

Beirut port explosions UNHCR's response update

1 December 2020



Syrian refugee, Saleh Hamdu Ibrahim, 22, from Deir ez-Zor has received aid from UNHCR after the devastating blasts in Beirut. The father of two has lived in Lebanon with his family for five years and was at home on the day of the explosions.

©UNHCR/ Diego Ibrra Sanchez

On 4 August, the city of Beirut was hit by a devastating explosion which flattened most of the city's port. The incident killed around 200 people, injured more than 6,500 and damaged over 74,000 homes, affecting more than 290,000 people, including many refugees.

In such situations, UNHCR's responsibilities extend beyond its refugee and stateless mandates to cover all affected populations.

UNHCR's response thus targets the most affected and vulnerable Lebanese, refugees, stateless people and migrant workers based on their needs.

A phased approach was adopted to ensure that immediate protection and shelter assistance was provided while medium and long-term responses were being planned in parallel.

The Office is also co-leading the inter-agency coordination of the protection and shelter sectors.

Overview of the response – Protection

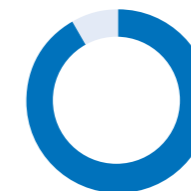
The people affected and their communities are at the heart of UNHCR’s response. The massive explosion was highly traumatic for Beirut residents who have experienced or witnessed injuries, loss of life and mass destruction of homes and belongings. This was particularly harsh on older people having gone through the civil war, children, female-headed households, and deprived or marginalized communities. UNHCR focused its efforts on providing people with services and assistance to secure their basic rights and dignity, while laying the foundation for emotional and material recovery and resilience.

Mental Health & Psychological Support (MHPSS) & Psychological First Aid (PFA)

Psychological first aid and psychosocial support is part of all the stages of our response – from emergency to recovery – to help survivors recover and rebuild their self-confidence and resilience. Frontline staff are trained in PFA to receive and appropriately respond to calls from persons in distress, and refer individuals in need to specialized services, including tailored MHPSS.

MHPSS interventions

Over 650 instances instances of PFA provided in the first days of the response



Over 2,050 MHPSS beneficiaries. This represents **92%** of UNHCR's Flash Appeal target. Needs however remain very high.

Community Engagement, Mobilization & Outreach

UNHCR mobile teams were deployed immediately to affected areas to exchange with and assess affected populations of all nationalities. This effort was complemented by the presence of 13 Outreach Volunteers already trained by UNHCR and who were deployed in affected areas. UNHCR ensured that refugees were not left behind in the response or cut off from information.

Existing capacity was directed to make over 10,000 calls to every refugee and their families known to reside within a 5 km radius from the port, while leveraging well-established mechanisms, such as refugee networks on social media. Additionally, a protection hotline was set up for all victims, advertised through social media and staff on the ground.

Outreach

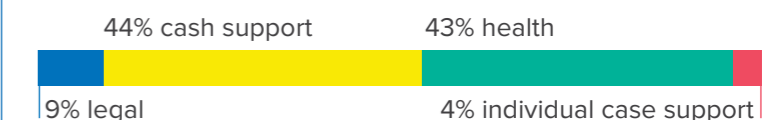


Over 10,000 people reached through home visits, OV's, community activities, hotlines and mobile teams' interviews

This enabled the identification of **more than 2,000 individuals** whose situations needed to be referred to specialized partners for support:



10,000 calls to refugees in a 5 km radius of the port



Individual case support services

Emergency Cash Assistance as well as counselling is provided to vulnerable persons, such as isolated older or disabled persons, who have been impacted by the blast and in need of tailored support. This allows families to cover urgent medical needs, recover necessary belongings, and pay for other immediate survival needs. This also includes crucial rehabilitation support for people who sustained serious injuries from the explosions.

Support services



Rehabilitation



Individual case support



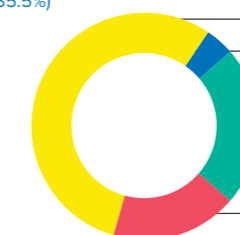
Emergency Cash Assistance

Legal aid

Tailored legal aid helps people obtain legal documents that were lost during the explosions. UNHCR teams also assist the most vulnerable on challenges related to contracts and tenancy rights, e.g. to mitigate the risks of eviction or increase in lowered rent, in the context of our shelter repair and rehabilitation programme. Such Housing, Land and Property (HLP) issues are expected to remain an area of need as repairs and rehabilitation continue, whether conducted by humanitarian actors, local actors or through self-recovery.

Legal aid interventions

Beneficiaries: 1,694 (135.5%)
Target: 1,250



Breakdown:

- 55%** Legal awareness
- 4%** Legal assistance
- 23%** Legal counselling
- 18%** Housing, land and property rights support

Overview of the response - Shelter

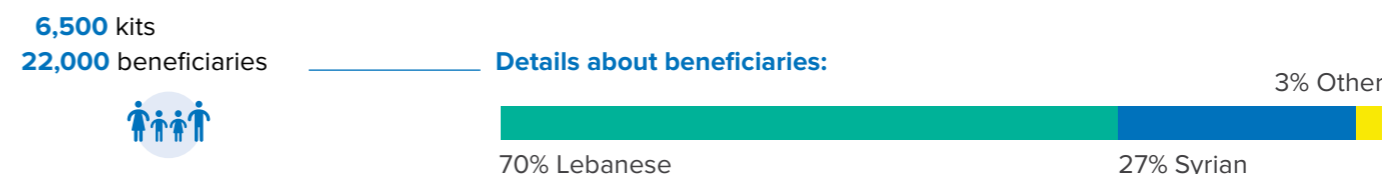
The Shelter Sector estimates that some 290,000 people are in need of shelter repairs and targets about 117,500 among the most vulnerable

Damaged doors, locks and windows severely curtails the privacy and protection of the persons affected. Inadequate housing can impact an individual's - and especially children's - health, education, security, livelihoods, family and community life, and increase the risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Older persons or people living with disabilities prior to the explosion, or as a result thereof, as well as other vulnerable populations need tailored attention and interventions.

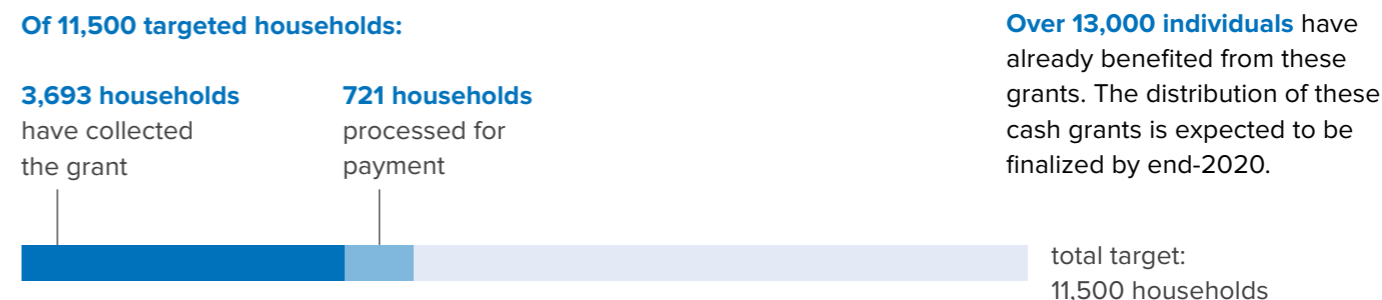
Weatherproofing kits

Immediate and urgent needs have been addressed through the distribution of over 6,500 UNHCR weatherproofing kits containing plastic sheeting, timber, plywood and associated tools. Partners adapted distribution modalities to bring materials as close to homes as possible, going as far as the doorsteps of individuals who have reduced mobility. This brought a degree of privacy, dignity and safety to more than 22,000 individuals in the initial days of the response.



Cash for shelter assistance

Less costly and relatively simple repairs, such as installing new doors and windows, are addressed through USD 600 shelter cash grants provided directly to households. 11,500 of the most vulnerable families affected by the explosions are gradually receiving this one-time grant from UNHCR. They are identified according to the damage level to their homes and their socioeconomic vulnerability, based on the information collected through the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment coordinated by the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) with UNHCR's support as well as through other referral pathways.



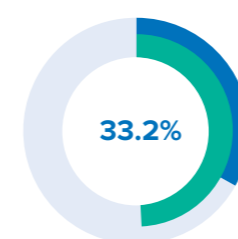
Minor repair and rehabilitation programme

Support for minor repairs or rehabilitation is provided to households and owners in need through professional contractors. UNHCR plans to repair 4,100 housing units with interventions costing up to USD 1,500 and rehabilitate 2,400 housing units for up to USD 4,500. The level of support provided is based on expert technical assessments and a precise list of repairs to be completed. Tenants and owners have a voice in how repairs look like and UNHCR endeavors to improve previously substandard apartments with basic requirements of dignity. This enables families who live in these apartments to feel comfortable in their homes and improve the prospects of recovering from the trauma experienced on 4 August.

Communal areas

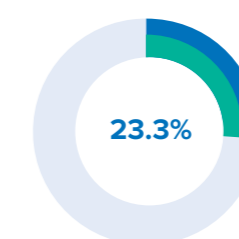
Household level repairs are linked to that of buildings and communal areas, ensuring the human element and the community are placed at the centre of each intervention. Building entrances and stairs will be repaired as a part of the minor repair and rehabilitation programme. In addition to this, 55 communal areas, such as gardens, squares, sidewalks and stairs, will be repaired to enable inhabitants of affected neighbourhoods to rebuild their community life in safe, improved and inclusive spaces.

Minor Repairs



- Target: 4,168
- Funded: 2,050
- Completed or underway: 1,383

Rehabilitation



- Target: 2,394
- Funded: 630
- Completed or underway: 558

Following necessarily time-consuming technical assessments and transparent tendering procedures, the pace of actual repairs is now accelerating in November-December 2020 to meet targets.

Not only bricks...


Repairing and rehabilitating damaged apartments and homes indiscriminately would not recognize the damage inflicted on the rich cultural heritage and social fabric of these areas, which also need to be restored. Thus, UNHCR's response recognizes and integrates the need to actively "repair" these elements, even in the emergency phase.

Heritage buildings

Residential areas targeted by UNHCR's shelter response to the explosion at the port include Beirut's historic neighbourhoods, which hold a strong cultural and social value and contain rich architectural and cultural heritage, ranging from the Ottoman to the French Mandate periods. These neighbourhoods were home to people of diverse social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. UNHCR's programme takes into consideration the social, cultural, economic and urban recovery aspects which are interlinked with housing. This is also in line with, and paves the way for subsequent recovery and reconstruction approaches articulated under the Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) prepared by the UN, EU and World Bank with wide community and institutional consultation.

UNHCR works with the Directorate of General Antiquities and the Beirut Built Heritage Rescue to achieve the following:

Advocacy and awareness raising

UNHCR is working to frame the sector's approach in a heritage-sensitive way, providing key advocacy and raising awareness on best practices, technical issues and legal requirements of authorities. UNHCR organized 9 online training sessions with the Arab Center for Architecture attended by 150 humanitarian respondents and contractors, with more than 90 people attending 9 field visits to engage and exchange with experienced architects and restorers. The sessions cover architectural heritage pre-1930 and between 1930-70, as well as public and common spaces.

With 75,000 m² of tarpaulin, UNHCR has covered over 100 heritage houses and buildings in affected areas. Photo © UNHCR

Minor repairs and rehabilitation of heritage buildings

UNHCR aims to support 150 damaged apartments in heritage buildings, many of which are homes to vulnerable families, often with older members, by year-end. Specialized contractors will carry out the work with the oversight of expert partners. All apartments and communal areas in single buildings will be rehabilitated to ensure the best conditions to its inhabitants. Legal aspects relating to Housing, Land and Property will also be taken into account to ensure vulnerable families living in those apartments have access to security of tenure.

Neighbourhoods as a complex whole

UNHCR understands that living is not only having a roof over one's head or windows to stop the rain. Living is done within a community and a neighbourhood, with all its complexities. These need to be well understood so as to give the tailored support required to restore their social fabric.

To achieve that, UNHCR launched a project with the American University of Beirut's Urban Lab to establish neighbourhood profiles of the areas targeted by the shelter programme. These holistic profiles cover the populations living in the area, including housing, social life, demographic, integration, infrastructure and services. These profiles will help inform the choices that UNHCR and other actors make in the short and the longer term, notably when rehabilitating communal spaces affected by the explosions, and promote community inclusion, participation and accountability in the process. With a detailed understanding of neighbourhoods as complex systems, well-planned interventions from different actors will complement each other to improve the lives of its inhabitants in mutually reinforcing ways while respecting distinct identities.

Support for Social Development Centers

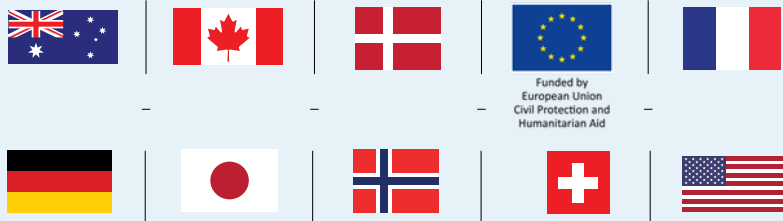
Communities and neighbourhoods are also actively built and reinforced thanks to safe spaces offering support and recreational activities for its members, including the most vulnerable. One such example are the Social Development Centers managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and that UNHCR has been supporting for past years.

Five such centers suffered damage during the explosion and were rehabilitated by UNHCR. These centers are already back to their previous role in providing services needed by the community such as non-formal education programmes, skill development, awareness raising on health, SGBV and child protection services.



Syrian refugee Makhoul (43) holds his daughter Sama (6). Photo © UNHCR / Sam Tarling

UNHCR Lebanon is grateful for the support of its donors to our response to the Beirut explosions, including donors of flexible funds and private donors.



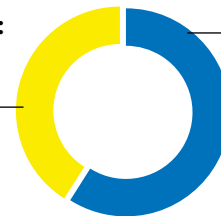
**Australia | Canada | Denmark | European Union | France
 Germany | Japan | Norway | Switzerland | United States of America**



We plan to **reach over 100,000 affected persons** through all our interventions.

**Overall needs:
 USD 35M**

**Unfunded
 41%
 USD 14.35 M**



**Funded
 59%
 USD 20.65 M**
as of 27 November 2020

UNHCR Lebanon operation



Funding:

USD 607.5 million requested for the UNHCR Lebanon operation in 2020

55% funded as of 17 November 2020
 (USD 331.5 million received)

Human stories

Refugees find help with mental health effects of Beirut blast

When the shockwave from Beirut's port explosion ripped through her home in the nearby Jnah neighbourhood of the Lebanese capital, Fahima was thrown across the room by the force of the blast. In her mind, however, she was transported even further. "I felt I was back in Syria and the [...]"

Four-year-old Syrian refugee Maher is photographed at her home in Beirut, Lebanon. © UNHCR/Diego Botto/Santitas



Additional links

For further information, please visit – [UNHCR Lebanon website](#) or the [UNHCR data portal](#).

Support UNHCR's emergency response in Lebanon:

<https://donate.unhcr.org/sg/stand-with-lebanon/~my-donation>

For more details, please contact:

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