their homes into compliance (after which any non-compliant structures would be demolished); however, the date has been postponed until the end of June.

Some 19% of Syrian households in Lebanon are estimated to reside in non-permanent structures, mainly ITS. However, the number of Syrian refugees living in structures at risk of demolition in ITS is unclear. The demolition will contribute significantly to the deterioration of living conditions for the affected refugees in ITS and may act as push factors for returns.

Potential aggravating factors include exposure to the harsh winter (December – March) and inadequate infrastructure in ITS, increasing tensions with host community, and the status of some 565,000 unregistered Syrian refugees.

Syrian Refugees Registered in Lebanon

Source: UNHCR 19/09/2018



PROBABILITY



IMPACT



NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



Key priorities



Shelter
For newly displaced



Protection
Increased vulnerability



WASH
Risk of illness and disease

Humanitarian constraints



Restrictive national policies mean that bureaucratic impediments can inhibit international agencies response efforts. Military checkpoints may also restrict access, particularly in Aarsal municipality.

Limitations

There is limited information available on the total number of refugees across the country that are at risk of eviction as well as the situation for refugees other than Syrian refugees.

Drivers of the crisis

935,454 Syrian refugees are registered with the UNHCR in Lebanon, though the government estimates the number of Syrians in the country to be 1.5 million (UNHCR 31/05/2019; Government of Lebanon and UN RC/HC 31/01/2019).

Lebanon has the largest concentration of refugees per capita worldwide, however no formal refugee camps were established in response to the influx of Syrian refugees. Consequently, Syrian refugees live in cities, villages, or informal tented settlements (ITS) throughout the country (WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018).

Anti-refugee rhetoric is on the rise and pressure on Syrians to return is increasing (Independent 14/06/2019). Lebanese ministers, politicians, and part of the population have called for Syrian refugees to go home, blaming them for a string of economic woes in the country (The Globe Post 12/06/2019; Al Jazeera 09/06/2019). Local authorities have expressed difficulties in maintaining a peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities (ECHO 12/06/2019). Evictions and army raids on refugee camps are on the rise and towns have introduced curfews specifically for Syrians (Independent 14/06/2019).

While Lebanon has always been presented as abiding to the principle of non-refoulement, recent deportations have raised concerns (ECHO 12/06/2019). Refugees in Lebanon are being pushed back to Syria, despite the ongoing dangers, through a combination of restrictive government policies, dire humanitarian conditions, and discrimination (Amnesty International 12/06/2019; ECHO 12/06/2019). Analysts say this fear has made it *de facto* government policy to keep refugees in a state of discomfort in order to dissuade them from staying permanently (Independent 14/06/2019).

The Higher Defence Council, a military body, declared in mid-April that all "semi-permanent structures" built by Syrian refugees using materials other than timber and plastic sheeting in ITS must be deconstructed (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019). Some 19% of Syrian households in Lebanon are estimated to reside in non-permanent structures, mainly ITS (WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018). The authorities had set a 9 June deadline for Syrian refugees to bring their homes into compliance with a ban on semi-permanent structures for refugees, after which any non-compliant structures were to be demolished (Save the Children, World Vision and Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019; UNHCR 04/06/2019). The Lebanese government has postponed the demolition after coming under pressure from humanitarian agencies. The deadline has since been extended to the end of June, with formal dismantlement starting on 1 July (Christian Today 15/06/2019; Al Jazeera 13/06/2019).

Anticipated crisis impact

Syrian refugees in Lebanon living in structures built of materials other than timber and plastic sheeting in ITS will be affected. Formal dismantling is scheduled to start on the 1 July, however some Syrian households have already started to dismantle their homes (Christian Today 15/06/2019; Independent 14/06/2019). While 19% of Syrian households in Lebanon are estimated to reside in non-permanent structures, mainly ITS (WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018), the number of Syrian refugees living in structures at risk of demolition in ITS is unclear.

In Aarsal town, near the Lebanon-Syrian border (Baalbek-Hermel governorate), there are around 5,500 hard structures made of concrete set to be demolished (Reuters 04/06/2019). The demolition of these structures would displace up to 25,000 Syrian refugees, including 15,000 children (Middle East Monitor 13/06/2019; Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019).

Similar measures could affect other communities in the near future as the policy applies countrywide (The Daily Star 04/06/2019). Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel governorates, having a high percentage of refugees residing in ITS, are highly vulnerable. Refugees residing in Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel had the worst shelter conditions, with around half living in shelters that were either substandard or in dangerous conditions (WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018).

The implementation of this demolition decision will contribute significantly to the deterioration of living conditions for the affected refugees in ITS.

Threats of demolition can also act as push factors for returns by worsening the coercive environment (ECHO 12/06/2019). Already refugees are returning because of harsh policies and deteriorating conditions in Lebanon, and not because they think Syria is safe (Human Rights Watch 2019).

Shelter: The destruction of structures will leave the affected population in need of replacement shelter, however alternatives for affected households are unclear, and no temporary locations have been confirmed for relocation (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019). Displaced people will also need material and assistance to reconstruct adequate shelter.

Many of the at-risk households are very poor and some have been displaced multiple times. If their homes are demolished they have limited means of rebuilding them or paying rent elsewhere (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019).

Some refugees are already demolishing their own homes and moving into the tents of friends and family, which are overcrowded, further straining limited resources (Independent 14/06/2019; The Globe Post 12/06/2019).

Retrofitting, by replacing brick walls with wood and sheets also raises concern about protection from the elements. There are concerns for families, many including children and the elderly, who could face exposure to the extreme summer weather (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019). Refugees are also worried about the winter, which is particularly harsh in Arsal, and accompanied by a lot of rain, snow, and strong winds. Last winter, even with brick walls, rainwater entered refugee homes, and roofs could not withstand the snow (Church Times 14/06/2019).

Protection: Around 73% of refugees live in Lebanon without valid residency visas. Refugees without regular migration status face the risk of detention and harassment and are limited in accessing essential services such as education and health care and in registering births and marriages (Human Rights Watch 2019; WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018).

Protection needs will be heightened as a result of the forced displacement, particularly for the most vulnerable groups (including female headed households, children, elderly people, and persons with specific needs).

Refugees may be exposed to physical harm during the demolition of their homes.

WASH: The demolition of homes could result in the destruction of household water and sanitation systems, leaving the affected population at higher risk of illness and disease (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019). It is estimated that only 44% of those living in ITS have access to basic sanitation services and a high percentage share sanitation facilities, particularly in Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel governorates (Government of Lebanon and UN RC/HC 31/01/2019; WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018).

Displaced people will have an increased need for access to potable water due to heightened exposure to the high temperatures of the extreme summer weather.

Health: Without adequate shelter, households will be more exposed to extreme temperatures, flooding, and humidity, leading to several potential health risks, especially for the elderly, children and people living with disabilities. The displacement of refugees will also impact their mental and physical wellbeing (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019).

Refugees demolishing their own homes are also at risk of injury due to the demolition of hard structures/buildings without any appropriate safety gear.

Food: The destruction of homes and the forced displacement of households may result in the loss of food stocks and utensils, worsening the food security situation for the already food insecure Syrian refugee population.

90% of displaced Syrians display some degree of food insecurity and 34% are moderately to severely food-insecure (WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018; Government of Lebanon and UN 31/01/2019). Baalbek-Hermel, Akkar, Mount Lebanon and North Lebanon have the highest prevalence of food insecurity, with more than 35% of households reporting moderate and

severe food insecurity (Government of Lebanon and UN 31/01/2019). Female-headed households are more vulnerable to food insecurity than male-headed households overall (WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018).

Education: Forced displacement will disrupt education (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019). 40% of Syrians aged 3-18 – more than 250,000 – are out of certified education (formal and non-formal) (Government of Lebanon and UN 31/01/2019).

Families with children – especially girls – who do not continue their education, resort to negative coping mechanisms such as early marriages or child labour, which have a significant impact on children's health and psychological wellbeing, among other detrimental effects (NRC 03/05/2019; Government of Lebanon and UN 31/01/2019).

Livelihoods: Livelihoods will be disrupted by the evictions and livelihood assets lost as a result of the demolitions (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019). 97% Syrian refugee households resort to some type of livelihood coping strategy (Government of Lebanon and UN 31/01/2019).

Vulnerable groups affected

The highest proportion of the most socio-economically vulnerable population reside in ITS, such as female-headed households, elderly groups, and people with specific needs (PwSN) (WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018). Should these people be forcibly displaced they will be in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.

69% of Syrian refugee households live below the poverty line and the income of female-headed households are lower (WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR 24/12/2018). This increases their vulnerability as they have limited means of rebuilding their homes or paying rent elsewhere (Save the Children, World Vision, Terre des Hommes Foundation 04/06/2019).

The lack of durability of shelter materials in ITS means that PwSN, elderly individuals, persons with disabilities, female-headed households, and children can face particular risks. This includes difficulties in weatherproofing their shelters, which means an additional financial burden that could lead to decreased spending on other basic needs such as food and health (Government of Lebanon and UN 31/01/2019).

Humanitarian constraints

General access for international humanitarian workers remains limited in Lebanon. The Lebanese government's refusal to formally recognise Syrians' refugee status and the absence of formal refugee camps results in limited humanitarian assistance (Amnesty International 12/06/2019).

Restrictions on residency permits for UNHCR's international staff, limitations in operational scope, and the restrictive refugee registration policy prevent UNHCR and

other international organisations from fully implementing their humanitarian programmes to address refugees' needs (Aid in Danger 05/2018; CrisisWatch 07/2018).

Military checkpoints surrounding Aarsal have made it difficult for NGOs to visit and for aid to be delivered (Al Jazeera 17/01/2019).

Potential aggravating factors

Weather and inadequate infrastructure in ITS

Refugees living in tented settlements face harsh winter conditions in Lebanon, particularly in the eastern Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel governorates where most ITS are located (UNHCR accessed 19/06/2019). The coldest months are December – March when temperatures drop below the freezing point. Extreme weather conditions, including heavy rains and snowfall, often affect the area.

The infrastructure of the ITS is fragile and not adequate for winter. The government has refused to set up any official refugee camps and imposed restrictions on materials that refugees can use to build their shelters. Therefore, Syrian refugees, who are not able to afford official housing, are living in makeshift tents and improvised wooden and plastic structures. Consequently, one-third of all refugees live in overcrowded shelter arrangements. 30% of refugees live in shelter arrangements below humanitarian standards with 5.5% in dangerous living conditions (VASyR 2018).

ITS' are often built on agricultural land that is very prone to flooding (Vaaju 9/1/2019). The makeshift tents are not protected against floodwater and often sustain significant damage during winter. The lack of proper insulation exposes the residents to a number of health risks. Especially infants, children, elderly, people with disabilities and people with respiratory diseases are vulnerable.

On 6 January 2019, Lebanon was hit by storm Norma which caused heavy rains, snowfall, erosion, and cold temperatures, across the country. The storm affected around 11,300 Syrian refugees reside in at least 360 settlements, mainly in the north and eastern governorates of Bekaa, Baalbek-Hermel and Akkar. Most of the affected settlements were severely damaged or destroyed by the storm, raising the financial pressure on families who had to buy materials to secure or repair their tents (UNHCR 10/1/2019; Middle East Eye 9/1/2019). As humanitarian aid has decreased significantly over the last years, due to a decrease in funding, maintaining and repairing tents have become increasingly difficult for refugees. As a consequence, many refugee families have become increasingly vulnerable, especially during the winter months.

Increasing tensions with host community

The decision of Lebanon's Higher Defence Council to dismantle semi-permanent structures in the ITS comes amid heightening tensions between the Syrian refugee population and the Lebanese host community. Hostilities towards Syrian refugees, including raids, evictions, imposed curfews, harassments and arrests, have increased significantly over the past months (ECHO 12/06/2019).

Earlier this month some 600 refugees were forced to leave a settlement, following an altercation with the host community in which a fire fighter was injured (Al Jazeera 09/06/2019). Dozens of Syrians were arrested and multiple tents were set on fire, likely by locals with anti-refugee sentiments (Asharq Al-Awsat, 8 June 2019). According to UNHCR, refugees were not allowed to return to their tents to gather personal documents and medicine (Middle East Eye 14/06/2019). Following the incident, Minister of State for Refugee Affairs, Saleh Gharib, stated that the residents of the settlement might be forced to return to Syria (The National 10/06/2019).

In April, Lebanese authorities evicted at least 50 people from their homes in an ITS in Tyre. The eviction was part of a campaign against the pollution of the Litani River along which the settlement was located. Since January 2019, the campaign has forced some 1,500 refugees out of the area (Al Jazeera 27/04/2019).

On 24 April, the Lebanese army raided an ITS in Bar Elias, destroying 110 tents and detaining 80 male residents for not possessing the correct documents (The New Arab 26/04/2019).

Lebanese Foreign Minister, Gebran Bassil, has started a public campaign against the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. He has stated that over three-quarters of the refugees could be sent back home, claiming they no longer face any security threats in their home country (The Guardian 15/06/2019). Volunteers from his party, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), have started a campaign to shut down businesses that employ Syrian refugees and are encouraging Lebanese citizens to send photos and videos showing Syrians working for Lebanese businesses as evidence for the authorities (Middle East Eye 14/06/2019).

While claims from Lebanese officials about the burden of Syrian refugees on the Lebanese society are not new, the current political climate towards the Syrian population in Lebanon has become particularly hostile, raising fears about potential forced returns.

Undocumented refugees

Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of refugees worldwide, hosting more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees, from which only around 935,000 are registered. The lack of documentation prevents refugees from accessing basic services and from being

legally protected. It also limits their free movement and puts them at risk of fines, arrests, detention, exploitation, and deportation (L'Orient Le Jour 13/06/2018; HRW 20/04/2018 Al Araby 20/04/2018). The unofficial number of people in need is, therefore, difficult to estimate and makes the response more challenging.

Key characteristics of host population and area

Total Lebanese population: 6.082 million (World Bank 2017)

Refugee figures (UNHCR 31/05/2019)

- Total no. of registered Syrian refugees: 935,454
- Female: 52.2% / male: 47.8%
- Aged 0 – 17: 55.2%
- Estimated no. of Syrian refugees in Lebanon: 1.5 million (UNHCR 31/12/2018)

Shelter arrangements of Syrian refugee families (VASyR 2018; UNHCR 10/2018)

- Living in substandard shelter conditions: 55%
- Living in informal settlements: 19%

Food security figures of Syrian refugee families (VASyR 2018; UNHCR 10/2018)

- Some level of food insecurity: 90%
- Moderately to severely food insecure: 34%

Health statistics of Syrian refugee households (VASyR 2018; UNHCR 10/2018)

- Unable to access needed primary healthcare: 13%
- Unable to access needed secondary health care: 23%

WASH statistics of Syrian refugee households (VASyR 2018)

- Access to drinking water: 91%
- Used of basic drinking water services: 85%
- Rely on bottled drinking water: 43%

Response capacity

Humanitarian response to the refugee situation in Lebanon is co-coordinated by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and UNHCR, who are cooperating closely with municipalities, international NGOs and local NGOs. Inter-Agency coordination meetings are held in several governorates among different partners involved to coordinate assessments and response.

Due to strict government regulations related to shelter building, it is often difficult for actors, other than UNHCR or municipalities, to provide shelter materials. It is unclear whether UNHCR will be able to provide any support to the people affected by the decision to demolish semi-permanent structures.

Information gaps and needs

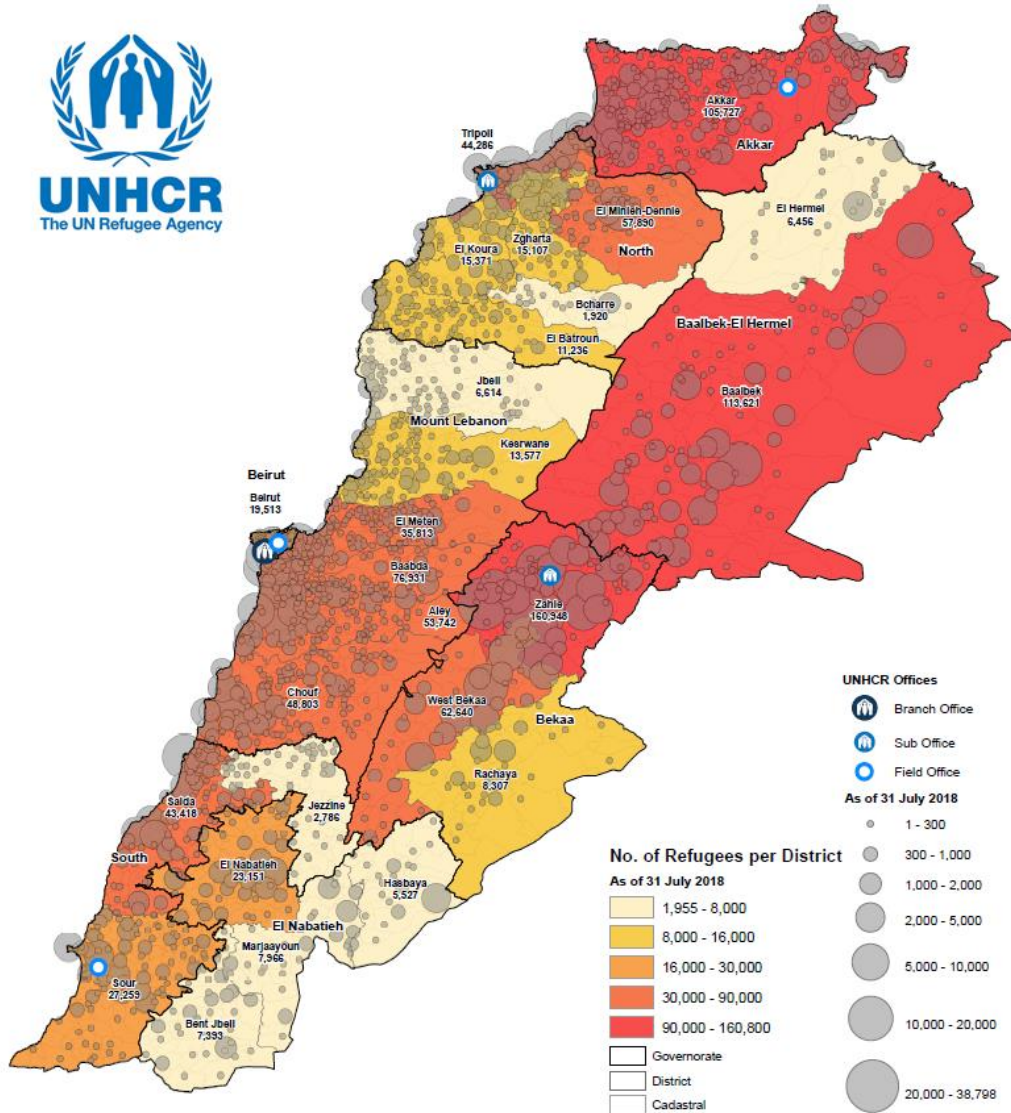
There is limited information available on the total number of refugees across the country that are at risk of eviction as a result of the policy.

Information on the situation for refugees other than Syrian refugees is also limited.

Methodology

ACAPS anticipatory briefing notes provide a brief outline of the likelihood and impact of a particular crisis or spike in crisis. Likelihood describes the certainty that a particular outcome will happen, and is therefore a subjective measure. The objective of estimating likelihood is to indicate how certain we are that the identified risk will occur. Likelihood estimates help prioritise the most significant risks. This can contribute to better decision making with regards to preparedness.

Syrian Refugees Registered in Lebanon



Source: UNHCR 19/09/2018