

Lebanon

November 2020

Operational context

Nine years into the Syria crisis, Lebanon continues to host the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, with a Government estimate of **1.5 million** Syrian refugees, of whom **879,529** are registered with UNHCR as of end-September, **16,631** refugees of Iraqi, Sudanese and other origins, as well as more than 200,000 Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate. The presence of such a large refugee population in a small country facing a deep **economic and financial crisis**, high unemployment, rising poverty and pressures on fragile infrastructure and services is increasingly affecting inter-community relations and social stability.

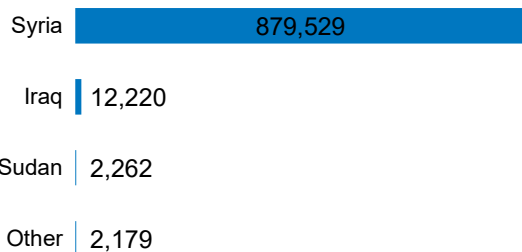
Beirut blast

On 4 August, Beirut was hit by a devastating explosion which damaged neighborhoods and buildings across the capital and left hundreds of thousands of people homeless. More than 200 people were killed and 6,500 injured. UNHCR immediately launched a phased approach focusing on **protection** and **shelter**. Affected populations of all nationalities received immediate assistance to respond to their most urgent needs. UNHCR partners distributed over 6,500 emergency weatherproofing kits to help families protect their homes from the elements and regain a sense of security and privacy. UNHCR has also ramped up medium-term programmes for housing as well as mental health and socio-economic support to enable a recovery centered around communities. The organization is also contributing to the recovery plan for the Lebanese capital.

For details on UNHCR Lebanon's response to the Beirut blast, please see [UNHCR Update on Lebanon: Beirut Port Explosions](#).

POPULATION OF CONCERN

Country of origin (registered refugees)



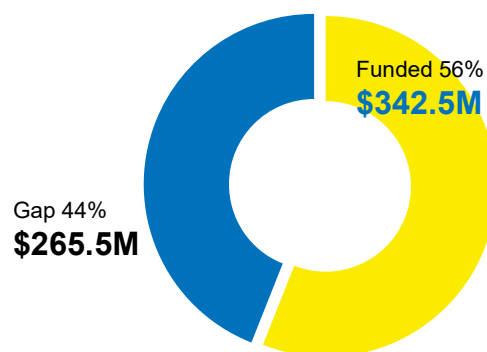
* Registration figures as of 30 September 2020

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

FUNDING

USD 607.5 M

requested for the Lebanon operation



*** Funding level as of 1 December 2020

UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff

540 National Staff

105 International Staff

Offices

1 Country Office in Beirut

2 Sub-offices in Tripoli and Zahle

2 Field Offices in Mount Lebanon and Tyre

COVID-19

Early on in the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Lebanese Government imposed various confinement measures to prevent the spread of the virus. While these restrictions affected the implementation of some programmes, UNHCR adapted the delivery modalities of many protection services to remain responsive to the needs of refugees. UNHCR expanded its availability through the national call centre and field hotlines to respond to an increasing number of protection, assistance and other queries, and individual case management was conducted by phone wherever possible. Core assistance programmes including cash-based interventions and health have been maintained throughout. As of July 2020, all four UNHCR reception centres have gradually re-opened with precautionary measures in place to keep refugees and staff safe. In-person appointments are prioritized for the most urgent protection, documentation, status determination and resettlement cases.

In its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR is working within the framework of the Government, and in close collaboration with WHO and other partners, to ensure that refugees' needs are addressed in a coordinated, equal and coherent manner. UNHCR's contribution to the COVID-19 response falls within three main areas: community engagement and prevention; enabling quarantining/isolation of refugees living in overcrowded settings; and reinforcing testing and hospitalization capacity.

More than 480,609 individuals living in informal settlements and other similar sites were reached with hygiene promotion and awareness sessions as well as hygiene kits distribution. UNHCR is also assisting communities and families to ensure the ability to self-isolate by providing support in setting up and/or equipping 10 level-3 isolation centres across the country. Moreover, UNHCR is expanding the capacity of the national health system to treat COVID-19 cases by providing up to 800 additional beds and 120 additional intensive care unit (ICU) beds in total to selected hospitals nationwide, including ventilators and other medical equipment.

For details of UNHCR Lebanon's response to COVID-19 and ongoing socio-economic crisis, as well as impact on regular programmes, please see [UNHCR Lebanon's COVID-19 Operational Updates](#).

Working in Partnership

The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) is led by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) on behalf of the Lebanese Government and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. UNHCR co-leads the humanitarian refugee response component of the LCRP, while UNDP co-leads the stabilisation component, in close collaboration with the Government and humanitarian and development actors. UNHCR also co-leads a number of thematic sectors, namely Protection, Basic Assistance, Health, and Shelter, and provides support to other sectors, including Education, Social Stability and WASH.

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 centres 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. 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. In 2019, UNHCR fully verified 72% of the registered Syrian refugees, and updated key changes in, for example, family composition, specific needs and contact numbers of additional case files. The data of refugees and asylum-seekers of other nationalities is also regularly updated.

Access to territory has remained restricted for Syrians since 2015 when visa requirements were introduced and become increasingly difficult following the Higher Defence Council's decision in April 2019, that Syrians who have (re-)entered Lebanon illegally should be deported. The closure of borders in March 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19 further limited access to territory. 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.

Access to **legal residency**, which is what enables refugees to have freedom of movement and unhindered access to services and qualify for civil documentation, is a key protection priority. UNHCR advocates for an inclusive waiver of residency renewal fees for all refugees – regardless of nationality or registration with UNHCR – 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. At the same time, UNHCR supports the Directorate General of General Security (GSO) to expand its capacity to process residency renewal requests from refugees and provide services to Lebanese citizens.

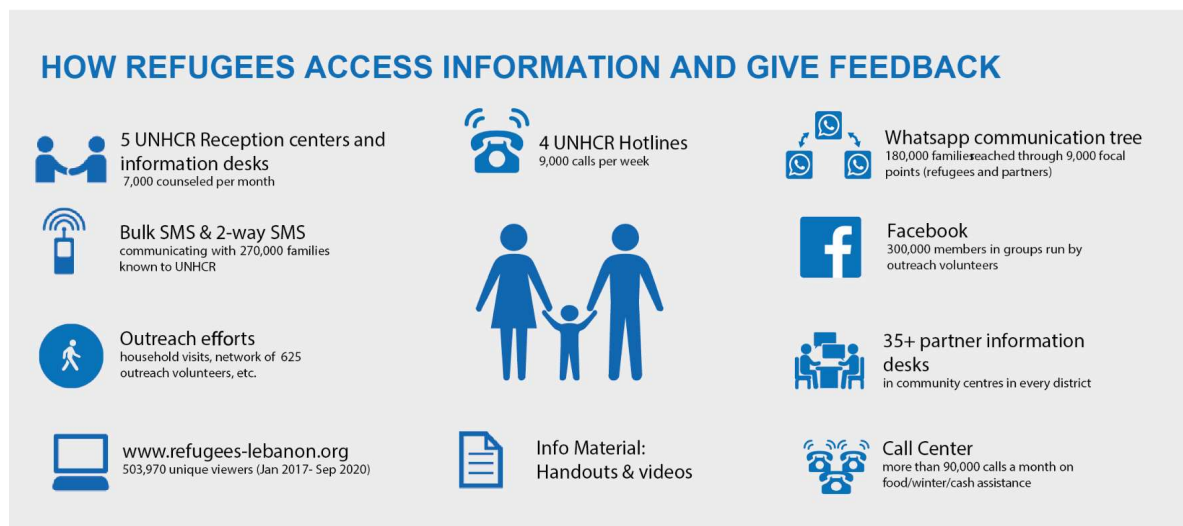
UNHCR provides **legal aid**, including counselling and representation, and conducts awareness sessions and campaigns to raise refugees' knowledge on how to obtain legal residency, civil documents to certify births, marriages, divorces and deaths that have taken place in Lebanon, and access judicial procedures relating to family issues, domestic violence, and civil or administrative disputes. While some of these services were affected by the COVID-19 lockdown measures, UNHCR and partners adjusted their modalities to provide legal counselling by phone and awareness sessions remotely. 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. To facilitate swift access to civil documentation, UNHCR is providing equipment and staffing to increase the capacity of the Directorate of Personal Status within the Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities.

UNHCR continues to prioritize **SGBV case management** and other essential services for survivors during the pandemic. Local and institutional capacities are supported to prevent and address SGBV and **child protection** needs through community mobilization, counselling, outreach, strengthening of specialized services and promoting the engagement of men and boys in SGBV prevention and response. In 2020, UNHCR is supporting 24 community centres run by NGOs. These centres support refugees and Lebanese in receiving updated information about services, acquire skills through trainings and awareness through sessions, and receive psychosocial support. Due to the pandemic, most of these services shifted from in-person to online.

Participation of refugees

Whether through daily outreach activities, targeted focus group discussions or surveys, 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 dialogue with over 1,000 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 around 9,000 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 mobilization and outreach volunteer initiative

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 community health volunteers at informal settlements and collective shelters who raise awareness on the pandemic and promote safe practices. Moreover, UNHCR engages with more than 640 general and specialized **outreach volunteers** (OVs), of whom 59% are women and 19% are youth, from the refugee and host communities. OVs provide practical information to refugees, raise awareness on relevant topics, visit the most vulnerable and refer those with specific needs to UNHCR

and other response partners for help. Since the imposition of the lockdown by the Government, community structures focused on virtual outreach, through which OVs and community groups reached 330,000 people with COVID-related awareness messaging that they helped to develop.

Durable solutions

UNHCR works towards securing durable solutions outside Lebanon for refugees as local integration is not an option provided by the Government. More than 10% of the refugee population in Lebanon is in need of **resettlement** or humanitarian admission in 2020, vastly outnumbering the places available. UNHCR therefore continues to advocate for States to increase the number of resettlement places. Resettlement interviews in-person were suspended during the COVID-19 lockdown while processing continued at a reduced frequency through remote interviewing modalities, implemented for certain categories of non-complex cases. As a result, 6,412 Syrian refugees and 505 refugees of other nationalities were submitted for resettlement from Lebanon by October 2020.

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 community centres and services 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. 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 2020, UNHCR has expanded its cash assistance programme, already covering 34,600 severely vulnerable refugee families, in response to the rapidly rising number of refugees living in extreme poverty due to the economic crisis and COVID-19 situation. The amount transferred in Lebanese pounds (LBP) was also increased to help compensate for the inflation. In October 2020, almost **68,000 families** received multi-purpose cash assistance. In addition to regular MCAP recipients, this includes:

- 12,287 severely vulnerable families who are receiving temporary multi-purpose cash assistance as part of the COVID-19 response (during the months from May to July, 11,500 families were assisted); and
- 22,522 families included in the MCAP, using funds made possible through the use of a humanitarian exchange rate (families were added to MCAP starting June).

Winter assistance

For the 2019-2020 winter season, UNHCR provided winter support through cash assistance to close to 870,000 refugees and some 20,000 vulnerable Lebanese to help them meet additional needs and costs during the harsh winter months

In 2020-2021 and in view of unprecedented economic and financial crisis, UNHCR intends to provide winterization assistance to up to 1.1 million Syrian refugees (over 270,000 families) and 7,843 refugees (3,268 families) of other nationalities. UNHCR remains the only agency planning large-scale winter assistance for refugees in Lebanon.

Education

Maintaining updated information on trends and individual data on the education acquired by refugee children in Lebanon, including out-of-school children, is a core activity given the importance of accurate data for planning and the design of effective programmes. At the community level, 113 **Education Outreach Volunteers** work to identify out-of-school children and youth and provide counselling and awareness sessions and community-based solutions for those at risk of dropping out. They also disseminate education-related information to the refugee community, raise parents' awareness on COVID-19, and support children and parents with distance learning. The latter started in March, following the suspension of all in-person education activities in line with the Government's and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's guidelines. As of October, a total of 2,159 children received remote homework support. Remote communication networks were established for parents in 22 **Parent Community Groups** to discuss education-related matters and foster parental engagement in their children's learning. Despite the suspension of in-person non-formal education, Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) classes continued remotely. Education-related allowances, such as for transportation, were redirected in 2020 into connectivity bundles to ensure students' access to distance learning courses. Moreover, some 2,000 university students are receiving **full scholarships** to study in Lebanese universities, complemented with language, guidance, skills support and monthly allowances to help students with transportation and other expenses. DAFI students engaged in different volunteer activities within the community, including rehabilitation efforts after the Beirut Blast.

In addition, in order to increase the capacity of public schools to accommodate the large number of Lebanese and refugee students, UNHCR is **rehabilitating and expanding** 15 schools across the country, of which 14 are completed. The works include measures to enhance the physical accessibility of children with disabilities.

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. From January-August 2020, UNHCR supported more than 37,200 PHC consultations for refugees.

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. From January-September 2020, UNHCR supported more than 43,500 life-saving care referrals. In 2020, UNHCR plans to support around 73,000 hospitalizations.

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. During the COVID-19 lockdown, many of UNHCR's non-essential shelter activities were temporarily suspended. Nevertheless, by mid-year, 2,425 refugees had received **shelter kits** to reinforce or rebuild their shelters following flooding, evictions or fire incidents. Shelter activities resumed in June when the lockdown was lifted and focused on shelter rehabilitation and collective site improvements. The latter allowed 77 individuals 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.

Following the Beirut blast, UNHCR prioritised the distribution of emergency weatherproofing kits to those most severely affected by the explosion, with more than 6,500 households reached so far. This is being followed by support through shelter cash assistance for small interventions as well as rehabilitation and repair works for damaged buildings.

Support to Lebanese host communities and national and local responders

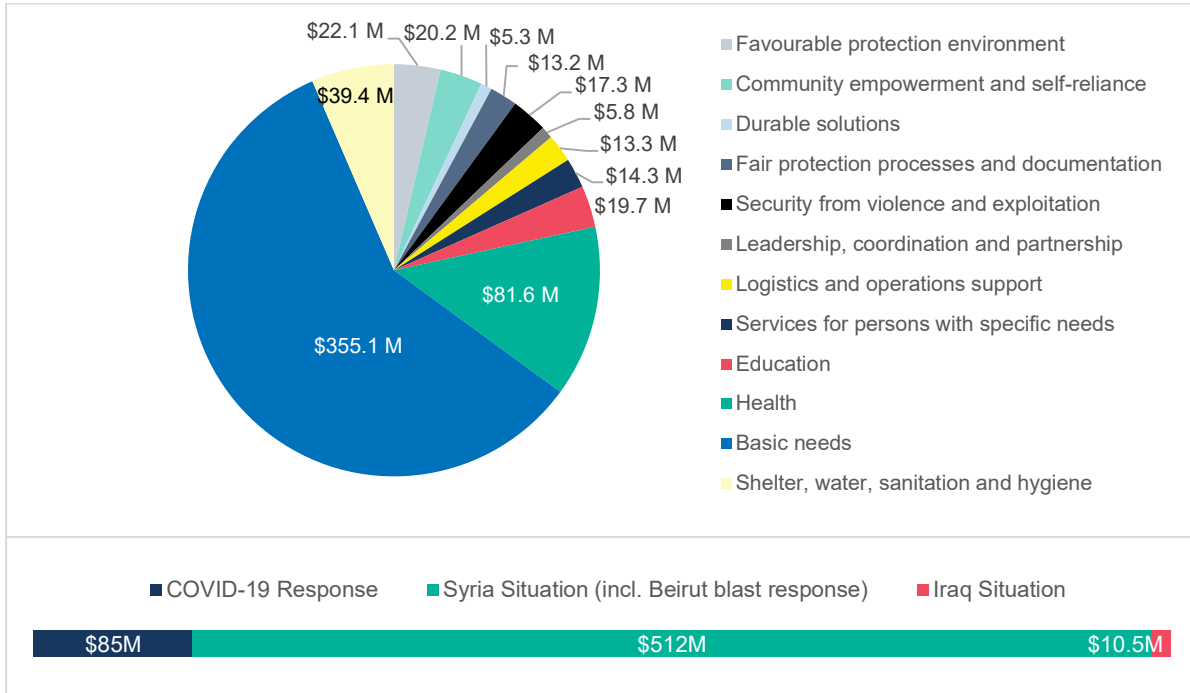
As part of UNHCR's efforts to preserve the hospitality and social stability of host communities, **institutional support** is provided to central and local authorities to increase their capacity to respond to the needs of refugees and Lebanese communities hosting large numbers of refugees. The support to public institutions in 2020 also included supporting the government-led national COVID-19 response through the ongoing rehabilitation, procurement of medical equipment, supplies and medications for five hospitals as well as the technical and human resources support to the Ministry of Public Health.

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, a total of 500 **community support** projects were implemented by UNHCR in Lebanon. In 2020, UNHCR has planned 14 community support projects aimed at mitigating the impact of deteriorating public services and rising poverty among Lebanese families, as well as responding to COVID19 crisis.

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 prevent and reduce statelessness in Lebanon. In 2020, UNHCR will continue to support the Directorate 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. 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.

2020 financial requirements



Thank you to UNHCR Lebanon's donors in 2020



Special thanks to the major donors of unearmarked and other softly earmarked funds in 2020

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Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America | Private donors