

Lebanon

January – June 2018

Parliamentary elections and three international conferences in support of Lebanon took place during the first half of 2018, whereby international partners recognized the tremendous challenges facing Lebanon and pledged substantial support. Nonetheless, host community fatigue over the protracted stay of close to 1 million registered Syrian refugees continued to grow after the elections, with rising calls on refugee returns to start taking place in larger numbers. The reporting period also saw a rise in municipal restrictions targeting refugees. Protection risks heightened due to the increasingly tense environment and challenges, such as the widespread lack of legal residency and limited possibilities for refugees to find daily labour opportunities. The Lebanon Partnership Paper for the Brussels II Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" in April thus stressed the need to enhance access to legal residency and ensure respect for the rule of law. UNHCR continued to update the data of the registered Syrian refugee population, which stood at 976,065 by mid-year, and embarked on a verification exercise of the registered refugees of other nationalities, who numbered 19,930 by end-June.

This report provides an update on key developments and UNHCR activities during the first six months of 2018 in narrative and numbers (please see also an indicator report at the end of the document).

ACCESSING PROTECTION

Access to territory

Access to territory for Syrians remains curtailed since 2015, when visa requirements and limited humanitarian exception criteria were introduced by the Government of Lebanon (GOL). UNHCR border teams are deployed at official border crossing points in Eastern and Northern Lebanon to, notably, assess the motivation for entry or exit of people departing or arriving, identify and submit humanitarian admission cases, and provide counselling on border admission regulations to people of concern. The need for more protection-sensitive admission criteria and a full and inclusive application of the humanitarian admission criteria was again demonstrated by a tragic event in January 2018, when 16 Syrians froze to death while trying to enter Lebanon through a smuggling route; at least 23 individuals have died while trying to reach safety in Lebanon this past winter.

In January – June:

- 1,800** border assessments conducted
- 12** Syrians seeking protection identified and referred to the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) for consideration under the existing humanitarian admission criteria
- 14** General Security (GSO) centres equipped with IT equipment, cabling and furniture
- 17,000** families received individualized legal counselling on how to register the birth of their children
- 2,700** vulnerable families assisted to register the birth of their child
- 5,600** families counselled on marriage registration to facilitate the birth registration of their children and increase protection of women in case of separation, divorce or disappearance of their husband
- 250** couples who married unofficially helped to obtain retroactive proof of their marriage
- 78 community centres** supported with staff and activities benefiting both Lebanese and refugees
- 647** outreach volunteers mobilized

Legal residency

UNHCR conducted a quantitative survey of more than 11,500 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR at the end of 2017 to assess how many of the refugees who possessed the required UNHCR documents had been able to renew their legal residency based on the March 2017 fee waiver. The survey was complemented with 18 focus group discussions involving more than 200 refugees of different ages, gender and backgrounds, and focused on the impact of the lack of legal residency. The findings show that 67% of those who managed to submit their application for residency received a free renewal, while many refugees continued facing difficulties to obtain or renew legal residency due to a variety of factors, including access to the procedure or eligibility criteria. However, the survey also shows that the obstacles identified can be overcome through continued support to capacity development, even and predictable practices, further policy developments particularly at the central level, and the continued dissemination of information about the criteria and procedures for obtaining legal residency.

These findings have been used to inform UNHCR's continued advocacy for a full and inclusive application of the fee waiver, its expansion to categories of refugees currently not covered, information sharing and counselling to refugees, and increased capacity support to the GSO. As a result, during the first half of 2018, 14 GSO centres had been equipped with computers and other electronic devices, as well as cabling and furniture, under UNHCR's project in support of GSO's expanded capacity to facilitate residency renewals for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Out of these centres, 11 were fully operational and processing residency renewals for UNHCR certificate holders by mid-year, while three others will be operational by the end of September 2018. Additionally, as all residency applications are sent from the regional GSO centres to the GSO central in Beirut for examination and issuance of permits, UNHCR has committed to rehabilitate a building belonging to GSO central, which will increase the operating space of the responsible GSO unit.

POLICY UPDATE

Following discussions with UNHCR, the GSO issued a new regulation in early April 2018 which allows Syrian minors (between 15 and 18 years of age) to renew their residency using a civil extract. Previously, those who had turned 15 years during their time in Lebanon had to provide a national ID or passport to obtain residency.

According to UNHCR's estimate, as of 2018, more than 70,000 individuals registered with UNHCR turned 15 while in Lebanon and therefore had no national ID or passport. Furthermore, in the coming three years another 71,000 Syrian refugees will turn 15. This new decision will thus provide those individuals with an option to overcome their lack of documentation, with the limitations that those who turned 15 in Lebanon but are now over 18 are not covered by the waiver and that the civil extract should not exceed 2 years since its issuance.

Another positive policy development was the issuance of an internal instruction by the GSO in February 2018 to stop investigating Syrians prior to renewing their legal residency free of charge based on the UNHCR certificates, even if they were thought to be working. This is consistent with the current labour decree that allows refugees to work in three sectors of the economy, i.e. construction, agriculture and the environment.

POLICY UPDATE

Following legal and technical advice by UNHCR, as well as advocacy by multiple parties, the Council of Ministers in February 2018 adopted a Decision that grants to the Minister of Interior and Municipalities (MOIM) the authority to take the necessary measures to facilitate birth registration of Syrian children born in Lebanon after 2011. As a result, the Personal Status Department (PSD) issued in March 2018 a circular stating that the birth of Syrian children born in Lebanon between 1 January 2011 and 8 February 2018 is to be registered through administrative procedures. This circular targets children whose birth was not registered within the one year deadline, after which – until this change – the birth could only be registered through a costly and complex procedure that required access to the religious and civil courts. However, the regulatory framework on birth registration remains unchanged for asylum-seekers and refugees of other nationalities, Lebanese nationals and other foreigners.

Civil documentation including birth registration

Since the beginning of the crisis and as of June 2018, around 160,000 children born in Lebanon to registered Syrian refugees have been added to their parents' files. UNHCR is supporting the PSD to implement new measures (see "Policy Update" box, left) by increasing its capacity to register civil events. UNHCR also continues to inform refugees on civil registration procedures through mass communication tools, community-based approaches, and legal counselling at community centres and UNHCR reception centres, as well as through outreach volunteers, protection staff and partners.

While UNHCR is not organizing voluntary repatriation to Syria at this time, the Office is helping refugees returning spontaneously to Syria, individually or in groups through the GSO, to speedily obtain documents certifying vital events that have taken place during their exile in Lebanon. To achieve this, UNHCR is working with legal aid partners and civil registry authorities to support the fast-tracking of such documents and advocate for further simplification of procedures. Having these documents enables the people to re-establish themselves back home and facilitates access to institutions and services.

Social services

In Lebanon, refugees as well as vulnerable Lebanese have access to information, safe spaces, social services, counselling and life-skills activities around the country through MOSA's Social Development Centres (SDCs) and Community Development Centres (CDCs) managed by NGO partners. UNHCR has supported MOSA's SDCs since 2007 and CDCs since 2002, and is currently supporting 63 SDCs and 15 CDCs with staff and activities benefitting both Lebanese and refugees. A network of more than 640 outreach volunteers is also mobilized to help UNHCR provide up-to-date information to refugee communities on developments in policies, procedures and services affecting refugees, and raise awareness about a wide range of topics. To contribute to the GOL's development of a national social protection system, benefitting Lebanese and non-Lebanese, UNHCR concluded an agreement with MOSA on the development of an online data and information management system and social service cards. Specifically, this project aims to strengthen the planning, design, monitoring, evaluation and overall management of, as well as State accountability for, the services offered by MOSA's SDCs to Lebanese and non-Lebanese, including refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR.

DIGNITY IN EXILE

Assisting particularly vulnerable refugees

UNHCR prioritizes support to refugees who are particularly vulnerable to protection risks, such as children, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and persons with specific needs, especially persons with disabilities and older persons. UNHCR supports refugees with specific needs through counselling, case management, emotional support, and participation in life-skills activities at the SDCs and CDCs. Psychosocial support to survivors of SGBV is also available to help them in their recovery. Further, UNHCR works to ensure that vulnerable children and children at risk of abuse are identified and have access to specialized services, which include case management, psychosocial support, awareness sessions, skills training, educational activities, as well as medical, safe shelter, financial and material support. UNHCR's efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) by humanitarian workers are closely linked to, and progressively integrated into, the Office's operational SGBV prevention and response activities.

Where appropriate and in line with standard operating procedures, case management includes the provision of cash assistance through UNHCR's protection cash assistance programme (PCAP) to complement services, with the aim of helping the individual cope with a protection incident or refrain from resorting to harmful coping mechanisms to survive. More than 2,000 refugees were supported through PCAP during the reporting period, of whom 60% had specific protection profiles while 40% faced specific protection-related issues such as SGBV or child protection.

UNHCR's multi-purpose cash assistance programme (MCAP) aims to capacitate the most severely vulnerable refugees to meet their basic needs and reduce their susceptibility to exploitation and other protection risks, such as child labour, survival sex and dropping out of school. The assistance provided helps these families cover their monthly expenses primarily for rent, food, health care and medicines. UNHCR's outcome monitoring has found that a higher percentage of families who receive cash assistance have acceptable food consumption scores, less debt, and rely less on various harmful coping mechanisms compared to families who do not receive this assistance.

In January – June:

3,400 persons with specific needs, including SGBV survivors, provided with psychosocial support, skills training and awareness sessions

2,000 refugees supported through PCAP

Best interest processes conducted for **1,300 children**

34,000 severely vulnerable refugee families reached with MCAP each month

17 schools undergoing rehabilitation or expansion

41,500 refugees assisted to access life-saving and emergency hospital care

127 refugee families' homes upgraded to adequate standards in exchange for 12-month occupancy agreements with landlords

4,800 residents of informal settlements who were affected by floods or fires received shelter kits and assisted to rebuild their shelters

5,800 refugees benefited from desludging services to prevent public health risks

2,400 refugees had access to safe water through quality-monitored water trucking or through connection to water sources

2,100 refugees sensitized on hygiene practices adapted to the displacement conditions

Layla's story

Layla* has experienced the worst kinds of physical and verbal abuse by her partner. She was beaten, burned and constantly intimidated by her husband, who also verbally abused her two children from her first marriage.

Eager to live in safety, Layla and her son and daughter fled the house to a safe shelter. But they soon had to flee again after the husband managed to find them. With no relatives to stay with or rely on, the woman and her children were living in fear.

UNHCR and partners helped Layla and her children relocate to a safe shelter, provided them with psycho-social support as well as legal support for the woman to start the divorce process. Layla also received PCAP for a year to be able to provide for herself and her children while she was looking for a job.

While the legal procedures for the divorce are still ongoing, Layla has successfully graduated from PCAP and is currently working. Her children are also enrolled in a nearby school and are pursuing their education like other children their age. She says PCAP has greatly helped her during the period when she was scared to even leave the house.

** The name was changed for protection purposes*

Education

In 2018, UNHCR has prioritised its activities and support in education to advocacy on refugee children's unhindered access to education and safe learning environments free from abuse, given the remaining high number of refugee children out of school and reports of violence and abuse in schools, and to community-based programmes. The latter are aimed at identifying out of school refugee children and supporting the retention of refugee children in school. Specifically, children benefited from homework and after-school support to prevent drop out from schools, and parents increased their engagement in their children's education through participating in parents community groups.

Another reason for the high number of refugee children out of school is the lack of sufficient space to accommodate all of the students in the existing public schools, especially in areas with many refugees, and poor learning environments and worn-out facilities, such as bathrooms. Thus, in order to increase access of Lebanese and non-Lebanese children to adequate learning environments in public schools, and contribute to maintaining the hospitality of Lebanese host communities and preserve social stability, UNHCR and the Ministry for Education and Higher Education (MEHE) jointly identified 17 schools for rehabilitation or expansion in 2018-19. The works will be regulated by MEHE's Effective School Profile framework that stipulates national standards for accessibility as well as water, sanitation and hygiene. The rehabilitation project will thus also help enhance access to public schools for Lebanese and non-Lebanese students with disabilities, and contribute to better inclusion of children with specific needs. Furthermore, the project will help create livelihood opportunities for vulnerable Lebanese and refugees; this is important for preserving the social stability, since real or perceived competition over jobs is frequently cited as the primary source of tensions between Lebanese and Syrian refugees, especially in areas of high unemployment. Overall, this support to MEHE will increase the accessibility of an estimated 4,300 Lebanese and 6,500 refugee children to the public education system.

Health

UNHCR continues to support refugees' access to comprehensive primary, secondary and tertiary health care by subsidizing services through a network of private and public institutions which are partially subsidized by humanitarian partners. While UNHCR is one of several actors supporting primary health care centres, UNHCR remains almost the sole supporter of hospital care for refugees apart from ad hoc services by a few actors. To improve access, equity and affordability of referral health care services for persons of concern, UNHCR partially covers the cost of life-saving and emergency interventions; more than 41,500 refugees were assisted in the first half of 2018. However, financial resources are severely stretched given the enormity of needs. UNHCR continues to explore and implement ways to constantly improve the efficiency and sustainability of the programme.

Shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

UNHCR responds to acute shelter needs in informal settlements and provides sustainable rehabilitation of substandard buildings within an integrated area-based approach. During the first half of 2018, based on specific assessments and selection criteria, UNHCR identified 13 poor urban neighbourhoods and rural areas that will be targeted through an integrated shelter/WASH response. Interventions include substandard shelter rehabilitation and connections to water supply and sanitation networks where possible. The design for the area-based approach was completed, alongside the assessment and design of improved storm water drainage systems in the North. UNHCR also started conducting technical assessments of substandard shelters identified for rehabilitation.

REALIZING SOLUTIONS TO DISPLACEMENT

UNHCR is not organizing/facilitating or promoting voluntary repatriation to Syria at this time since critical legal and safety guarantees and humanitarian access necessary for returns to take place in safety and dignity remain under discussion with the relevant authorities. However, since early 2017 UNHCR has conducted a number of surveys among refugees of different ages, gender and backgrounds to identify their intentions regarding the future, and the obstacles to their return. The consolidated findings from these intention surveys were published in January 2018 in [UNHCR's report "A Longing to go Home, in Safety and Dignity"](#). These have informed evidence-based advocacy towards removing obstacles to return, operational preparedness, increased support to refugees' ability to obtain civil documents that are important for their ability to register vital events upon an eventual return to Syria, and dialogues with the Lebanese authorities on the conditions governing safe, dignified and sustainable returns.

Between January and June, UNHCR is aware of around 2,600 individuals having returned spontaneously to Syria. During the same period, two group return movements facilitated by the GSO have taken place, one involving close to 500 individuals from Chebaa to Beit Jein and another of around 300 refugees from Aarsal to Western Qalamoun. Several localized initiatives are underway and are expected to lead to further group returns in the coming months. UNHCR is not involved in the organization of these returns but liaises closely with the GSO regarding planned movements, and conducts pre-return interviews to assess intentions and motivations of the refugees intending to return, and any document and/or other needs they may have. UNHCR is also present at the departure point to attend to any queries or needs the refugees may have, and address protection concerns such as separation of families. Coordination with partners is taking place through the Durable Solutions Group (DSG)

and through a recently established technical DSG comprising partners who are operationally engaged and involved in e.g. legal aid on civil documentation and health screening and vaccinations.

Given the heightened interest among political actors, civil society, and the general public in the topic of return, UNHCR increased during the reporting period its advocacy and external communication, and dialogues on the work being undertaken to remove obstacles that are preventing large-scale voluntary returns from taking place in safety and dignity at this stage. UNHCR also explained its engagement in current individual spontaneous as well as group returns. To date, in bilateral or public meetings, all political actors have affirmed their commitment to the principles of voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable returns. These principles were also committed to in the Lebanon Partnership Paper for the Brussels II Conference.

A new intention survey was conducted in May 2018, as part of a regional initiative to obtain updated information on the wishes and perceptions of the refugee community and current obstacles to return in safety and dignity. The findings will be presented during the third quarter of 2018 and inform continued advocacy and other efforts to enable refugees to realise durable solutions outside of Lebanon. This includes resettlement and complementary pathways to third countries. During the first half of 2018, UNHCR submitted more than 4,400 individuals for resettlement, a decrease compared to the same period last year due to reduced quotas being offered by resettlement countries. The Lebanon Partnership Paper therefore included a recognition that resettlement to third countries constitutes an important alternative solution for refugees, and expressed the commitment of Lebanon's international partners to continue efforts to increase resettlement opportunities and create complementary pathways, such as humanitarian admission programmes, accessible family reunification procedures, scholarships and work visas.

SUPPORTING HOST COMMUNITIES TO PRESERVE SOCIAL STABILITY

The Government of Lebanon and its municipalities and institutions have played a critical role in providing refugees with basic services by allowing them access to the country's infrastructure, including for health, education, water, sanitation and electricity. While this has been recognized and highly appreciated by the refugees and by Lebanon's international partners, it has undoubtedly increased the pressure on the country's already stretched public infrastructure, and contributed to the rise in social tensions.

UNHCR implements small-scale Community Support Projects (CSPs) and Solidarity Initiative (SI) projects to help municipalities, local authorities and communities manage the increased demand on public services. This contributes to preserving the protection space and strengthening the peaceful coexistence between refugee and host communities. CSPs are planned in close consultation with municipalities and with refugee communities to determine and meet the most pressing needs. Through municipal-level support, UNHCR aims to help alleviate the strains on public service provision and delivery, such as for water and sanitation, by strengthening local facilities and services through the provision of technical, logistical and infrastructure support.

UNHCR, with the involvement of both host community members and refugees, finalized the planning of 60 SIs that respond to jointly identified protection concerns. Projects endorsed during the reporting period for implementation in 2018 have a focus on improving the protection environment for persons with specific needs within the community, such as SGBV survivors, female heads of household, older persons without family support and persons with disabilities. These projects aim to increase the understanding of the situation of affected populations, increase the interaction between the host and the refugee community and facilitate some basic joint/fair income generating possibilities.

The Tensions Task Force, comprising UNHCR, UNDP, the Ministry of Displaced Affairs, Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MOIM) and Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), maps incidents that indicate a rise or reduction in social tensions between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities, and produce analytical quarterly Tensions Briefs. These serve as an early warning mechanism, to inform preventive interventions at central or municipal level and the work of the social stability sector, co-led by UNDP and UNHCR, including conflict-sensitive programming and selection of priority areas of intervention.

LEADERSHIP, COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP

UNHCR actively supports the GOL in the coordination of the overall response to the Syria crisis, and in the planning and implementation of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). UNHCR co-leads the Protection, Basic Assistance, Health, and Shelter sectors, and participates in and supports the coordination of other sectors including Water, Education, and Social Stability. In line with the approach of sectoral consolidation of the response, UNHCR and its partners have aligned their programming and implementation for Syrian refugees and refugees of other nationalities. In particular, this focused on community-based protection mechanisms, using networks for awareness-raising on child protection and SGBV issues, services available to survivors, and for the identification and referral of protection cases. In 2018, the methodology of the vulnerability assessments for Syrians (VASyR), led by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, and refugees of other nationalities in Lebanon (VARON) by UNHCR, is aligned to ensure coherency in needs analysis and targeting. Data collection for both assessments was completed in May 2018.

A partner survey was launched in February 2018 to review the current coordination structure and to understand better how it could evolve to ensure continued effectiveness and timeliness of the response in Lebanon. More than 400 responses to the survey were completed (50% international NGOs; 22% national NGOs; 21% UN; 4% Government and 3% donors). The key findings were that partners are generally satisfied with the current performance of the coordination structures and did not have strong objections to proposed streamlining and improvements to the coordination structure, with few alternative proposals to the current coordination structure emerging. The detailed results of the partner survey were disseminated across Lebanon and are being used to improve coordination at all levels (national, regional, inter-sector and sector).

PROGRESS AGAINST TARGETS

January - June 2018

Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers

Protection	Reached Jan-Jun	2018 Target (prioritized)*	2018 Target (if fully funded)
Legal assistance and counselling provided	18,732	27,530	40,720
Persons submitted for humanitarian admission and resettlement	4,374	9,500	9,500
Monitoring visits to detention centres conducted	524	1,292	1,925
Persons assisted through SGBV psychosocial support	1,332	1,940	4,270
Community groups supported	583	606	855
Individuals/cases receiving protection or emergency cash assistance	3,493	3,845	12,700
Children registered and issued documentation under regular birth registration procedure	4,023	6,500	14,000
Basic Assistance			
Average number of households assisted with monthly multi-purpose cash grants	32,508	33,435	78,869
Households receiving seasonal support (winter 2017-18)	156,725	178,000	178,000
Health			
Individuals benefitting from referral health care	41,295	65,000	100,000
Shelter			
Shelter maintenance tool kits and materials provided	5,756	21,716	50,250
Households benefitting from shelter upgrades in exchange for an occupancy agreement	127	1,894	8,120
Water, sanitation and hygiene			
Individuals with access to improved sanitation	5,874	12,600	56,100
Individuals assisted with improved access to adequate quantity of safe water for drinking and for domestic use	2,415	214,200	374,000

Institutional and community support
2018 Planned Budget (USD)

Institutional support (rehabilitation of infrastructure, staffing and training, equipment, supplies, medications and vaccines)	19.7 million
--	--------------

Community-based projects (health, education, livelihoods, WASH, roads and community facilities)	9.5 million
---	-------------

Total invested	29.2 million
-----------------------	---------------------

Refugees and asylum-seekers (other nationalities)

Protection	Reached Jan-Jun	2018 Target (prioritized)*	2018 Target (if fully funded)
Legal assistance provided	697	2,630	2,800
Monitoring visits to detention centres conducted	492	835	1,200
Persons submitted for humanitarian admission and resettlement	89	330	330
Persons departed through resettlement	223	400	400
Individuals/cases receiving protection cash assistance	127	475	700
Children registered and issued documentation under regular birth registration procedure	28	250	300
Persons assisted through SGBV psychosocial support	34	100	200

Basic Assistance

Average number of households assisted with monthly multi-purpose cash grants	1,522	1,773	2,800
--	-------	-------	-------

Health

Individuals benefitting from life-saving emergency and obstetric referral health care	221	550	1,000
---	-----	-----	-------

Stateless

Protection	Reached Jan-Jun	2018 Target (prioritized)*	2018 Target (if fully funded)
Legal assistance provided	106	200	250

* As of June 2018. Priorities and targets are subject to change throughout the year to respond to unforeseen needs, funds available, and other factors.

UNHCR Lebanon is grateful for the support of its donors, including major donors of unearmarked and regional funds and private donors:

Australia | **Belgium** | **Canada** | **Denmark** | **Estonia** | **European Union** | **Finland** | **France** | **Germany** | **Italy** | **Japan** | **Monaco** | **the Netherlands** | **Norway** | **Qatar Charity** | **Republic of Korea** | **Saudi Arabia** | **Spain** | **Sweden** | **Switzerland** | **United Kingdom** | **United States of America**