

## Operational update

September 2025

*In a small classroom in the suburbs of Beirut, learning opens new doors. At a UNHCR Community Development Centre, refugees and Lebanese attend English classes together – gaining skills, confidence, and connection. These centres offer safe spaces for learning and protection, helping communities rebuild resilience and hope. ©UNHCR/Houssam Hariri*

### Operational context

Since October 2019, Lebanon has endured overlapping crises, including its worst economic collapse and a prolonged political vacuum, with a President elected in January 2025. Hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah escalated in 2024, causing destruction, loss of life, and displacement, before a ceasefire took effect on 27 November. These events prompted some Syrian refugees to flee under duress back to Syria, many of whom later returned, while ongoing violations and access restrictions continue to affect southern Lebanon. The collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024 triggered further instability, resulting in increased cross-border movements. Over 105,000 new arrivals have been recorded since December, with the highest concentrations in Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel and Akkar and the North. At the same time, by the end of September 2025, an estimated 362,000 Syrians had crossed from or via Lebanon towards Syria.

In coordination with the Government of Lebanon, UNHCR continues to implement the Self-Organized Voluntary Return Programme, launched in July, ensuring that returns are voluntary, safe and dignified. By the end of September, 3,500 families (around 17,000 individuals) had completed the return process and received cash assistance, while more than 118,000 individuals have expressed their interest to return, largely from the Bekaa, Baalbek and Hermel, with Homs the most common intended destination. Meanwhile, UNHCR has inactivated over 295,000 refugees from its records to reflect verified or presumed returns, and a Present Headcount exercise is underway to update population figures. Decisions to return remain highly individual and often gradual, with many families testing conditions in their areas of origin through pendular movements or “go-and-see” visits before deciding whether to stay. Sustainable returns remain limited, as insecurity, housing shortages, and the lack of access to education, livelihoods, and basic services in Syria continue to weigh heavily on refugees’ decisions.

As of September, **661,000 Syrians remain registered with UNHCR in Lebanon**. With only **26 per cent of requirements funded**, UNHCR has been forced to scale down or discontinue programmes in healthcare, shelter, and cash assistance, leaving access to life-saving care and basic survival support at critical risk.

### Key figures

**661,367 Syrians**  
registered with  
UNHCR Lebanon

**105,300 Syrians**  
estimated arrivals since  
December 2024

**364,000 individuals**  
estimated to have crossed from or via  
Lebanon into Syria since December 2024

**294,912 individuals**  
Syrian individuals inactivated in 2025  
from UNHCR’s records in Lebanon

**118,764 people**  
who expressed interest in the  
return programme

**17,291 individuals (3,514 families)**  
received return cash grant

## HIGHLIGHTS

In September, UNHCR maintained protection assistance and counselling nationwide and expanded the Self-Organized Voluntary Return Programme launched in July, while the General Security Office (GSO) announced the extension of administrative facilitation measures for Syrians and Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS) returning via land borders to Syria until 31 December 2025. By the end of the month, **17,291 individuals (3,514 cases)** had completed the return process and received cash assistance, while over 118,764 individuals (22,103 cases) expressed interest in return, mainly from Bekaa, Baalbek and Hermel (36%), the North and Akkar (34%), and Beirut and Mount Lebanon (23%), with Homs as the most common intended destination. This represents a 175% increase in processing capacity compared to August.

Most refugees (98%) self-organized their return, primarily crossing through Arida, Qaa, and Masnaa, while the remaining 2% were assisted with organized transportation by UNHCR and IOM, with 351 individuals supported to reach Homs, Hama, and Idlib. Ten additional convoys are scheduled throughout 2025. The majority of returnees (84%) departed as complete families, while most family members who remained in Lebanon are adult men staying for livelihood reasons. Since January 2025, UNHCR has inactivated 294,912 Syrian refugees from its records due to confirmed or presumed returns, including 277,621 spontaneous returnees, reflecting the growing scale and complexity of movements back to Syria.

The [Enhanced Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria](#) compiling data from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan & Lebanon was recently released, providing updated insights on how refugees' views on return have evolved since the political transition in Syria. The findings show that the proportion of Syrian refugees in Lebanon intending to return within the next 12 months fell from 24 per cent in January to 14 per cent in June 2025, underscoring a shift from early optimism to growing caution.

While the [Flash Regional Survey on Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions to Return](#) published in January captured heightened hopes immediately following the fall of the Assad regime, the new survey reflects the fluid and complex realities shaping decision-making throughout 2025. Refugees in Lebanon cite destroyed or undocumented housing (74%), limited livelihoods (54%), and safety concerns (45%) as the main obstacles to return.

Despite these challenges, eight in ten refugees continue to express hope to return "one day." Many are taking gradual steps, such as "go-and-see" visits by family members. The findings reaffirm that while the wish to return endures, structural barriers inside Syria remain decisive, requiring continued support in both countries to enable safe, voluntary, and sustainable returns.

## UNHCR PRESENCE IN LEBANON



## COORDINATION & WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Since 2024, Lebanon has been operating under the Lebanon Response Plan (LRP), a two-year humanitarian-stabilization framework co-led by the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations. Building on the LCRP and 3RP, the LRP provides a unified platform to respond to the needs of displaced Syrians, including new arrivals and returnees, alongside vulnerable Lebanese. A dedicated Returns Chapter, co-led by UNHCR and the Ministry of Social Affairs, guides support for voluntary repatriation in line with protection principles, while UNHCR leads the Protection, Shelter, and Basic Assistance sectors, co-leads the GBV sub-sector and Cash Working Group, and steers the Durable Solutions Working Group on return.

UNHCR has been present in Lebanon since 1962, and maintains a country office in Beirut and field offices in Tripoli and Zahle. In 2025, it is working with 21 partners, including 13 international and eight national organizations, to implement protection and assistance activities across Lebanon. UNHCR also works closely with national institutions to strengthen response capacity and ensure complementarity with government efforts. However, with resources increasingly constrained, its ability to sustain these programmes will depend on urgent donor support. Without renewed commitment, the impact on refugees and host communities amid Lebanon's fragile context will be immense.

## PROTECTION

- Since 8 December 2024, 105,300 Syrians have been monitored as new arrivals in Lebanon, the majority concentrated in Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel (65,396) and Akkar and the North (28,239), with an additional 11,665 reported in other areas. Numbers continue to fluctuate due to onward internal movements and the fluidity of the displacement environment, while identification of new arrivals in some governorates is ongoing, as well as through ongoing distributions. UNHCR conducts targeted recording and has developed tools for data deduplication of new arrivals from Syria since December 2024 for facilitation of protection interventions, and in-kind distributions to the most vulnerable.
- Legal assistance remained central to the response in September: over 3,000 people were counselled or supported on legal information for documentation such as, residency birth, marriage, and death certificates. Mobile missions to GSO centres in Nabatieh, Saida, and Choueifat were conducted to support residency renewals and civil documentation. More field visits are scheduled to the South to be carried out jointly with the card validation exercise for cash assistance.
- UNHCR and partners also conducted legal information sessions covering civil documentation and residency to inform refugees about processes.
- In September, over 600 persons facing protection risks and persons with specific needs at heightened risk, including persons with disabilities and older persons have been assisted through protection case management while psychosocial support services reached over 400 people. In addition, prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) remained a priority, with 280 survivors receiving case management and specialized services. Child protection and GBV partners strengthened community outreach to address rising violence and stress among families, particularly in Bekaa and the South.
- Resettlement remained an essential durable solution for refugees with specific protection needs, offering safety and the prospect of rebuilding their lives in a third country. In September, a total of 400 refugees departed for resettlement to various destination countries. However, reduced resettlement quotas and limited reception capacities in many host countries continue to constrain opportunities, underscoring the need for sustained international solidarity and responsibility-sharing to support refugees most in need of protection.
- The Protection Analysis and Monitoring Task Force (PAMTF) released its [five-month monitoring report](#) summarizing risks and needs of displaced Syrians, migrants, other refugees, covering February to June 2025. While nearly one million internally displaced people (IDPs) returned after the ceasefire, around 80,000 remain displaced—mainly in the South, Bekaa, and BML—due to damaged housing (63%), financial barriers (33%), and safety concerns (30%). Health (72%) and food (71%) were identified as top needs, while legal protection issues sharply increased. Psychological distress affected 41% of surveyed households, linked to prolonged displacement and economic strain. Conducted by UNHCR and partners under the Protection Working Group, the report recommends expanding legal aid and documentation support, rehabilitating damaged shelters, improving affordable healthcare and food assistance, and strengthening mental health and psychosocial services to enhance access to rights and services for the remaining displaced and guide coordinated protection planning.



After nearly a decade in Lebanon, Mahmoud is finally going home. He is among almost 300 Syrian refugees who voluntarily returned from Lebanon to Syria in a convoy organized by UNHCR and IOM, in coordination with the General Security Office (GSO). 'I'm happy,' he says. 'I just hope to have a shelter there.' UNHCR and IOM continue supporting those who choose to return — ensuring every journey is voluntary, safe, and dignified. ©UNHCR





## COMMUNITY EMPOWER AND SELF-RELIANCE

- UNHCR continued to engage communities through its 26 Community Development Centres (CDCs) and partner-led Social Development Centres (SDCs), providing safe spaces for dialogue, learning, and skills development. In September, over 30,000 individuals were reached through community-based activities, including awareness sessions on legal rights, return procedures, gender equality, and protection risks.
- 440 Outreach Volunteers (OVs) remained key in identifying and referring individuals at heightened risk, while 1,000 people received awareness messages on voluntary return and available assistance channels during September. In Bekaa and the North, CDCs observed a growing number of newly arrived families seeking information on registration, financial assistance, and resettlement.
- 28 newly recruited Outreach Volunteers (OVs) from communities across the South and Mount Lebanon completed a training in September on basic protection principles, the Code of Conduct, and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). The training strengthens their capacity to identify and refer vulnerable individuals, raise awareness on rights and available services, and promote accountability within their communities—ensuring that protection remains rooted in community engagement and trust.
- Community feedback indicated increasing anxiety over the expiry of the General Security Office (GSO) circular at the end of September. Following the extension announcement until 31 December 2025, communities have been informed.
- In September, more than 6,500 people participated in skills trainings, including vocational and digital marketing trainings in Zahle and Bar Elias, and youth employment workshops at Baalbek CDC.



## HEALTH

- UNHCR's partner organizations reported growing concerns among women regarding the reduction of health assistance, particularly affecting pregnant women who face similar medical costs in Syria and Lebanon, making the decision to return increasingly complex. Partners identified health and education gaps as critical challenges in case management.
- In parallel, new arrivals continued to present urgent health and protection needs in September. UNHCR met four Druze families recently displaced from Sweida following violent clashes. Families reported urgent needs for medicine, health coverage, cash assistance, and winterization, while expressing no intention to return given insecurity in Syria. Vulnerable families are being referred for fast-track recording and assistance.
- In September, UNHCR supported more than 2,000 people through their secondary health programme, while more than 13,000 people received access to mental health and psychiatric care at two specialized centres.



## SHELTER & CORE-RELIEF ITEMS

- UNHCR and partners continued to prioritize life-saving shelter support to improve safety and dignity for displaced families across Lebanon. In September, rehabilitation and repair works were ongoing in housing units for vulnerable refugee families in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and the South, while site improvements were carried out in informal settlements across the Bekaa and the North to reduce risks from flooding and fire.
- In September, the Unified Shelter Assessment, recently finalized in the South and Bekaa, is a joint exercise that evaluates the condition of refugee shelters—such as damage, overcrowding, or exposure to weather—and identifies households in need of support. The findings guide different types of assistance, including shelter repairs, weatherproofing kits, ensuring that activities reach those most in need.
- Following these assessments, UNHCR distributes three types of shelter kits—light, medium, and heavy—depending on the level of damage and materials required. Each kit provides items such as plastic sheeting, timber, nails, and insulation materials to repair or reinforce existing shelters. Distributions are coordinated through partners and local municipalities, ensuring that assistance is delivered safely and efficiently ahead of winter.
- In total, over 20,000 refugees received core relief items in September—including blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets, and solar lamps—while 540 newly arrived individuals received emergency relief kits. Preparations for the winterization campaign are also underway, including the replenishment of 9,500 weatherproofing kits in Zahle and planning for the distribution of jackets, boots, and available winter clothing across the Bekaa and North.



## BASIC NEEDS

- UNHCR delivered monthly multi-purpose cash assistance (MCAP) to 481,134 refugees (103,590 households) in September, including individuals with protection-related needs, ensuring timely financial support for the most vulnerable to address their urgent basic needs.

## Impact of underfunding

UNHCR, together with the wider humanitarian community, is facing an unprecedented decline in funding in 2025. Uncertainty around funding flows and limited visibility on future projections are already forcing UNHCR Lebanon to make difficult decisions on the scope of its activities, with a focus on lifesaving and core mandate interventions. At the same time, in light of cross-border movements triggered by the conflict escalation and the fall of the Assad regime in 2024, UNHCR launched a nationwide presence verification exercise in 2025 as part of its population data management strategy. This effort aims to ensure accurate data for protection and assistance targeting within the new operational and funding landscape.

Despite the generous support of donors, UNHCR's response in Lebanon has been consistently underfunded, with less than 60 per cent of the USD 545.2 million required in 2024 covered. In 2025, the situation has worsened significantly: as of 30 September, only 25 per cent of the resources needed have been received.

A number of those in need will no longer receive support, while crucial activities around supporting return and those still in Lebanon may be deeply affected if more funds cannot be found:

- 64,000 people no longer receive Emergency Protection Cash Assistance, an 80% drop in assistance from 82,000 to 18,000 people.
- 347,000 individuals were discontinued from UNHCR's cash assistance programme, a drop in coverage of 60% since January.
- UNHCR's Cash-for-Shelter programme has been fully discontinued following a 90% reduction in the number of people assisted since March. Coverage dropped from 95,000 to just 11,000 individuals, leaving around 83,000 vulnerable people without support after the first quarter of the year. 42,000 people will also no longer receive shelter kits or improvements, a cut of 20%.
- UNHCR will fully phase out of secondary healthcare at the end of the year, meaning 45,000 refugees, including pregnant women, will no longer receive secondary healthcare as of December 2025.
- UNHCR has already fully phased out of primary healthcare, affecting 40,000 refugees.
- UNHCR is fully phasing out education assistance: 15,000 children will no longer benefit from community-based learning and education retention support.
- Return-related activities for up to 400,000 people may be in jeopardy if adequate funding is not received.

## Thank You!

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who contributed to this operation as well as those who contributed to UNHCR with unearmarked and broadly earmarked funds.



With the support of the following private sector partners:

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UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | Other private donors

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