

Protection Monitoring Findings

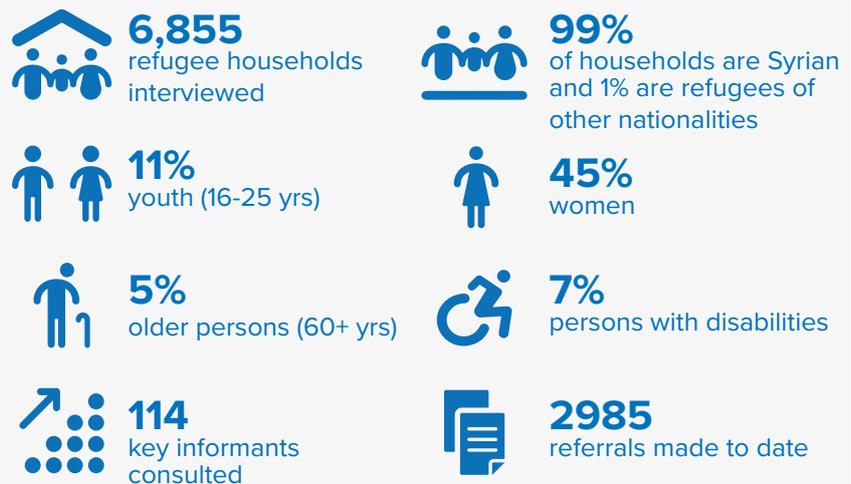
Lebanon – 1st quarter 2021



UNHCR conducts protection monitoring with partners on an ongoing basis to analyse trends in the protection environment and risks facing refugees. UNHCR’s protection monitoring partners – Caritas, Intersos, and SHEILD conduct interviews with refugee households to elicit their feedback on the overall protection environment in Lebanon and the impact of COVID-19 on their lives. The sampling of households and findings presented are representative both at the regional and at the national level. In addition, partners conduct a number of interviews with key informants of different profiles to complement the quantitative analysis from the household interviews. When needs for specific services, assistance or information are identified during interviews, UNHCR’s protection monitoring partners refer the individuals concerned accordingly. Information on COVID-19 is systematically provided during each call.

In March 2020, the protection monitoring questions were reviewed to adapt them to the emerging COVID-19 crisis and assess its impact on refugees. As of October 2020, UNHCR reverted to a more expanded version of the questionnaire to collect information on the broader protection environment, while retaining relevant COVID-19 related questions. This report provides a summary of the findings from protection monitoring conducted in all regions in the 1st quarter of 2021 (January-March)¹. The feedback from refugees is used to inform UNHCR’s advocacy, and programmatic interventions with the aim of improving refugees’ access to protection and essential services, assistance and information.

Key numbers January to March 2021



Contributing organizations

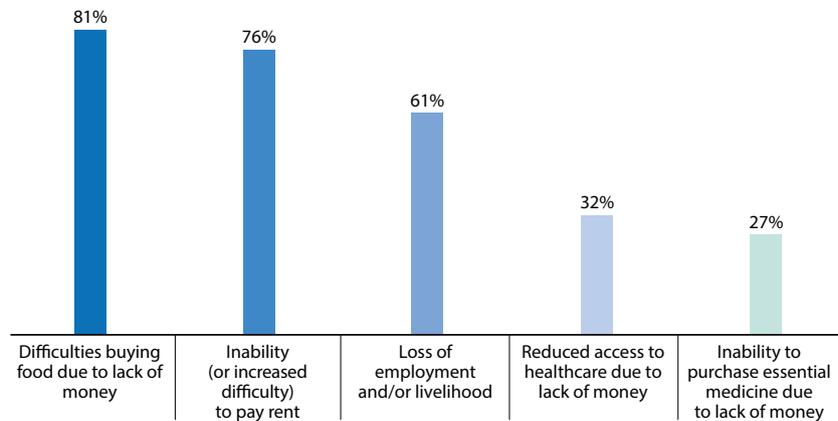


¹ Numbers and percentages presented are for the quarter (Jan-Mar 2021) unless otherwise specified.

Impact of the socio-economic situation

- Lebanon's ongoing crises have led to a severe deterioration of the socio-economic situation for all population groups. Refugees who were already struggling to cover their daily costs have become even more vulnerable as livelihood opportunities have decreased, while prices for basic necessities have multiplied. Protection risks are increasing in this environment as more and more families have had to turn to harmful coping strategies and are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. Data elicited through protection monitoring during the first quarter of 2021 confirms this trend towards greater impoverishment and shows that the impacts of the national lockdown are likely to increase the struggle of refugees in the coming months.

Most widely experienced impacts of the socio-economic situation



- The deepening economic crisis has meant that the vast majority of refugees remain unable to cover their basic needs (see chart).

- As refugees face more and more difficulties meeting their basic needs in a safe and dignified manner, many have had no choice but to resort to harmful coping strategies to survive. Reducing spending on rent/ not paying rent rose over the quarter (from 53% to 64%) and is now nearly even with reducing spending on food and forgoing meals (67%), which is the coping mechanism most refugees resort to. In line with these findings, refugees throughout the country reported that their priority needs were assistance to cover rent (86%) and food assistance (82%).



- Two worrying trends emerged this quarter concerning the economic capacity of refugee families. First, there was a rise in loss of employment and/ or livelihoods this quarter (from 54% to 61%), and second, more refugees are borrowing to meet their basic needs, with nearly half (41%) resorting to buying food on credit, and over half (57%) borrowing money. These two trends are concerning because rising levels of debt and shrinking income and livelihoods opportunities mean that refugees may soon lose access to credit, and with it their primary means of obtaining food, shelter, healthcare and other basic needs.

- This quarter refugees also indicated rises in negative impacts of the economic crisis and harmful coping mechanisms related to health: 1 in 5 refugees (20%) are now forgoing needed healthcare and medicine due to a lack of resources (compared to 15% in the previous quarter). Further, older persons and persons with disabilities were more likely to be negatively affected. For example, nearly half of all older persons and persons with disabilities (47%) reported that their economic situation has resulted in decreased access to essential healthcare compared to just 27% for younger populations and 31% for persons without disabilities.



The costs of my health condition after undergoing multiple surgeries broke my family financially.

- Child with disabilities, South (Nov, 20)

- Very concerning issues with accessing food and nutrition arose at the close of this quarter. In March, 85% of respondents reported difficulties buying food, over half (52%) had to buy food on credit, and nearly all (88%) requested food assistance as a priority need. These rates are all the highest yet recorded. That nearly all refugees need food assistance is likely a reflection of the rising costs of food and the deteriorating value of the Lira.



We, as Syrians, no longer think about anything except how to feed our children.

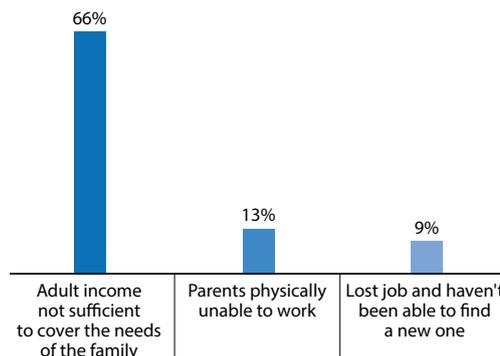
- Refugee Woman, Mount Lebanon (Nov, 21)

- Given the deteriorating economic situation many households had to resort to child labour to meet their basic needs, with 3% of all households interviewed reporting having at least one child working, and all instances caused by financial necessity (see chart).

- Over two thirds (69%) of all children involved in child labour were not attending school. While many of these children were not attending school because of COVID-19 closures (27%), the majority could not attend because their income was too important to the family (62%).

- A worrying development this quarter was the rise of street selling as the most common form of labour for the younger children (aged 5 to 14). Now, nearly half were reported as working in this high-risk area (from 17% to 41%), while older children (aged 15 to 17) continue to work most frequently in agriculture and in shops.

Reason for child labour



The only thing that keeps me going on is that I am able to get money for my parents.

- Syrian child, Mount Lebanon (Nov, 20)

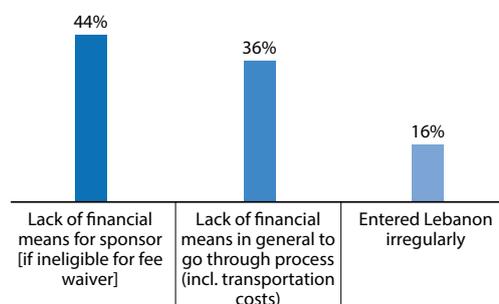
- In total, over one fifth of adults surveyed (23%) reported mental health issues or mental distress during the quarter. Out of those affected, nearly all (96%) said that the pressure of the economic crisis was a main cause, before COVID-19 and the situation in Syria. While majority of respondents experience symptoms of mental distress each month a small number of also report critical mental health issues, including self-harm, suicidal ideation and attempts. Serious incidents of self-harm have been observed at an increasing frequency by UNHCR and partners across the country.

Legal residency

- Rates of legal residency have continued to decline this quarter with less than one in five (18%) households reporting that each member above 15 years had legal residency. Protection monitoring figures have been consistent with VASyR results and so we see a clear negative trend, as 20% of individuals above 15 reported having legal residency in 2020, 22% in 2019 and 27% in 2018. Legal residency rates among women (46%) continue to remain lower than amongst men (54%).

- The national lockdown during much of the quarter likely contributed to lower rates of legal residency as GSO offices were closed and freedom of movement was restricted. However, easing of the national lockdowns might not improve legal residency numbers because refugees report that financial barriers (see chart) remain the main constraint, and the financial situation has only worsened during the lockdown. This affirms the critical importance of an inclusive fee waiver, especially in the context of the current economic and health crises in the country.

Main reasons why respondents reported not having legal residency



- Lack of legal residency remains a key protection problem affecting core aspects of refugees' lives. More and more refugees are reporting being negatively impacted by the lack of legal residency, as it limits refugees' ability to move freely (72%, up from 65% in the previous quarter), their ability to access livelihood opportunities (33%, up from 21%), and travel to visit family and other community members (11%, up from 8%) amongst other negative impacts. Refugees who needed to turn to the courts also report that lack of residency has either impeded their access to the justice system or meant they feared accessing it for lack of a legal status. In particular, this quarter, in light of the deteriorated security context, there were instances where refugees who were the victims of theft and violent crimes, unable and fearful of seeking legal protection because of their lack of residency status.



I am a divorced woman with two kids, I was the breadwinner. But because I don't have legal residency I was unable to continue going to work.

- Syrian woman, South (Nov, 20)

COVID-19

- From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR and humanitarian partners have used multiple channels to share lifesaving COVID-19 information on a large scale. Survey results suggest that these efforts have been successful as knowledge among refugee populations is strong in most areas. Nevertheless, important knowledge gaps remain (see table). The need for continuing communication efforts were highlighted by declines in knowledge that testing and treatment is covered. Communication needs related to COVID-19 were highest in the South, where only 25% of respondents said they did not need any additional information, and expressed higher needs for specific information related to COVID-19 than in any other region.

Knowledge of COVID-19

94%

reported knowing COVID-19 symptoms

94%

reported knowing preventative measures

73%

reported knowing how to access testing

67%

reported knowing the MoPH hotline number

54%

knew that costs of testing and treatment are covered

46%

did not need additional COVID-19 information

- The important role for UNHCR in COVID-19 communications continued to be shown as SMS from UNHCR (70%) continued to be the preferred channel. Further, interest in communication via other UNHCR channels, such as Facebook and receptions centres, rose this quarter while preferences for nearly all other non-UNHCR channels decreased.
- Throughout the quarter UNHCR supported government efforts to prevent COVID-19. In March UNHCR launched a campaign aimed at promoting vaccination information for refugee audiences and removing barriers preventing refugees from accessing vaccination. This campaign utilizes UNHCR's trusted communication channels, such as community volunteers and social media platforms to promote knowledge, and further monitors key indicators related to refugee vaccination rates.
- At the end of March, the number of refugees registering for vaccination remained low, many citing fears of the vaccine, amongst other barriers. UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation and adapt its outreach strategy during Q2 to promote COVID-19 vaccination.

Evictions

- This quarter fewer refugees reported that they have received eviction notices (4% compared to 8% last quarter) or been evicted (0.3% compared to 1% last quarter).

Key numbers related to evictions

4%

reported living under an eviction notice

97%

reported inability to pay rent as reason for eviction notice

71%

responded by negotiating financially with the landlord

0.3%

reported being evicted in the past 30 days

- These decreases in reported eviction issues appear to be the result of a combination of factors which have resulted in what was likely a temporary reprieve during this reporting period.
 - First, it is reported that many landlords have been flexible with collecting rent, because they recognize that their tenants are unable to work. Amongst refugees who are reporting support by the host community (15%), 1 in 2 mention that their landlords have assisted them by agreeing to reduce rental fees or postpone payment. This is the most common form of assistance cited, and is more frequently cited than during the last quarter.
 - Second, the combination of strong advocacy and co-operation between UNHCR and authorities on the issue of evictions within the context of the COVID-19 crisis has helped to prevent evictions that otherwise would have occurred. The effects of this joint advocacy are particularly visible surrounding collective evictions of informal settlements. For example, while the regions of the Bekaa, Baalbek-el Hermel, North, and Akkar have the highest numbers of refugees living in informal settlements, through engaged joint advocacy these regions reported the lowest rates of evictions and eviction notices.
- Still, the lockdown has not stopped the financial pressures on both refugees and landlords and tensions over rent remain high. Over three quarters of refugees report difficulties paying their rent (76%), more refugees reported not paying rent/ reducing paying on rent (64% up from 53%), and requests for assistance to pay for rent increased from 80 to 86% this quarter, making it the number one form of assistance requested. Thus, lower reported eviction issues this quarter might only be a short term trend linked to COVID-19 prevention and the national lockdown.

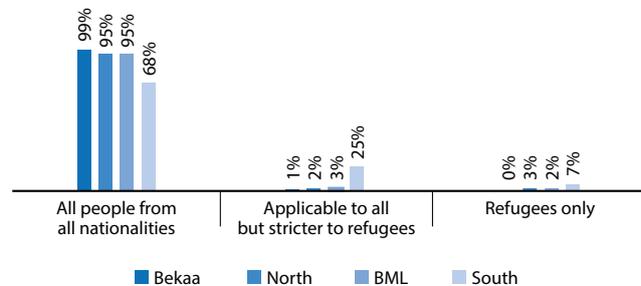
Measures impacting refugees

- Curfews and COVID-19 movement restrictions, linked to the national lockdown in place for much of the quarter, accounted for nearly all of the restrictions reported by refugees (98%) -other restrictive measures reported include raids, shop closures and confiscation of IDs. The scale of the national lockdown has meant that a little over two thirds of all refugees (67%) reported living under some form of restrictive measure, compared to 55% in the previous quarter.

- Since restrictions tied to the national lockdown also affected host populations, there was a decrease in refugees reporting that that they were living under measures targeting refugees only, or more harshly (7% compared to 31% in the previous quarter).

- Reports of measures that either targeted refugees only or which were applied to refugees more harshly were much higher in the South than in any of the other regions (see chart).

Applicability of reported measures impacting refugees



Recent developments on measures impacting refugees

In 2020, **755,771** refugees were targeted by **456** curfews and **290** COVID-19 movement restrictions that either applied to them only, or were applied to refugees more harshly.

Of the 290 reported discriminatory COVID-19 movement restrictions in 2020 the most common prohibitions involved forbidding refugees from leaving informal settlements, neighbourhoods or municipalities and receiving visitors from outside the community. Most of the 456 curfews targeting refugees applied to them only, while others applied to them more harshly either through enforcement or by imposing longer curfew hours for refugees. These curfews, in combination with movement restrictions, limited refugees' freedom of movement and severely impacted their ability to access employment and essential services. The effect

was to add to the marginalization and vulnerability of already fragile refugee communities.

High rates of discriminatory measures were reflected in the 4th quarter 2020 protection monitoring when nearly 1 in 3 refugees (31%) reported living under a measure which applied to them only, or more strictly. Since the 1st quarter of 2021 was characterized by national lockdowns which also affected host populations, there was a large decrease in refugees reporting that that they were living under measures targeting refugees only or more harshly (7%) this quarter.

Nevertheless, the scale of the national lockdown has meant that a little over two thirds of all refugees (67%) reported living under some form of restrictive measure, compared to 55% in the previous quarter. Restrictive measures have also had more severe impacts. Since, many of the restrictions this quarter

Social Stability

- Social stability is another area in which protection monitoring results were likely affected by the national lockdown. Overall, relatively low levels of tensions with the host community were reported, with just 1% of respondents reporting incidents such as threats, disputes, COVID-19 based discrimination, armed and physical violence, with most of these incidents caused by personal issues (53%). While generally tensions may be underreported because of a combination of factors, the national lockdown likely lowered incidents of tension between refugee and host communities as restrictions on movement, and closure of workplaces minimized the interaction of the two communities.
- According to key informants, many reports of tensions emerged in March related to refugee access to food. Refugees were specifically affected by the broader tensions surrounding subsidized goods. It was reported across the country that many members of the host community feel that subsidized goods should only be for Lebanese, and that this had resulted in refugees being denied access to grocery stores, and their facing physical and verbal confrontations when attempting to access subsidized goods. There has also been increased online activity arguing that Syrians should not have access to subsidized goods.
- Refugees consulted however also noted continued instances of inter-community support in the context of the worsening socio-economic and COVID-19 crises affecting both populations. Despite the hardships they themselves face, Lebanese people occasionally supported refugees, with 17% of surveyed households reporting being aware of such instances of assistance. This support most frequently took the form of agreeing to reduce rental fee / postpone payment (49% compared to 28% in the previous quarter), helping to buy or share food (33%) and allowing to buy food on credit (27%).