

Lebanon

January 2021

Operational context

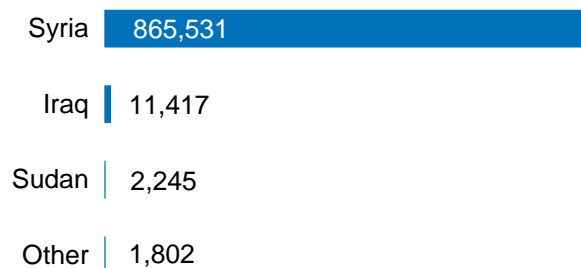
Lebanon remains the country hosting the largest number of refugees per capita, with some 865,500 registered Syrian refugees as of end December 2020 and 15,800 refugees of Ethiopian, Iraqi, Sudanese and other origins. The number of registered Syrian refugees has been gradually reducing since the Lebanese Government instructed UNHCR to suspend new registration at the beginning of 2015.

The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has had a heavy economic and social toll on Lebanon. In addition, Lebanon has faced a deep economic and financial crisis since late 2019, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating explosions in the Beirut port on 4 August 2020. The protracted nature of the refugee situation with limited self-reliance possibilities, coupled with the impact of these recent crises, have led to an exponential rise in extreme poverty among refugees. According to the preliminary findings of the 2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR), 88% of the Syrian refugee families are now living below the extreme poverty line, up from 55% in 2019. The situation is creating hunger, increased debt and mental and physical health problems, as well as increasing risks of evictions, exploitation, child labour and gender-based violence.

At the same time, the percentage of refugees holding valid legal residency has further decreased, as the number of refugees able to pay for residency renewal has reduced and fewer fall within the criteria of the 2017 fee waiver. A lack of legal residency exposes refugees to the risk of arrest and detention. It also hampers their access to basic services like education, health care and social services, as well as to obtaining civil status documents such as marriage and birth registration. Non-Syrian refugees without legal residency are particularly vulnerable and at high risk of deportation to their country of origin.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

Country of origin (registered refugees)



* Registration figures as of 31 December 2020

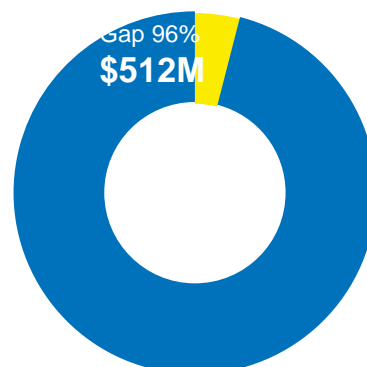
** UNHCR registration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has been suspended since May 2015 through a decision by the Government of Lebanon

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FUNDING

USD 535.4 M

requested for the Lebanon operation



*** Funding level as of 8 January 2021

Working in Partnership

The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2017-2020, developed by the Lebanese Government and humanitarian and development partners, provides an integrated humanitarian and stabilization framework, ensuring protection and immediate assistance to the most vulnerable while strengthening and supporting the capacity of national and local systems to deliver basic services to the refugee population. In 2021, UNHCR is having project partnership agreements with 27 partners, of which 11 are international, 13 national and 3 UN agencies. In December 2020, the LCRP was formally extended for one year, until end of 2021. UNHCR coordinates the implementation of the LCRP jointly with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and UNDP, maintaining leadership on the refugee component in line with the Refugee Coordination Model. UNHCR co-leads the Protection, Basic Assistance, Health, Shelter, and Social Stability sectors, and provides support to other sectors, including Education and WASH, ensuring that refugees are central to planning, strategy design and prioritization. UNHCR is also engaged in the National COVID-19 Response through programs to support the prevention, containment and treatment of cases, and in the protection and shelter response to the Beirut port explosions. UNHCR also co-leads the Housing and the Social Cohesion, Inclusion and Gender sectors in the Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF).

Objectives

The overall goal of UNHCR in Lebanon is to preserve a dignified protection space for the refugees, while working to enable their attainment of durable solutions outside the country. This is broken down into four main objectives:

- **Access to Protection:** Ensure access to protection, temporary legal residency, and birth and civil status documentation for refugees, and their protection from refoulement.
- **Dignity in Exile:** Ensure inclusive access to social protection and a safety net to preserve the dignity and well-being of refugees in Lebanon, while supporting refugees' ability to develop their human capital.
- **Secure Continued Hospitality:** Preserve the hospitality of Lebanese communities and overall social stability.
- **Realize Solutions:** Facilitate refugees' attainment of durable solutions in the form of resettlement or complementary pathways to third countries, and capacitate refugees to exercise their right to voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity.

While UNHCR's priority lies in addressing the immediate protection and assistance needs of the refugees, the rights-based and solutions mandate makes it imperative to do this in a way that supports refugees' ability to build their human capital, resilience and transferable skills while in exile. In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development goal to leave no one behind and the localisation approach set out in the Grand Bargain, and within the framework of the LCRP's development component, part of the strategy is to identify opportunities to strengthen the protection of the refugees in Lebanon through supporting the development of national legal frameworks and institutions to provide documentation and deliver effective services for Lebanese, refugees and stateless persons. Support to national systems is also important to mitigate the impact of having such a large refugee population accessing the public schools, health and social services and local infrastructures, and thereby prevent tensions from rising due to competition for services and resources.

Main Activities

Protection

Advocacy aimed at preserving the protection and dignity of refugees while they remain in exile in Lebanon and ensuring respect for the principles of *non-refoulement* and voluntary, safe and dignified returns is at the core of UNHCR's work. It is grounded in international standards, principles and good practices, including those set out in the **Global Compact on Refugees**, and frequently centers around respect for the rule of law and due process.

UNHCR regularly **verifies and updates the data** of Syrian refugees who registered with UNHCR before the Government's instruction in 2015 to suspend registration, and registers and determines the claims of asylum-seekers of other nationalities. Syrians approaching UNHCR since 2015 are counselled on the suspension of registration, have their needs assessed, and are referred to relevant protection and assistance programs. Accurate data is needed to inform planning and interventions, including eligibility for assistance, responses to refugees with specific needs, and the identification of durable solutions. Activities at UNHCR's Reception Centres were disrupted throughout 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led the operation to develop remote case processing modalities for renewal and verification activities, while reserving the reduced on-site capacity for new registration interviews and counselling. These new case processing modalities will continue in 2021, with UNHCR aiming to verify at least 50% of registered Syrian refugees, register refugees and asylum-seekers of other nationalities and update key changes in, for example, family composition, specific needs and contact numbers of case files.

Access to territory has remained restricted for Syrians since 2015 when visa requirements were introduced, and became increasingly difficult following the Higher Defence Council's (HDC) decision in April 2019. The HDC decision, complemented by a General Security instruction, provides that Syrians who have (re-)entered Lebanon illegally since 29 April 2019 should be deported. UNHCR conducts border monitoring and advocates for the right to seek international protection and a full and inclusive application of the narrow humanitarian admission criteria agreed in 2015. Advocacy interventions are conducted to prevent *refoulement* and visits to prisons and places of detention are regularly undertaken to identify and assist persons of concern. In 2021, UNHCR border teams will maintain a regular presence at all the official land border crossings with Syria to monitor regularly the entry and exit procedures and conditions, and systematically monitor, track, and analyse such movements.

Access to **legal residency**, which is what enables refugees to have freedom of movement and unhindered access to basic services and qualify for civil documentation, is a key protection priority. According to the preliminary findings *2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees*, a mere 20% of all Syrian refugees above 15 years hold a valid temporary residence permit. UNHCR thus advocates for an inclusive waiver of residency renewal fees, in line with the recommendations in the Brussels I and II Conference partnership papers, and its expansion to cover all refugees – regardless of nationality or registration with UNHCR. This is particularly important in light of the exceptional economic and public health situation prevailing in the country, which is making it impossible for most refugees to obtain a valid residence permit. UNHCR continues to support the Directorate General of General Security (GSO) with technical and material assistance to expedite and automate the processing of residency permits for refugees and provide services to Lebanese citizens.

UNHCR provides **legal aid**, including counselling and representation, and conducts awareness sessions and campaigns to raise refugees' knowledge on how to obtain legal residency, civil documents to certify births, marriages, divorces and deaths that have taken place in Lebanon, and access judicial procedures relating to family issues, domestic violence, and civil or administrative disputes. Individuals and families with specific needs also receive tailored support to obtain marriage registration, which enables birth registration of their children and increases the protection of women in case of later separation, divorce or loss of their husband.

UNHCR continues to prioritize **gender-based violence** (GBV) case management and other essential services for survivors. Local and institutional capacities are supported to prevent and address GBV and **child protection** needs through community mobilization, counselling, outreach, strengthening of specialized services, promoting the engagement of men and boys in GBV prevention and response, and strengthening of national systems.

In 2021, UNHCR continues to strengthen its **outreach activities** to ensure all refugees have updated information and that persons at heightened risk can access specialized case management and psychosocial support services, among others. Refugees will be supported to further build their capacities through activities which promote resilience, such as life skills activities and skills development training, with the latter focussing on agriculture, construction and the environment or around skills which can be applied in the home. Community centres will support refugees and Lebanese in receiving updated information about services, acquire skills through trainings and awareness through sessions, and receive psychosocial support. Self-help kiosks are being set up at the community centres to enable refugees to themselves update key basic data. Building on achievements in previous years, refugees will be further empowered to actively engage in preventing and responding to community issues such as COVID-19, mental health and psychosocial well-being, GBV and child labour. All this will take into account movement restrictions and lockdowns related to COVID-19, such as through supporting the use of online and hybrid modalities for interventions at community level.

Participation of refugees

Whether through daily outreach activities, targeted focus group discussions, surveys, or through established communication platforms, UNHCR seeks regular feedback from refugees on their concerns, needs and capacities, and their views on current and foreseen interventions to ensure that they respond to refugees' expectations and are effective.

Each year, UNHCR and key partners engage in dialogues with over 2,000 refugee women, men, girls and boys of Syrian and other origins, with diverse profiles, through a **Participatory Assessment** exercise. The findings inform UNHCR's assessment and analyses of the protection situation, design of the country operations plan and prioritisation of activities and implementation of its programmes. In addition, UNHCR and partners conduct hundreds of community and individual face-to-face and online interactions each month, including with thousands of refugee women, men and youth mobilized to identify and respond to community concerns. Such interactions also inform UNHCR programmes and activities, as well as guide prioritization.



Community-Based Protection

As a result of COVID-19, community groups supported by UNHCR increased significantly in 2020 from the 153 pre-existing groups, which include women, youth and older person-groups, to 2,252 **community groups**. The latter include site community groups and medically trained community health volunteers (CHVs) linked to informal settlements and collective shelters who raise awareness on the pandemic and promote safe practices. Moreover, UNHCR engages with more than 597 general and specialized **outreach volunteers** (OVs), of whom 59% are women and 6% are youth from the refugee and host communities. OVs provide practical information to refugees, raise awareness on relevant topics, provide insights into community risks and priorities, visit the most vulnerable and refer those with specific needs to UNHCR and other response partners for help.

Awareness sessions focused on preventative measures for COVID-19, importance of measles vaccination, birth registration, updates on assistance and services, among many others. With the introduction of lockdowns by the Government and other movement restrictions, community structures such as OVs, CHVs and community groups will continue to focus on virtual outreach to hundreds of thousands of persons with the aim to provide information, raise awareness and reaching those at risk.

Durable solutions

UNHCR works towards securing durable solutions outside Lebanon for refugees as local integration is not an option provided by the Government. UNHCR estimates that 10% of the refugee population in Lebanon is in need of **resettlement** or humanitarian admission, vastly outnumbering the places available. UNHCR therefore continues to advocate for States to increase the number of resettlement places. In 2021, UNHCR aims to submit 8,000 Syrian refugees and 1,250 refugees of other nationalities for resettlement, based on anticipated quotas.

While UNHCR is currently not organising **voluntary repatriation** to Syria, refugees who take a decision to return are interviewed and provided with counselling on the importance of having identity and civil status documents prior to return, and the availability of services and community centres in Syria. In coordination with relevant actors, refugee children returning are also provided with school diplomas and vaccinations. UNHCR staff are present at staging and departure point across the country during GSO-facilitated group return movements. These were suspended with the border closure in March 2020 but are expected to resume

in 2021. Since 2017, UNHCR has conducted regular surveys to gauge refugees' intentions and perceptions in relation to return, in order to inform advocacy and other interventions aimed at creating enabling conditions for safe, dignified and sustainable returns. On average, 86% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon express an ultimate intention to repatriate to their home country.

Multi-purpose cash assistance

UNHCR Lebanon has pioneered the provision of humanitarian assistance through a large-scale multi-purpose cash assistance program (MCAP) and ATM cards since 2013. Apart from strengthening the capacity of the benefitting families to cover basic needs such as rent, food and medicines, and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and harmful coping strategies, UNHCR's MCAP has enabled refugees to contribute to the local economy by purchasing directly from local markets and shops. In 2021, UNHCR is prioritising to assist at least 48,000 severely vulnerable Syrian refugee families and 750 refugee families of other nationalities. However, these families, plus the ones assisted by WFP with multipurpose cash, are far less than the total number of refugee households below the extreme poverty line. UNHCR therefore continues to advocate for increased resources to be able to expand the safety net to better match the rising number of refugees living in extreme poverty due to the economic crisis and COVID-19 situation.

Winter assistance

For the 2020-2021 winter season, in view of unprecedented economic and financial crisis, UNHCR has provided winter cash assistance to almost 200,000 vulnerable refugee families (more than 870,000 individuals) and 8,300 vulnerable Lebanese families to help them meet additional needs and costs during the harsh winter months. In addition, UNHCR is also providing in-kind assistance, such as food parcels, fuel cards for heating, blankets, hygiene parcels and winter clothing to refugees and host communities in need, as well as community support such as fuel/gas for heating for schools, medical facilities and other community sites. UNHCR remains the only agency implementing such a large-scale winter assistance programme for refugees in Lebanon.

Education

UNHCR works to increase access of refugee children and their retention in Lebanese public schools, as well as awareness and sensitization of the refugee community about education through community engagement and outreach. The community itself is at the core of UNHCR's work. **Volunteers** identify out-of-school children and youth, provide counselling and awareness sessions, and facilitate community-based solutions for those at risk of dropping out including through homework support and support to children and parents with distance learning. In 2021, UNHCR continues to support a standardized and certified basic literacy and numeracy (BLN) programme for children (10- 14 years old) who are out of school and without the most basic learning in order to support their entry into Accelerated Learning and ultimately, formal public education, where applicable. Out-of-school youth will also be provided with access to short term modules of technical vocational training.

Health

UNHCR implements a substantial health care programme to ensure refugees in Lebanon have access to primary and secondary health care. While refugees have non-discriminatory access to public and private health facilities in Lebanon, the Lebanese health system is mostly privatized and user fees present a significant barrier. UNHCR supports **primary health care** (PHC) services accessible to refugees and Lebanese. PHCs and mobile health services offer child and maternal health, sexual and reproductive health,

care for non-communicable diseases and mental health services through subsidizing health services and medication, including vaccinations.

While UNHCR is one of many actors supporting PHCs, the organization remains almost the sole supporter of **hospital care** for refugees apart from *ad hoc* services by other actors. To improve access, equity and affordability of health care services for persons of concern, UNHCR covers a large part of the cost of life-saving and emergency interventions at hospitals. In 2021, UNHCR will continue to subsidize refugee access to primary health care consultations and laboratory tests, as well as at least 55,000 life-saving hospital care referrals.

Shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

An integrated, area-based approach is applied to respond to refugees' acute shelter needs in informal settlements and in substandard buildings. Poor urban neighbourhoods and rural areas in need of support are identified and receive targeted assistance through an integrated shelter/WASH response, including rehabilitation. Refugees receive **shelter kits** to reinforce or rebuild their shelters following flooding, evictions or fire incidents. Shelter rehabilitation and collective site improvements allows vulnerable refugees to move to **upgraded shelters** and benefit from secure tenure through free occupancy for one year.

Refugees living in informal settlements benefit from desludging services to prevent public health risks; access to **safe water** through quality-monitored water trucking or through connection to water sources; and sensitization on hygiene practices adapted to the displacement conditions.

Support to Lebanese host communities and national and local responders

As part of UNHCR's efforts to preserve the hospitality and social stability of host communities, **institutional support** is provided to central and local authorities to increase their capacity to respond to the needs of refugees and Lebanese communities hosting large numbers of refugees.

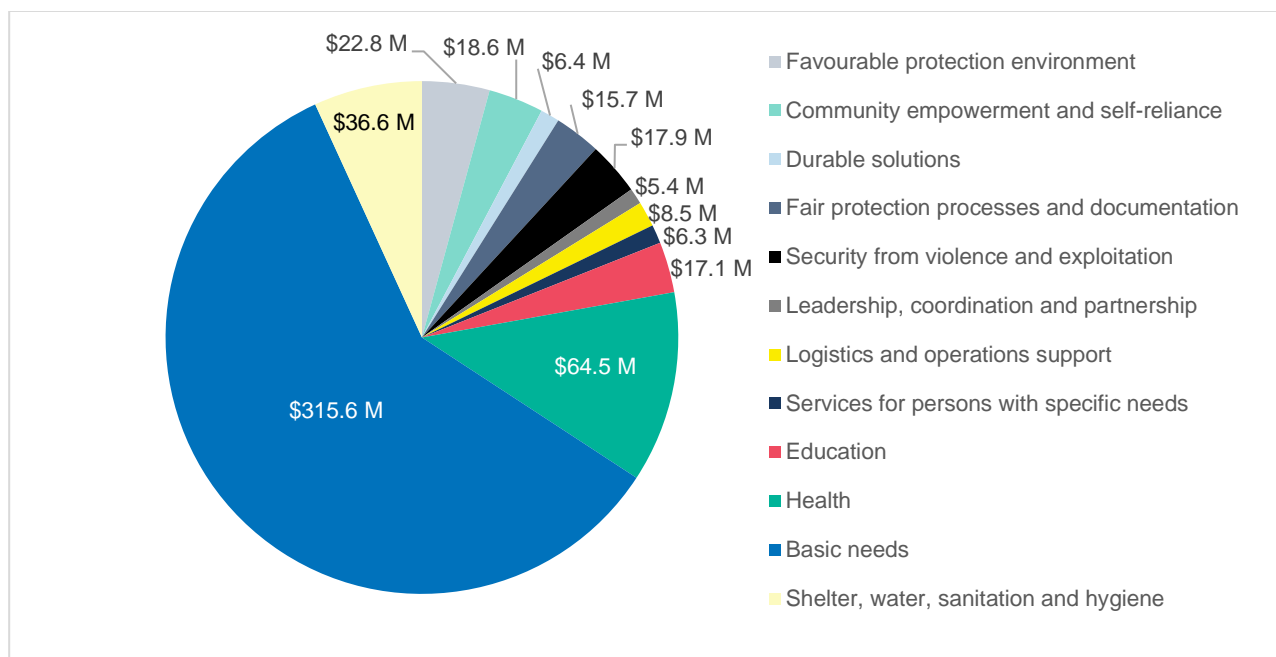
Projects to promote peaceful coexistence amongst Lebanese and non-Lebanese communities, as well as sectoral interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of the refugee presence on public services and infrastructure (e.g. support to solid waste management and communal infrastructure) are supported by UNHCR. Since the onset of the Syria crisis in 2011 to date, more than 500 **community support** projects have been implemented by UNHCR in Lebanon. In 2021, UNHCR plans to implement three Community support projects in solid waste management and production of masks and soap by both local and refugee communities.

Preventing and eradicating statelessness

In line with UNHCR's Global Campaign to end statelessness by 2024, UNHCR Lebanon's multi-year strategy aims to better identify stateless populations and those at risk of statelessness, and to protect, prevent and reduce statelessness in Lebanon. In 2021, UNHCR will continue to support the Directorate General of Personal Status to facilitate the registration of births and other vital events of refugees and Lebanese, which is key to preventing and reducing the risk of statelessness. UNHCR will continue to support the removal of gender-discriminatory nationality provisions, and the inclusion of stateless persons into national and humanitarian assistance programs and plans.

Advocacy will target improved access to basic rights and the reform of procedural mechanisms and systems. UNHCR will also provide technical support to the Working Group on Statelessness, and continue working closely with UNICEF, in the context of the joint Global Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality, to promote joint advocacy initiatives to prevent and reduce childhood statelessness. Additionally, UNHCR will continue the provision of legal aid and services to stateless persons in order to acquire or confirm the Lebanese nationality.

2021 financial requirements



Thank you to UNHCR Lebanon's donors in 2020



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