STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION AND PROTECTION GAPS:

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON IN THE POST-2024 REALITY

CLDH

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01

Executive Summary

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Syrians who sought refuge in Lebanon have faced an increasingly difficult and precarious environment. Over time, this situation hasn't fundamentally improved; rather, it has evolved into new forms of legal uncertainty and socio-economic vulnerability.

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, a new wave of displacement emerged, with a considerable number of Syrians fleeing to Lebanon. This marked a distinct phase of displacement characterized by rounds of sectarian violence and fears of targeted persecution.

This research examines the legal, institutional, and lived realities of so-called Syrian "newcomers" (people who arrived in Lebanon after 8 December 2024) to Lebanon. It analyzes the national and international legal frameworks governing their situation and assesses how these translate into practice. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining desk review, key informant interviews with legal practitioners and frontline actors, and a survey targeting 116 "newcomers". This methodology enables both normative legal analysis and a comprehensive understanding of everyday challenges faced by "newcomers."

Survey findings reveal an alarming level of exclusion and vulnerability. While the vast majority of "newcomers" respondents didn't attempt to apply for a legal status, due to structural barriers, those who did have faced extremely low success rates: only 7% of applications were approved, while 54% were rejected.

In the absence of a national asylum framework and following the suspension of UNHCR refugee registrations since 6 May 2015, newly displaced Syrians remain **una**ble to legalize their entry and residency, largely deprived from humanitarian assistance due to fund cuts, and exposed to heightened risks of arrest, exploitation, and forced return.

The data collected further shows that 58% of "newcomers" receive no form of assistance, and 77% report lacking access to health care services, underscoring the depth of their vulnerability and protection gaps. Respondents also suffer from economic vulnerability as 65% of respondents are unemployed, and 14% rely on unstable forms of income such as self-employment or daily labor, leaving the vast majority without a secure and sustainable livelihoods.

This predicament is further compounded by shrinking international funding and a growing policy shift toward return and reconstruction narratives, which has significantly weakened protection and support mechanisms in Lebanon.

The lack of legal status not only affects refugees but also shapes the broader social environment in which they live, fostering exclusion and heightened risks of social tensions.

The research also highlights a clear disparity between the situation of "newcomers" and long-standing refugees in Lebanon. Indeed, "newcomers" underscored that they face additional obstacles, including funding cuts that have translated into shrinking humanitarian support and increasingly strict eligibility criteria. These developments also reflect the broader shifts in international donor agendas, which are having tangible consequences for Syrian refugees.

Furthermore, the study finds that Syrian "newcomers" are mainly fleeing Syria due to persecution based on their identity, religion or political opinion. Survey respondents overwhelmingly expressed reluctance to return to Syria and describes ongoing threats and violations faced by relatives who remain there, whether by state or non-state actors.

This situation, combined with their increasingly challenging situation in Syria, creates an environment in which many "newcomers" wish to resettle to a third country as a durable solution.

In sum, Syrian "newcomers" in Lebanon are caught in a cycle of legal exclusion, socio-economic vulnerability and declining international funding and donor neglect. The combination of these challenges has widened existing protection gaps. Without urgent change of policy and a renewed assumption of responsibility by both national and international actors, "newcomers" will remain exposed to heightened risks deepening marginalization.

To address these protection gaps a series of actions must be taken. For instance, Lebanon should simplify legal residency procedures, including resuming UNHCR registration, easing documentation requirements, and suspending arrest or deportations due to irregular residency status. "Newcomers" should be allowed to participate more easily in the formal economy. Additionally, child protection measures should be enforced by, for instance, ensuring access to education for refugees' children regardless of the legal status, and ensuring easy access to birth registrations as it is prerequisite for accessing fundamental services and rights.

These measures, among others, are essential to improve the living conditions of "newcomers". At the same time, the State should pay greater attention to marginalised host communities and promotion of local dialogue to help reduce tensions with refugees and enhance social cohesion.

On the international level, actors should ensure that funding is needs-based and sustained, while expanding resettlement opportunities to third countries in line with international protection standards.

02

Introduction

Syria has been at the epicenter of one of the most catastrophic and protracted humanitarian crises of the 21st century. The popular uprisings which came out against the Asaad regime's 53-year grip on the state quickly devolved into a fragmented civil war drawing in domestic factions as well as regional and global powers. Syria soon became a battlefield for global political strife. The result has been unimaginable suffering, mass destruction, and the displacement of millions of Syrians.

Since 2011, over 6 million Syrians have been registered as refugees abroad by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), making the Syrian crisis one of the largest displacement crises in modern history [1]. According to Lebanese government and UNHCR estimates, around 1.5 million Syrians currently live in Lebanon as refugees[2], though only around 716,000 are officially registered with UNHCR; a fact which reflects the regulative bottlenecks and discrepancies which impede their ability to access their fundamental rights.

Many Syrians saw the fall of the Assad regime as a potential turning point and a chance to return home after years of exile. Despite international recognition, the current Syrian government is yet to embody the trust and security it promised at the beginning of its political take over. Political authority remains fragmented; violence persists with repeated cycles of sectarian violence occurring across the country in March 2025, July 2025 and January 2026; local governance structures are weak or contested, and civilian populations continue to grapple with insecurity and deprivation. As of February 2026, approximately 120,000 Syrians have arrived in Lebanon after the fall of Assad regime in December 2024[3]. Syria now stands at a fragile crossroads, with intermittent violence, competing armed factions, entrenched sectarian tensions and violence, and the enduring imprint of regional and international power plays.

1. UNHCR, https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/syr?utm_
2. UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/lebanon
3. UNHCR, Lebanon Response Plan, February 2026, https://lebanon.un.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/Lebanon%20Response%20Plan%202026.pdf

Refugees as "Newcomers": Categorization and Marginalization

Syrians who have arrived at different times since 2011 are often subject to distinct legal and social classifications, with profound implications for access to rights, protection, and services.

Research underscores how these classifications are not only legal labels, but also social and political constructs deeply embedded in broader political dynamics. Refugees are categorized according to political priorities rather than the realities and context surrounding these communities. These classifications co-produce environments either facilitating or limiting access to services, rights, and opportunities. When enforcing limitations and criteria on who can have access to education, medical services, housing, and other basic needs for a dignified life, [4] becomes a crucial factor co-producing these inequalities. This obscures the historical and socio-political contexts reinforcing existinginequalities based on identity, sectarian affiliation, and perceived security threats.

One of the problematic conceptual categories to have emerged within Lebanese policy making, and public discourse is the term "newcomers". This term has been applied predominantly to Syrians who fled the final stages of the Syrian conflict and the resurgence of sectarian violence after December 2024, many of whom come from minority sectarian backgrounds including Alawites, Christians, Druze and Shiite [5].

Rather than being recognized as refugees under international law, these individuals are frequently described as "newcomers", a term that obscures their experience of persecution and displacement and serves to differentiate them from earlier waves of Syrian refugees who entered Lebanon during the period from 2011 to 2024.

Research Scope

This research seeks to analyze the displacement situation that has unfolded in Lebanon since December 2024. It focuses on Syrians who have fled renewed sectarian violence and persecution following the fall of the Assad regime, particularly members of various minorities including Alawites, Christians, Shiite and Druze who have sought safety in Lebanon under conditions of acute legal uncertainty and emerging violence. Unlike earlier waves of displacement triggered by the Syrian war, these individuals are fleeing a reconfigured political and sectarian order in Syria, while encountering a Lebanese system that no longer recognizes new claims to refuge.

4. S. CARVALHO and S. Dryden Peterson, "Political economy of refugees: How responsibility shapes the politics of education", *ScienceDirect*, Volume 173, January 2024, article No. 106394.
5. K. FINCHMAN, "Identity Politics and Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: implications for higher education", *Comparison Education Review*, Volume 66 (2), 2022, pages 302-320.

In the absence of a national asylum framework and following the suspension of UNHCR refugee registrations since 6 May 2015, these newly displaced Syrians find themselves in a state of profound limbo: unable to regularize their stay, largely excluded from humanitarian assistance, and exposed to heightened risks of arrest, exploitation, and forced return. This predicament is further compounded by shrinking international funding and a growing policy shift toward return and reconstruction narratives, which has significantly weakened protection and support mechanisms in Lebanon.

03

Methodology

The research applies a **mixed-method approach**, adopting qualitative and quantitative data collection tools. This approach sought to strengthen data accuracy and reliability and to examine possible gaps between theoretical frameworks and lived realities, while also deriving empirical insights reflecting the experiences of "newcomers":

- A **desk review** was carried out and focused on existing reports, legal texts, policy papers, and public statements produced by UN agencies, international organizations, and local civil society actors. The review was used to map the legal and policy environment and to identify gaps between formal frameworks and actual practice, as well as to have an in-depth understanding of every day's challenges and threats.

Key informant interviews included the participation of front-liners working in protection and social sectors in the Bekaa and Tripoli areas. CLDH's key relevant staff were identified for these interviews addressing a series of qualitative questions focusing on legal status, protection risks, and operational challenges. These interviews were used mainly to contextualize the findings and to reflect field-based observations.

An **online survey** was disseminated by Upinion [6] targeting Syrian "newcomers" to Lebanon. The survey, conducted between December 2025 and January 2026 targeted 116 respondents and included both quantitative and semi-qualitative questions. The survey was designed to collect data on legal status, access to services, and protection concerns, as well as short narrative inputs on everyday challenges faced by "newcomers."

6. Upinion is a research and surveying partner with experience in remote data collection and in reaching populations that are otherwise difficult to access.

04

Desk Review

The International Legal Framework

The primary international legal instrument governing refugee status and protection is the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Although Lebanon has not ratified it, the Geneva Convention is widely regarded as containing core principles and fundamental human rights that have become part of customary international law, binding on all states regardless of formal ratification. The most established customary norm is the principle of *non-refoulement, which prohibits returning refugees to territories where they face persecution.*

International human rights law may also provide an appropriate and effective framework for refugee protection in Lebanon. The application of international human rights law would ensure minimum standards of protection for refugee and define obligations and commitments of the Lebanese authorities towards them. It would, therefore, provide refugees with legal instruments to assert their rights before the host State.

Moreover, international human rights law supports a broader framework for understanding the forms of persecution that may lead individuals to flee their country of origin. As a result, in the scope of international human rights law, persecution may be defined as a serious violation of fundamental human rights resulting from a state's failure to protect refugees within its borders.

For instance, the prohibition of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is an absolute obligation under the Convention Against Torture (CAT), to which Lebanon is a state party. In particular, article 3 prohibits state party from expelling, returning or extraditing a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would be in danger of being subjected to torture.

Accordingly, any person that may face torture if deported, must be allowed to remain within the territory and under the jurisdiction and effective control of the host state [7]. Additionally, in its General Comment No. 4, the UN Committee Against Torture clarified the scope of Article 3. The Committee emphasized that State parties should not adopt dissuasive measures or policies, such as prolonged or indefinite detention in poor conditions, or refusal to process asylum claims, that would compel individuals in need of protection under Article 3 to return to their country of origin despite a personal risk of

7. Committee against Torture, General comment No.4 (2017) in the implementation of article 3 of the Convention in the context of article 22, para. 12, 4 September 2018.

torture[8]. The Committee's comment particularly resonates with the situation in Lebanon, where current practices appear inconsistent with the standards articulated by the Committee. It must also be highlighted that the Committee's General Comments carry an authoritative interpretative weight that every party State must comply with, and any failure to comply with these constitutes a breach of their obligations under the CAT.

Additionally, paragraph B of the Preamble of the Lebanese Constitution enshrines the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Lebanese government must therefore abide by the UDHR and ensure that all national legislation is consistent with it. Article 14 of the UDHR guarantees the right to everyone "to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution". However, Lebanon's legal framework on asylum does not align with this constitutional provision. Furthermore, the UDHR guarantees main fundamental rights including the right to life, the prohibition of torture and slavery.

Lebanon is also bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The rights and protections established under this instrument provide refugees with legal grounds for seeking protection from the host State as well as asserting their rights[9]. Additionally, there are rights that they can particularly invoke for enhanced protection. According to article 4 of the ICCPR, no derogation can be made to seven specifics rights of the Covenant. The rights most relevant to refugees' situation that cannot be derogated include the right to life, prohibition of torture, prohibition of slavery and servitude, and the right to recognition before the law. The right to life (article 6) and prohibition of torture (article 7) can be invoked by refugees if they face threats of such nature in their country of origin. Furthermore, refugees facing difficulties in accessing civil registration, specifically birth registration, can also invoke their right of recognition before the law (article 16). Article 7 of the Convention of the Rights of Child may also be invoked to protect the right to birth registration. Additionally, refugees in Lebanon may invoke their non-derogable right under article 8 para. 1 and 2 of the ICCPR (prohibition of slavery and servitude), particularly when they are required to abide by the "kafala" sponsorship system, described as modern slavery [10] , and in the context of being engaged in informal employment where access to basic rights and protections is often inaccessible.

Moreover, refugees can invoke their rights under the International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions that Lebanon has ratified, to protect themselves from forced labor [11], discrimination in employment based on race or national origin [12], child labor [13] and to request labour inspections [14]. Refugees can also claim their rights under the

8. Ibid para. 14
9. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, CCPR General Comment No.15: The Position of Aliens under the Covenant, 11 April 1986.
10. P. RACK, "Modern Day Slavery: The Kafala System in Lebanon", *Harvard International Review*, December 2020.
11. ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)
12. ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958 (No 111)
13. ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (No 182)
14. ILO Labour Inspection Convention 1947 (No 81)

International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), particularlyy articles 6 and 7 to secure dignified standards of living for their families and for decent working conditions.

The National Legal Framework

Lebanon lacks a comprehensive national asylum legal framework and has maintained its longstanding position that it's not a host country for refugees, but rather a country of transit[15]. Lebanon defines an asylum seeker as a person seeking asylum in a third country[16]. To avoid the legal obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and other legally binding conventions like the Convention Against Torture (CAT) Lebanon has refrained from using the term "refugee" and has opted for the term "displaced", to make clear that the presence of the individual on the Lebanese territory is only temporary until they find refuge in another country, often referred to as the country of resettlement. This is further reflected in the UNHRC's use of the term "displaced" to describe refugees in Lebanon.

The only text in Lebanon explicitly referring to refugees is the 1962 law regulating the entry, stay, and exit of foreigners in Lebanon. According to article 32 of the law, foreigners who violate the law or enter Lebanon irregularly will face imprisonment and deportation by court order. However, if a foreigner constitutes a threat to public security and safety, they may face deportation based on a decision issued by the director of General Security, with the oversight of the Ministry of Interior as per articles 17 and 18.

Nevertheless, in practice, a number of Syrians are being deported arbitrarily on basis of illegal entry to the country without court order, and without evidence of threat to public security the notion, while being denied the right to an effective defence [17]. This situation is a clear violation of the law and of Lebanon's obligation of non-refoulement, including the systemic violation of Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture (CAT).

Chapter 8 of the 1962 law is about the right of political asylum. Article 26 of the Law defines a refugee as a "foreigner who is subject to prosecution or conviction by a non-Lebanese authority for reasons of a political crime, or whose life or liberty is threatened, likewise for political reasons." And according to article 17 of the law, a commission must be established to examine the individual's case and determine if political asylum shall be granted or rejected.

However, the granting of refugee status according to this law is only upon very limited circumstances and, in practice, a commission in charge of examining asylum demands has never been established, and political asylum has never been granted.

15. UNHCR, Submission by the UNHCR for the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report, Universal Periodic Review, The Republic of Lebanon, April 2010, https://www.refworld.org/policy/upr/unhcr/2010/en/71496
16. Ibid.
17. Alef, Position paper on the decision to summarily deport Syrian nationals who entered Lebanon irregularly, June 2019, https://alefliban.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Position-Paper-on-the-decision-to-summarily-deport-Syrian-nationals-who-entered-Lebanon-irregularly.pdf

Consequently, individuals fleeing their country cannot enter Lebanon as asylum seekers and must instead comply with the conditions governing the stay of foreigners such as tourism or employment.

Moreover, paragraph I of the Preamble of the Lebanese Constitution further constrains access to asylum. According to this paragraph the "Lebanese territory is one for all Lebanese […] There shall be segregation of people […] and no fragmentation, partition, or settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon." The term "settlement" has been excessively used, especially in the political domain, to refuse the permanent presence of non-Lebanese on the Lebanese territory. This further clarify Lebanon's self-perception as a transit country rather than a host country for refugees [18].

In the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, following the outbreak the war in 2011, Syrians were granted entry to Lebanon based on the "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination" between Syria and Lebanon that was signed in 1993. According to this treaty, Lebanese and Syrian nationals were allowed to move freely between the two countries.

However, as the number of Syrians escaping war into Lebanon was rapidly increasing , the Lebanese authorities introduced a series of measures aimed at restricting their entry. In 2015, Lebanon requested that the UNHCR permanently suspend new registrations of Syrian refugees and this measure remains in place to date. Furthermore, in 2015 Lebanon suspended the 1993 treaty and introduced visa requirement for Syrian nationals[19] for entry into the country.

According to the Lebanese General Security, Syrians may only obtain visas under limited categories such as work, education, transit, and appointments with foreign embassies. The duration of stay depends on the type of visa, ranging from 11 hours to one month. No legal entry is possible for people wishing to enter Lebanon to seek refuge from the war, leaving Syrians fleeing their country with no option than entering Lebanon irregularly.

At the same time, Lebanon criminalized the clandestine entry of Syrians. In its decision of 21 April 2019, the Lebanese Supreme Defense Council ordered additional border controls, which in practice translated into the expulsion of Syrian refugees who had entered Lebanon clandestinely and imposed a permanent ban on their re-entry [20].

Reports have alleged that the individuals forcibly returned to Syria have been subjected to ill-treatment by the Lebanese authorities, without any access to justice to contest their expulsion through judicial mechanisms, in a violation of article 32 of law regulating the entry, stay, and exit of foreigners in Lebanon which states that deportation should happen under a judicial decision. Deportations are still occurring. In June 2025 the

18. D. MEIER, "Al-Tawteen": The implantation problem as an idiom of the Palestinian presence in post-civil war Lebanon (1989-2005), ***Arab Studies Quarterly***, Vol. 32(3):145-162, July 2010.
19. https://www.general-security.gov.lb/uploads/news/entrance2025.pdf
20. Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon Armed Forces Summarily Deporting Syrians, Human Rights Watch", 2023, https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/05/lebanon-armed-forces-summarily-deporting-syrians ; https://www.general-security.gov.lb/ar/operations/details/147

Lebanese government also launched a plan for the return of Syrian refugees, without taking into account new arrivals or addressing persistent protection gaps, particularly access to legal residency and the risk of arbitrary deportation [21].

Living Conditions and Vulnerabilities of "Newcomers"

While the fall of Assad regime was expected to mark the end of a war in Syria, the conflict persisted. Violence outbreaks continued to manifest in massacres throughout 2025, [22] targeting the Druze community in Sweida, and Syria's coastal regions targeting Alawites and Shiaa's resulting in the death of thousands. While the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria reported in August 2025 that no specific evidence was found in relevance to the claims that the sectarian violence was the result of a state policy, the different rounds of violence did significantly increase fears of further sectarian violence and massacres among affected communities, leading many to flee the country and seek safety in Lebanon.

Among the 105,000 Syrians who have arrived in Lebanon after the 8th of December 2024, 65,396 are residing in Bekaa and Baalbek El Hermel and 28,239 in Akkar and North[23]. These areas are among the most socio-economically vulnerable regions in Lebanon with limited access to basic services. This has raised concerns among the Lebanese host community.

While UNHCR has played a crucial role in ensuring legal recognition of refugees since 2013, the emerging challenge faced by "newcomers" is the lack of valid identity documents (IDs or family registry) necessary for legal recognition for civil registration, access to education, obtaining a job, as well as to access legal protection and basic services[24]. Many "newcomers" are unable to obtain such valid identity documents, while they fear going back to Syria amidst ongoing threats and risks of being detained, kidnapped, or even killed. Additionally, the relatively high cost of travel imposes an additional challenge for Syrian "newcomers" [25].

Furthermore, "newcomers" in Lebanon are denied any regular asylum status, as the Lebanese government has consistently refused to establish any asylum framework, despite its ratification of key international human rights instruments, including the

21. Legal Agenda, "Syrian Return from Lebanon: Between Government Facilitation Plans and Lingering Obstacles", 2026, https://english.legal-agenda.com/syrian-return-from-lebanon-between-government-facilitation-plans-and-lingering-obstacles/

22. See UN Syria Commission finds March coastal violence was widespread and systematic: outlines urgent steps to prevent future violations and restore public confidence | OHCHR

23. UNHCR, "Syrian returns and movements snapshot", September 2025, https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/119200

24. Refugee Protection Watch, "Caught between borders: Experiences of Syrians pushed away to Lebanon after the fall of the Assad", May 2025, https://upinion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/RPW-Report_Experiences-of-Syrians-pushed-away-to-Lebanon-after-the-fall-of-Assad_May-2025.pdf

25. Danish Refugee Council, Newly arriving Syrians Fact Sheet, October 2025

UDHR, CAT, ICCPR, CRC and others. For "newcomers" such registration is, however, crucial for enjoying their fundamental rights such as freedom of movement, education, and work.

To redress their irregular situation, most Syrians seeking residency go through the sponsorship system (kafala). This system requires refugees to be sponsored by a Lebanese national to be able to work and have a valid residency permit [26].

Refugees can access employment only through two pathways, either being dependent on the sponsorship system or forced to work in informal environments. As a result, many Syrians work far from any oversight, subject to low wages, and other forms of abuse.

This reality stands in contradiction to Lebanon's commitments under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, which states in article 7 that State parties must ensure favorable working conditions, including non-discrimination in remuneration, the right of workers to be able to guarantee a decent standard of living for them and their families and safe working conditions.

Studies show that nearly 90% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon work in the informal sector, primarily in agriculture and construction, with poverty levels rising by 56% [27]. Not being able to easily find formal employment, refugees are forced to compete for informal jobs with low wages, absence of legal protection, health insurance, and other fundamental norms for decent working conditions.

In addition, "newcomers" are faced with diminishing humanitarian assistance due to budget shortages as a result of funding cuts [28]. Funding has remarkably diminished between 2024 and 2025. In 2024, total funding amounted to 1,326,406,329 USD, whereas in 2025 it declined to 851,107355 USD [29]. In August 2025, 74% of the funding requested for UNHCR operations in Lebanon have not been delivered [30].

"Newcomers" are faced with strict eligibility thresholds to acquire assistance. Approximately, 75% urgent referrals for assistance are rejected due to assessments of insufficient severity while 25% are rejected due to lack of funding [31]. This situation is due to the limited availability of services provided to "newcomers" in Lebanon. This prioritization mechanism creates significant protection gaps, exacerbating inequality among vulnerable individuals, and increasing risks of exclusion.

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26. Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: New Refugee Policy a Step Forward", February 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/14/lebanon-new-refugee-policy-step-forward

27. Surplus and Displacement, Refugees and Migrants, Global Dialogue, July 2024, https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/articles/surplus-and-displacement-refugees-and-migrants

28. UNHCR, "Syria Global Appeal 2026 Situation Overview", 2026, https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/Syria%20situation%20overview%20-%20Global%20Appeal%202026.pdf ; Syria Direct, "Syrians continue to flock to Lebanon after the regime's fall", February 2025, https://syriadirect.org/syrians-continue-to-flock-to-lebanon-after-the-regimes-fall/

29. UNHCR, "2025 aid tracking Lebanon report", https://lebanon.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/2025%20Q3%20Lebanon%20Aid%20Tracking%20report%20%28as%20of%2030%20September%202025%29_0.pdf ; UNHCR, "2024 aid tracking Lebanon report", https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/lebanon/2024-aid-tracking-lebanon-report-1-january-16-december-2024

30. UNHCR Fact Sheet Lebanon, August 2025.

31. Danish Refugee Council, Newly arriving Syrians Fact Sheet, October 2025.

When compared to long-standing Syrian refugees and other nationalities, "newcomers" face barriers in accessing services on time and in an effective manner. For instance, 20% of referrals for "newcomers" are successfully closed compared to 40% for long-standing Syrian refugees and other nationalities [32]. As a result, "newcomers" are left in a state of prolonged precarity and heightened vulnerability.

At the same time, "newcomers" face challenges related to social cohesion and acceptance, and report feelings of insecurity and exposure to clashes and tensions with the host community[33].

"Newcomers" are also faced with risks of arbitrary arrests at checkpoints. Their camps are frequently dismantled by security forces, while political discourse [34] further exacerbates insecurity and contributes to rising xenophobia against refugees [35].

Combined with Lebanon's ongoing economic collapse and security challenges, these factors leave Syrian "newcomers" in an extremely fragile situation, with limited prospects for stability or protection.

32. Ibid.

33. Refugee Protection Watch, "Caught between borders: Experiences of Syrians pushed away to Lebanon after the fall of the Assad", May 2025, https://upinion.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/RPW-Report_Experiences-of-Syrians-pushed-away-to-Lebanon-after-the-fall-of-Assad_May-2025.pdf

34. AL Akhbar," باسيل: لإعادة النازحين فوراً.. وعدم تقديم هدايا للنظام الجديد", December 2024, https://www.al-akhbar.com/lebanon/817299 ; France 24, "Lebanon's Mikati calls on Syrians to return home", December 2024, https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241214-lebanon-s-mikati-calls-on-syrians-to-return-home

35. Syria Direct, "Syrians continue to flock to Lebanon after the regime's fall", February 2025, https://syriadirect.org/syrians-continue-to-flock-to-lebanon-after-the-regimes-fall/

05

Data Findings and Analysis

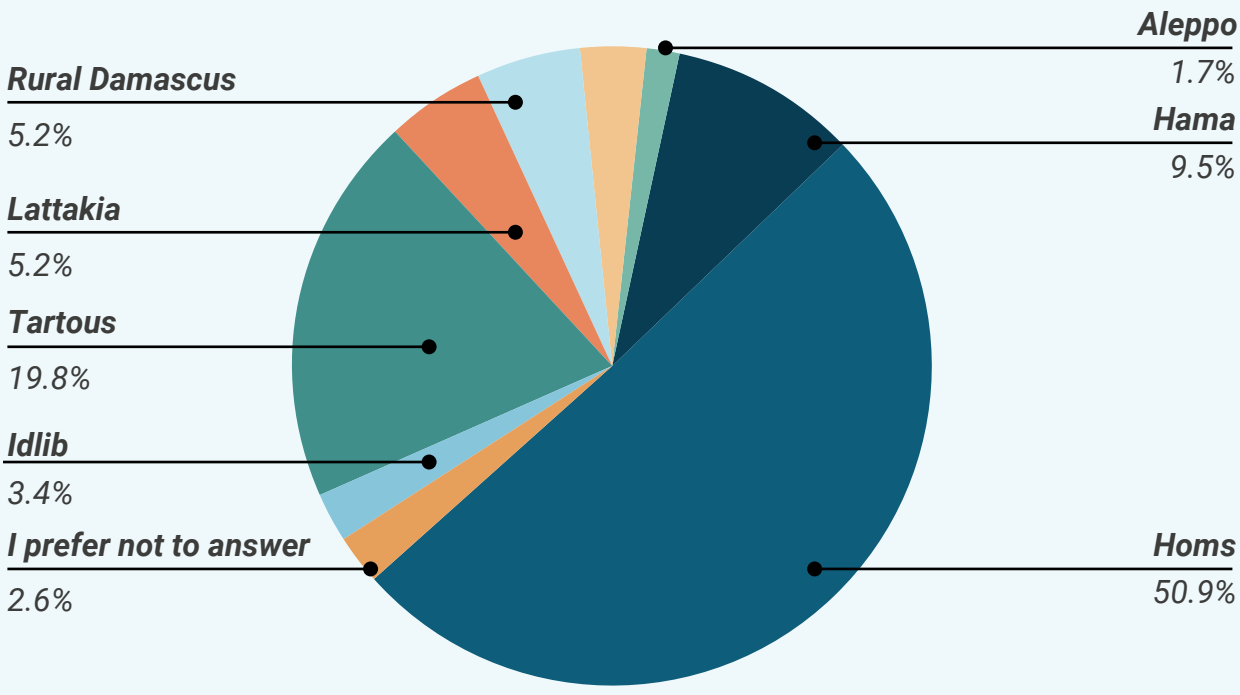
The section presents and analyses the data collected among 116 Syrian "newcomers", between 18 December 2025 and 26 January 2026, complemented by insights from key informant personnel including legal practitioner and project officer. The analysis aims to highlight the principal challenges faced by "newcomers" in Lebanon, examine persistent protection gaps, outline "newcomers'" profiles, and provide a comparative assessment of the situation of long-standing refugees and "newcomers" as well as studying the consequences of the overall situation on the rights of "newcomers".

The Demographic Profile of “Newcomers”: Implications for Vulnerability

According to data collected from the survey, nearly 40% of survey respondents arrived in Lebanon in December 2024. 35% of respondents arrived in Lebanon in March 2025, following the coastal massacres that occurred in Syria, and the remaining 25% mainly arrived in January 2025 (6%), February 2025 (3.4%), April 2025 (7,8%) and December 2025 (3,4%). Most respondents fled from Homs (51%), Tartous (20%) and Hama (9.5%).

Question: What is your place of origin in Syria?

01.00.00 - Background and Arrival:



Respondents were primarily located in peripheral regions in Lebanon. For instance, 24 respondents were located in Baalbak El Hermel, 18 in Bekaa, 18 in North Lebanon, and 16 in Akkar.

Respondents were leaving Syria mainly in search of safety and security (94%), and due to economic hardship (25%).

As the data shows, large number of Syrian "newcomers" are located in peripheral regions. These regions have long suffered from limited attention from Lebanese authorities. Communities in these areas face weak infrastructure, difficult access to education, healthcare, and other vital services.

Consequently, hosting large number of refugees in these areas places an additional strain on regions that already lack adequate living conditions for their residents, and it exceeds their capacity to absorb large population pressures. Hence, living conditions would become harsher for both host communities and "newcomers". In such context, hostility and tensions may arise between the two of them, increasing discrimination, exclusion, hate discourse and xenophobia, and potentially leading to heightened insecurity and delinquency. Similar dynamics were previously observed with Syrian refugees who arrived before 2024, particularly when municipalities adopted discriminatory measures such as imposing curfews on Syrians [36].

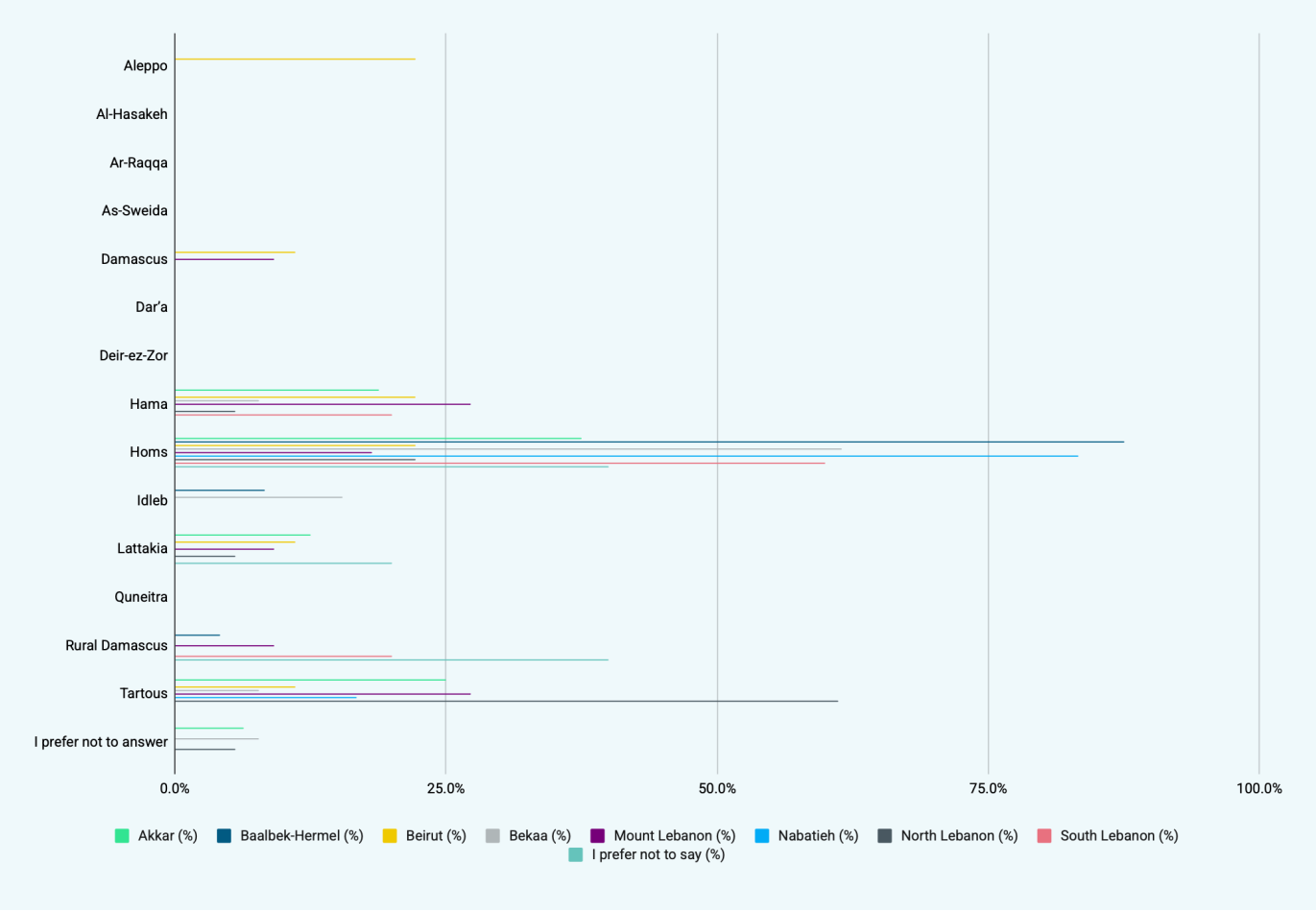
Furthermore, alongside the arrival of Syrian "newcomers", Lebanon was confronting an active conflict that triggered large-scale internal displacement and were particularly affected the peripheral regions mentioned above. Additionally, studies have shown that host communities and refugees are competing for services and utilities, exacerbating the tension between them [37].

This compounded existing pressures and has worsened the overall situation. The continuation of these practices without State oversight and without any comprehensive policy will further deepen social fragmentation and increase risks.

36. UNHCR, "Measures impacting refugees in Lebanon Curfews", January 2020.
37. Middle East Council on Global Affairs, "From Exile to Uncertainty: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Consider Returning Home", May 2025, https://mecouncil.org/publication/from-exile-to-uncertainty-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-consider-returning-home/#:~:text=The%20precarious%20conditions%20facing%20the,as%20its%20cash%20assistance%20program

What is your place or origin in Syria and where do you currently live in Lebanon?

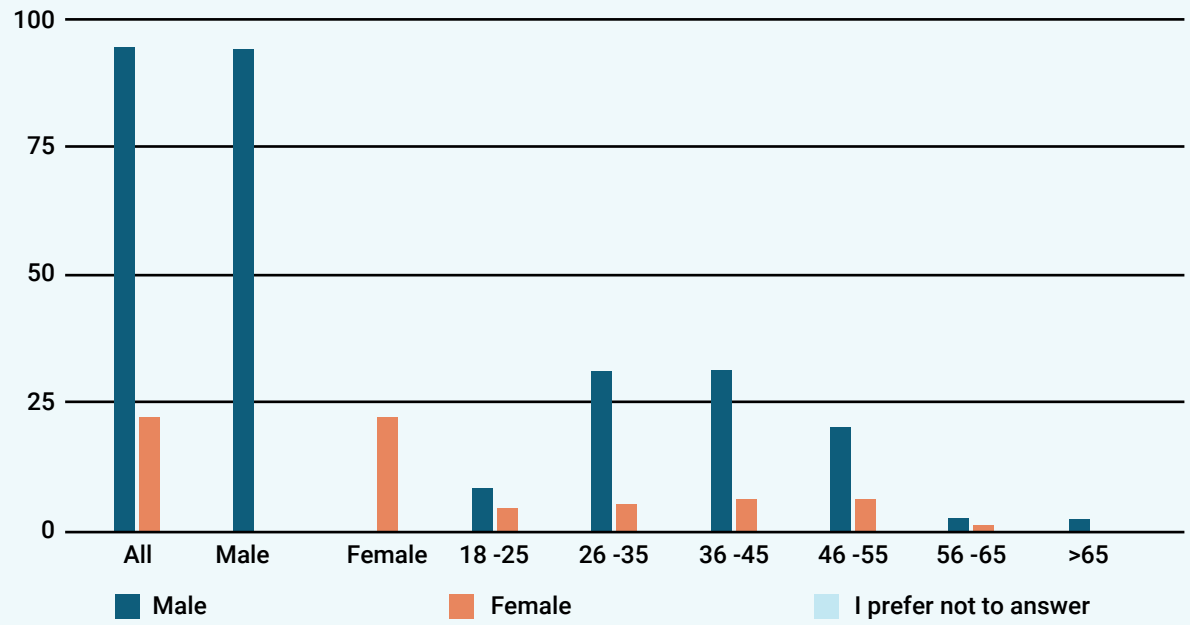
01.00.03 - Background and Arrival:



The data also indicates that "newcomers" are predominantly male, with men representing 81% of respondents, most of whom are between 26 and 45 years old. This survey while limited by a small sample size and other potential uncontrolled factors (such as surveys completed by male household members) suggest that female Syrians only account for 19% of "newcomers" respondents and tend to be older than male "newcomers", with the majority falling within the 36 to 55 age range.

Question: What is your gender?

01.00.03 - Background and Arrival:



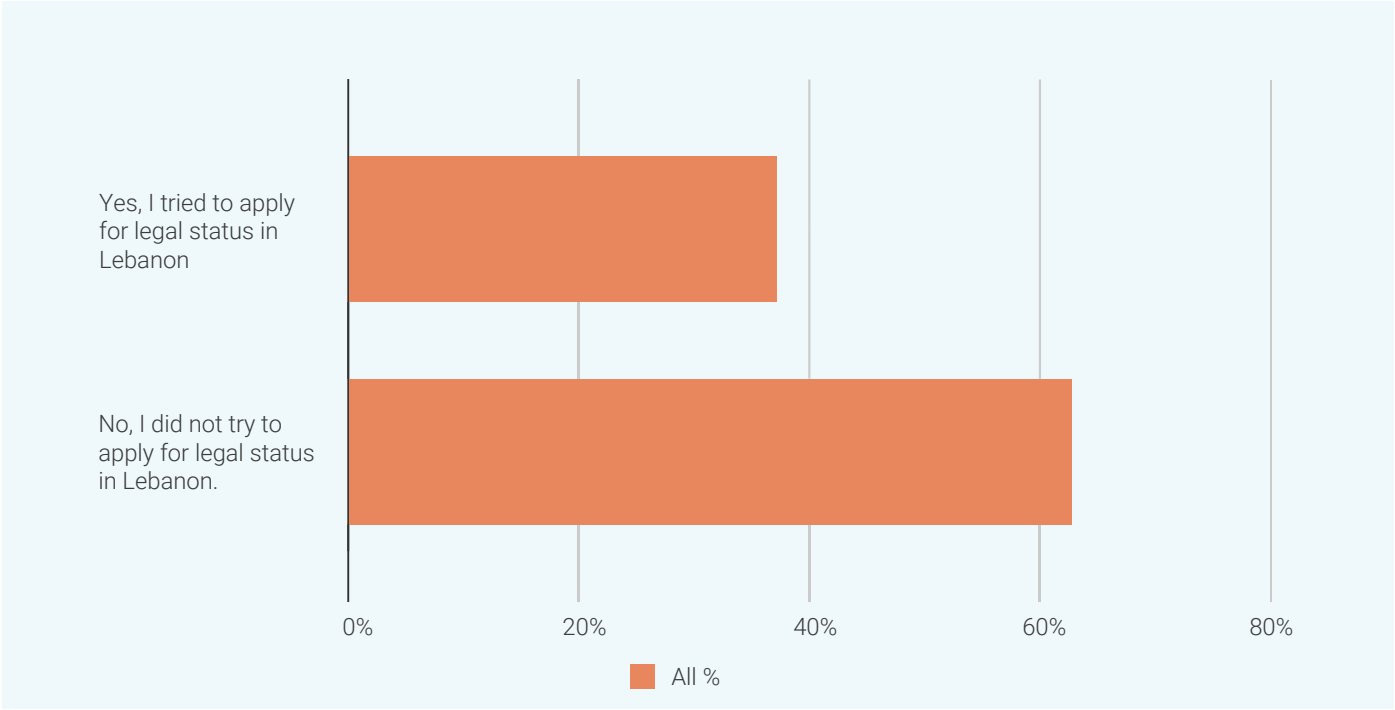
Absence of Legal Recognition: A Key Factor Shaping "Newcomers"' Precarious Situation

A- "Newcomers" Access to Legal Residency and Civil Documentation: Policies and Institutional Practices:

The survey shows that 63% of "newcomers" didn't attempt to apply for a legal status in Lebanon for a number of challenges outlined below where only 37% sought legal status registration, with only 7% success rate, while 54% of applications were unsuccessful and 39% remained pending at the time of data collection.

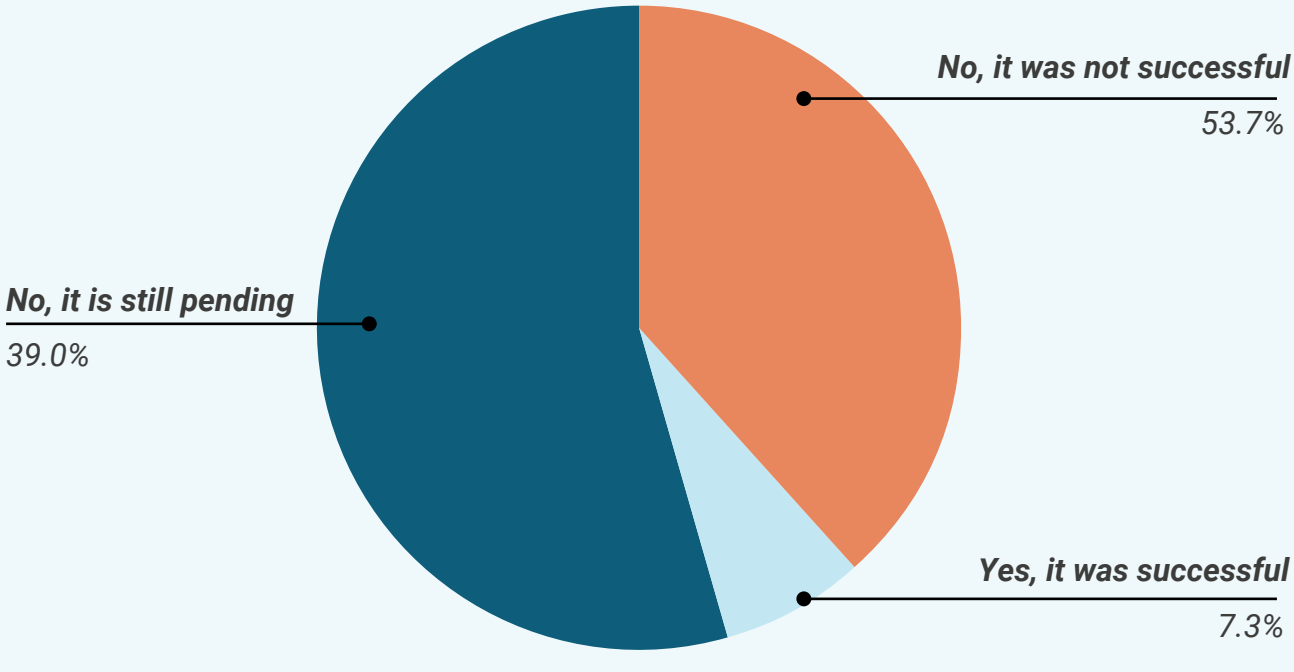
Question: Have you attempted to register your stay or apply for legal status in Lebanon?

01.03.00 - Legal Status and Registration - All %:



Question: Was this attempt successful?

01.03.01 - Success with legal registration:

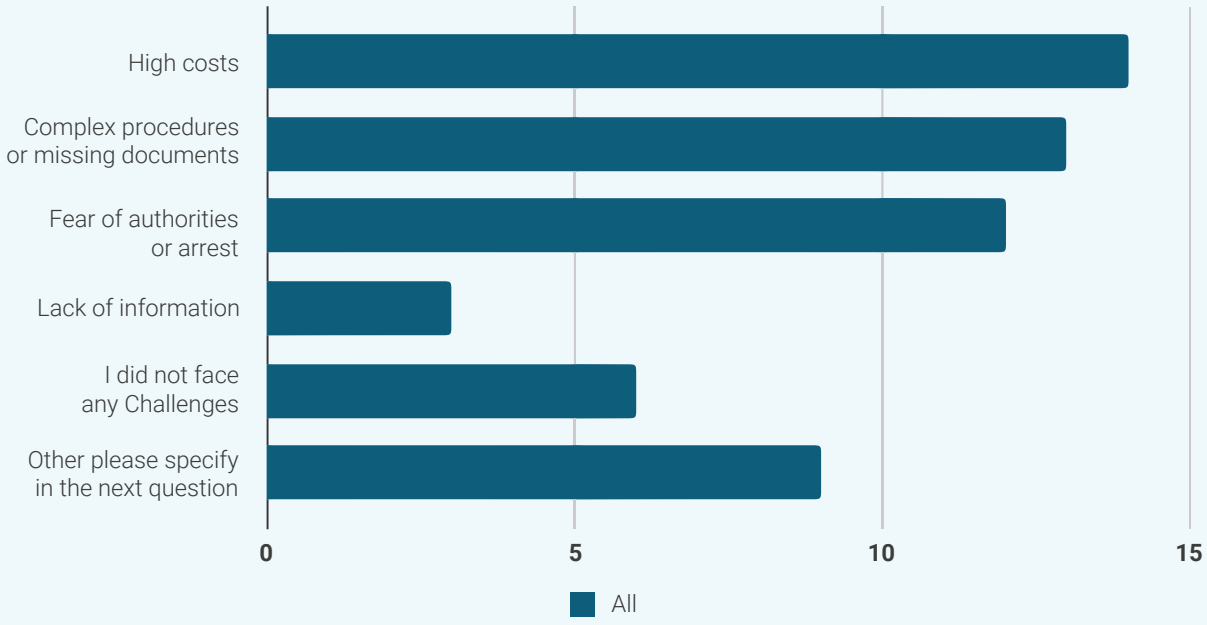


In addition to difficulties obtaining a legal status, 47% of respondents faced difficulties trying to obtain or renew documentation (mainly residency permits) and birth certificates. Approximately, a similar number of respondents (48%) didn't try to obtain these documents, while only 4,5% of them reported having faced no difficulties.

Question: What challenges did you face when trying to register or apply for legal status in Lebanon?

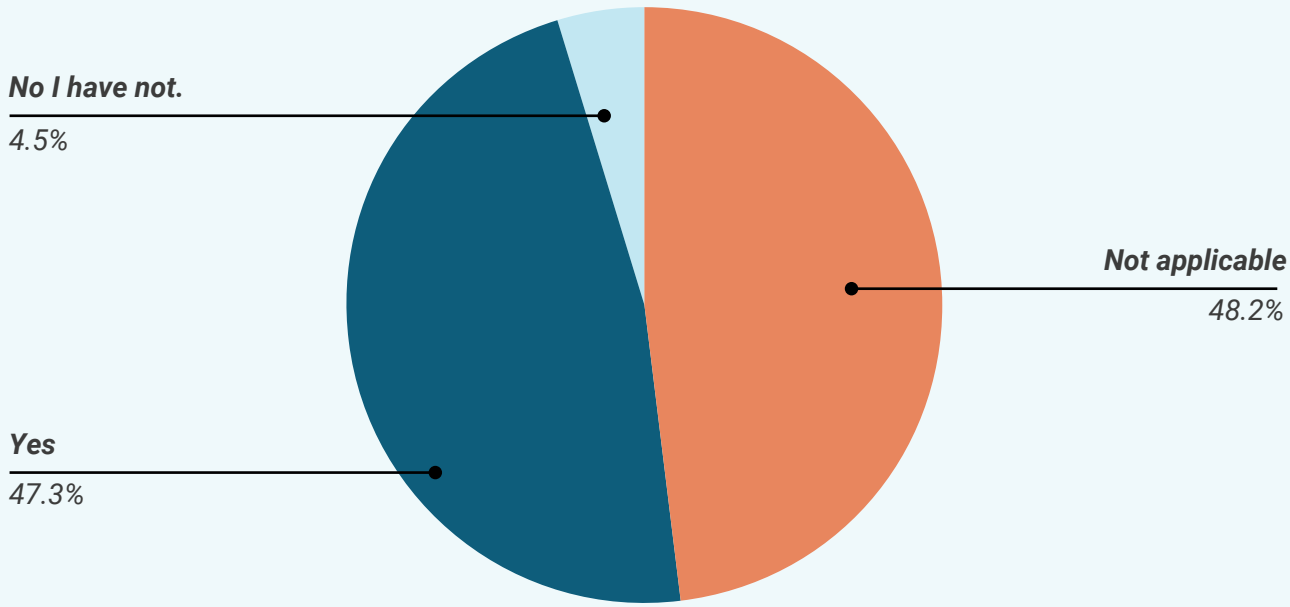
- Respondents reported several challenges hindering them from accessing a legal status and documentation. The main challenges were linked to the high costs of the procedure, the complexity of the bureaucratic procedure, movements restrictions due to checkpoints, lack of information, and fear of detention and deportation as a result of detection of illegal status.

01.03.01 - Success with legal registration:



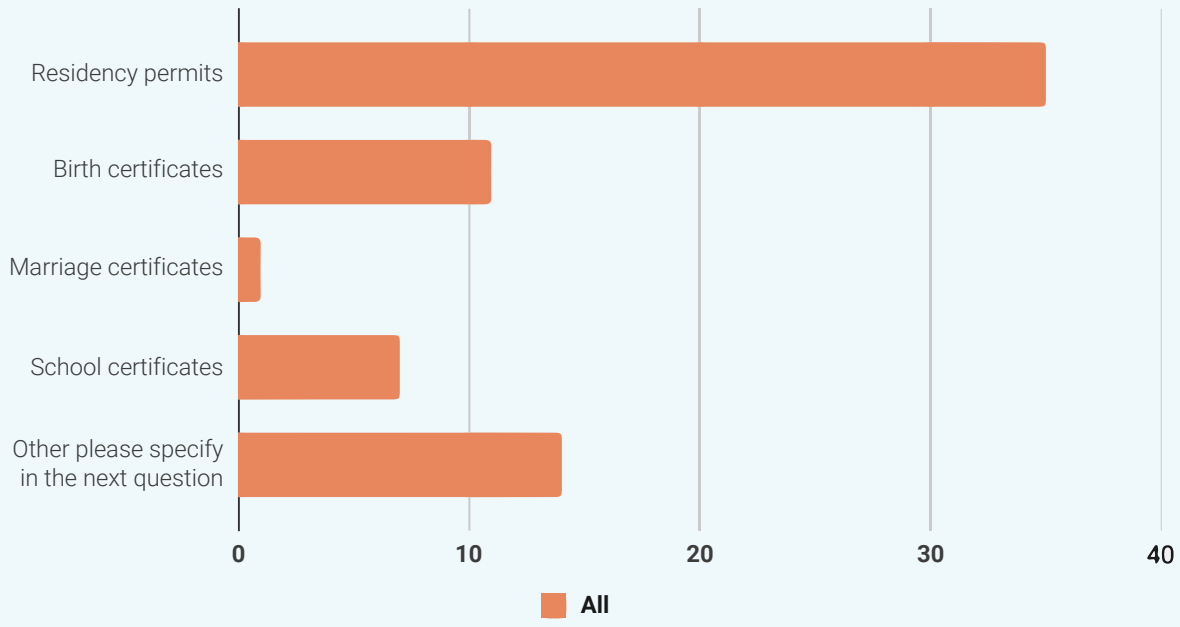
Question: Have you or your family faced difficulties obtaining or renewing documentation?

01.13.00 - Documentation:



Question: What type of documentation were you trying to obtain or renew?

01.13.01 - Type of documentation needed:



This situation is further clarified by data findings from Key Informant (KI) interviews. Key informants in Bekaa and Tripoli reported that Syrian "newcomers" are facing an increasingly uncertain and difficult legal and administrative environment. General Security (GSO) procedures change frequently, and requirements for residency and registration have become more restrictive and complex. Additionally, KIIs noted that the ongoing suspension of UNHCR registration for refugees since 2015 further complicates refugees' situation and their access to protection, leaving many in a state of uncertainty and insecurity.

In Tripoli, it has been noticed that the dominant narrative of the General Security, and the foreign registry in particular, is that there is no longer a "migration situation" that requires protection following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. This has made it much harder for "newcomers" to secure legal residency. Notably, access to residency renewal or legal stay that was previously available to certain categories are blocked or restricted. This includes cases such as "Moujemale", a category referring to individuals born to a Lebanese mother. Hence, the main challenge is the absence of legal residency, which serves as a key barrier preventing refugees from completing administrative procedures and accessing services and legal aid, thus affecting their ability to appoint a lawyer. This situation restricts refugees' access to court procedures and administrative follow-up. However, some Sharia courts have continued to process certain cases without requiring residency status, relying only on civil documentation such as individual civil registry ("ikhraj Kaid fardi") to verify identity and family links. The key informants also noted that in some regions such as Jabal Mohsen, Zgharta and Akkar humanitarian assistance (providing food and basic services) is more available and accessible than legal aid. However, these services don't address legal barriers faced by newcomer refugees, as the lack of valid residency continues to represent the most significant barrier.

In Bekaa, one of the biggest challenges "newcomers" face is not having access to their civil, legal or identification documents, as many fled their homes under life-threatening circumstances. Given that these documents are essential for administrative procedures and consequently obtaining legal recognition in Lebanon, the lack of these documents create significantly challenges to submit civil registration requests or complete other official procedures. For instance, the Jaafarieh Court; a religious court that handles personal status matters of Shia Muslims in Lebanon, has adopted particularly restrictive practices. It has largely refused to register cases for "newcomers" due to "nearly impossible" requirements related to documentation and legal papers, as indicated by one of the key Informant interviewees in Bekaa. Many "newcomers" arrived without family members which complicates the completion of civil documentation processes—especially for marriage registration and other family-related procedures.

Consequently, the absence of a formal legal framework and a governmental plan for asylum in Lebanon is a structural determinant shaping the experiences of refugees.

The legal vacuum created by the government, that is not abiding by its international obligations, is a key structural mechanism that converts institutional policies and practices into life-threatening risks for refugees' protection and fundamental rights.

Without legal recognition, refugees face systematical barriers for engagement with security and administrative authorities. This dynamic generates a cycle of avoidance where individuals refrain from accessing official procedures out of fear of detention or punitive measures.

Thus, the lack of recognition transforms what should be protective mechanisms into the contrary, consequently increasing refugees' vulnerability in general, and that of "newcomers" vulnerability in particular. Insecurity is imposed through policy ambiguity, effectively marginalizing refugees, and intensifying exposure to risks and threats.

This further reflects the hostile stance adopted by Lebanese authorities toward "newcomers", which exacerbate their vulnerability and exclusion and pushes them into precarious situations that heighten their exposure to risk, danger and exploitation.

Consequently, "newcomers" may potentially re-live the experience of long-standing refugees, being at risk of forced return to Syria by Lebanese authorities without the ability to defend themselves or challenge the decision before the courts. This exposes them to denial of their most fundamental rights guaranteed in key international human rights law such as the UDHR and CAT, particularly the principle of non-refoulement.

B- The Protection of Children's Rights amid Legal Invisibility

Most respondents indicated that they don't have access to education (59%), and 39% have limited access, while less than 3% reported to have adequate access to education.

This situation can be further explained by data collected through KIIs. A key informant in Tripoli indicated that even though the Ministry of Education and Higher Education has stated that residency should be compulsory for registration, many children are enrolling in schools without having to present residency documentation. According to the informant, this situation reflects disparities between regions and inconsistent access depending on local practices.

In Bekaa, access to education is relatively not complex; however, the lack of buses or adequate transportation means poses a major challenge and limits their ability to access education.

As a result, children of refugees are bearing the consequences of the legal ambiguity by being prevented from their most fundamental rights, including their right to access education and their right to being registered immediately after birth, as indicated in the previous section. This situation is contradictory to Lebanon's commitments under the Convention of the Rights of Child, in particular articles 7 and 28. The inability to register births or access education is not only a consequence of administrative barriers but also

a signal of systematic exclusion [38]. Refugees in Lebanon have always struggled to access education and birth registration and this situation has persisted without significant improvement for "newcomers" [39]. In the absence of legal recognition, children's refugees are at increased risk of exploitation, trafficking, and abuse [40].

C- Legal Uncertainty: Implications for the Access of Fundamental Rights

The right to a dignified life lies at the core of human rights and underpins fundamental rights, including the right to high standards of health, housing, education, protection from ill-treatment or torture and decent working conditions. This right is explicitly guaranteed in international instruments to which Lebanon is a party, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, which clearly states in its first article that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

The Day-to-Day Consequences

The findings from desk review, key informant interviews, and surveys reveal that one of the most pressing challenges faced by "newcomers" is their inability to adequately access basic needs and essential services.

According to key informant interviews, due to the lack of valid residency and the inability to access employment opportunities, had direct implications on the living conditions of "newcomers" exacerbating their vulnerability in Bekaa and Tripoli. This has been specifically characterized by increased risks and instability. This is further supported by survey findings, with all respondents reported difficulties accessing healthcare services, where 77% have no access at all to this type of service, while the remaining 23% have limited access to healthcare.

The KII in Tripoli stated that the underlying obstacle preventing refugees from accessing services is the lack of legal status. Basic assistance such as food, health support, and educational services are still being delivered because their provision is not dependent on one’s legal status. However, legal aid and protection pathways have become harder to operationalize as they are dependent on institutional approvals, documentation, and residency-related procedures.

38. Human Rights Watch, ”Stop Politicizing Education for Lebanon’s Refugee Children”, August 2024, https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/28/stop-politicizing-education-lebanons-refugee-children

39. CLDH and NRC, ”Comparative Analysis on Marriage, Birth & Death Registration for Syrian Refugees in Mount Lebanon, Beirut, North Lebanon and Bekaa”, October 2022.

40. Arab NGO Network For Development, ”Universal Periodic Report 2025”, https://www.cldh-lebanon.org/HumanRightsBrie/341f4a2d-309f-480f-aab8-50b1a2c6bbc7_UPR_Lebanon_2025.pdf

Moreover, according to integrated food security phase classification, 1.2 million people in Lebanon are facing high levels of food insecurity [41]. This situation reflects the harsh living conditions of both the host community and the refugees. Poverty among refugees and host communities creates an extremely challenging environment, with increased levels of violence reflected in rising crime rates . Furthermore, this situation fuels misinformation, hate discourse, and arbitrary accusations, further leading to increased tensions[42].

In addition, heightened vulnerability among refugees has a significant impact on their overall health and wellbeing. Studies show that prolonged exposure to precarious conditions is associated with deteriorating psychological and mental health [43].

Additionally, "newcomers" are facing difficulties accessing housing accommodations. Rent increases or housing challenges were considered significant drivers toward deterioration of living conditions as reported by 44.7% of survey respondents. Respondents also indicated that changes in aid provision as a key contributor to these challenges.

A key informant in Bekaa pointed out that when "newcomers" arrived, many stayed temporarily in Shia religious and community centers; known as “Husseiniyat”. However, during Ashoura; one of the most significant Shiite religious events, they were asked to leave these shelters due to the religious occasion and the rituals that take place there, which led to further displacement. Additionally, at first, Hezbollah provided assistance, but this gradually decreased over time due to evolving constraints on the Party. And more recently, an Informal Tented Settlement (ITS) in Hermel that falls under municipality jurisdiction was established providing shelter for some "newcomers".

Similar to the refugees who arrived before 2024, “newcomers" are resorting to informal tented settlements (ITS’s). However, as observed in previous incidents, ITS’s are still subjected to dismantlement by Lebanese authorities and refugees are forced to evict these settlements[44]. Since the fall of the Assad regime, Lebanese authorities have prioritized the closure of informal tented settlements [45]. These practices align with Lebanon’s concern over permanent settlements on its territory, as indicated in the desk review.

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41. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, ”Lebanon: Nearly 1.2 million people experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity despite ceasefire”, May 2025, https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Lebanon_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Apr_Oct2025_Report.pdf

42. Key Aid Consulting for CAMEALEON, ”The Role of Misinformation on Cash and Voucher Assistance for Social Cohesion in Lebanon”, October 2024, https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CVA-misinformation-Lebanon_Final-Report-Final.pdf

43. Médecins Sans Frontières, ”Trapped in fear, Syrian refugees face unbearable choices in Lebanon”, June 2024, https://www.msf.org/syrian-refugees-face-unbearable-choices-lebanon

44. Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, ”Lebanon’s Eviction of Syrian Refugees and the Threat of de facto Refoulement”, October 2018, https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/en/articles/details/1862/lebanon’s-eviction-of-syrian-refugees-and-the-threat-of-de-facto-refoulement

45. The National, ”Hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in Lebanon set to return home with financial incentives”, July 2025, https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2025/07/09/hundreds-of-thousands-of-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-set-to-return-home-with-financial-incentives/

Informal tented settlements are usually located in agricultural areas. Consequently, access to electricity essential for basic daily needs including hot water, lighting, digital communication, and street lighting enhancing settlement security, is often difficult to secure. This difficulty is further exacerbated by government policies prohibiting any permanent infrastructure in these settlements [46].

Studies show that living in informal tented settlements particularly affect children, where 39% of children living in ITS's experience impaired growth mainly reflected in stunting (shorter height for their age) as a consequence of prolonged chronic undernutrition[47]. In addition, families living in informal tented settlements face recurrent risks of flooding, harsh winter conditions, and fire hazards [48].

Restricted Access to Employment Opportunities

Alongside limited access to assistance and services, "newcomers" experience complex challenges of accessing employment opportunities. Surveys reveal that around 65% of "newcomers" are unemployed but looking for jobs, while only 14% are self-employed or working as daily laborers. This situation is mainly due to the exacerbated absence of work opportunities, reflected in 49% of the cases, and is partially attributed to the financial crisis that hit Lebanon in late 2019.

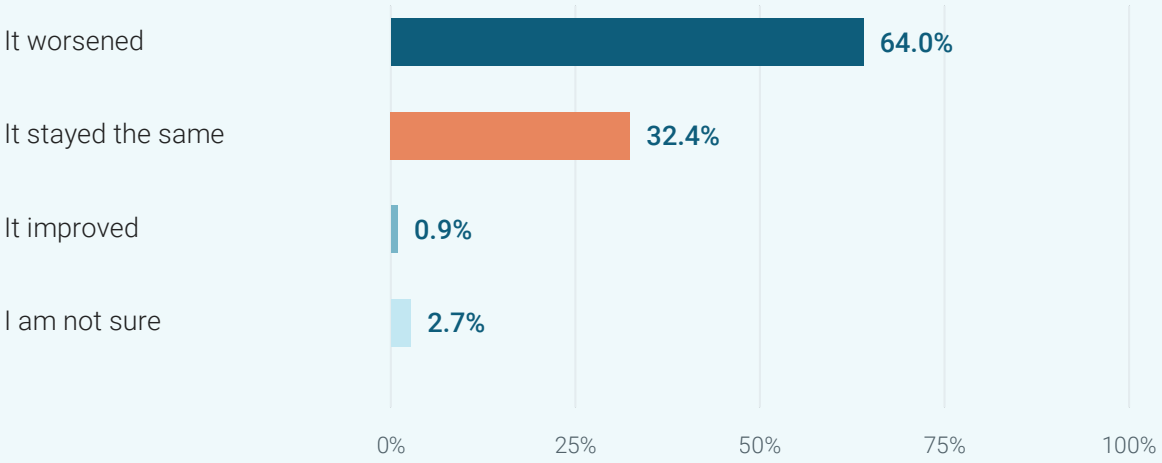
Consequently, over half of "newcomers" (51%) are unable to cover their basic needs, while the remaining respondents stated to be able to cover parts of these costs. Data findings indicate no improvement over time: 64% of the respondents confirmed deteriorating conditions, while 32% stated no improvements at all.

This situation is largely attributed to loss of income or employment. This was the case among 53% of respondents who reported worsened ability to cover their basic needs and access to aid.

46. The Lebanese Government and UNHCR, "Lebanon response plan", 2025.
47. Ibid; Lebanon Nutrition Sector, "National Nutrition Smart Survey Report", August-September 2021, https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/15741/file/National%20Nutrition%20SMART%20Survey%20Report%20.pdf ; The Lebanese Government and UNICEF, "Lebanon integrated micronutrient, anthropometry and child development survey 2023 (lima)", September 2024, https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/13011/file/LIMA_Final%20Report_FINAL.pdf.pdf
48. UNHCR, "Shelter Assistance Programs Fact Sheet", January-August 2025.

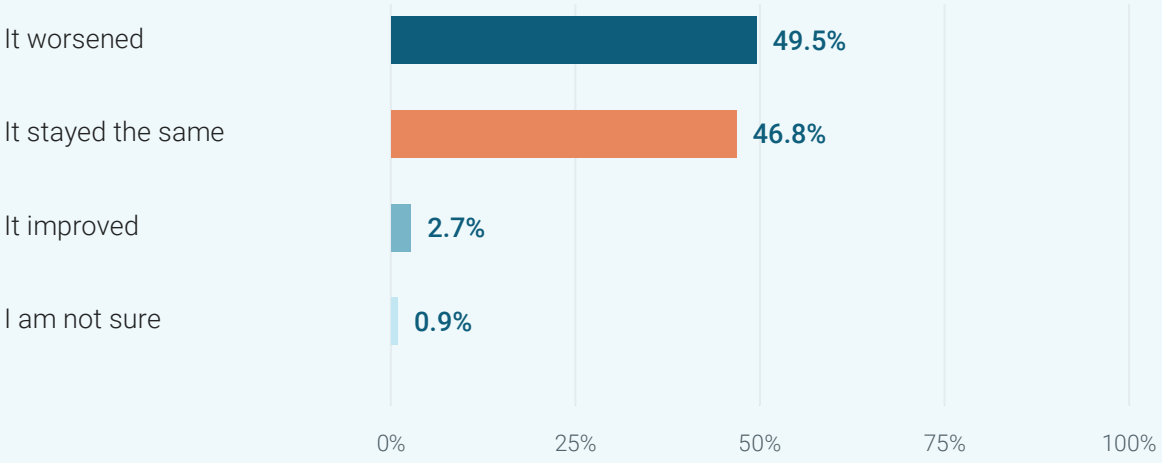
Question: Over the past six months, has your household's ability to cover its basic living needs changed?

01.12.00 - Ability to cover basic needs:



Question: has your access to aid changed since you arrived in Lebanon?

01.12.00 - Ability to aid:



This finding is further supported by data collected through key informant interviews. Employment opportunities, in Bekaa and in Tripoli, remain limited due to the lack of legal residency, which increases "newcomers" vulnerability and pushes many into informal labor conditions. As a result, "newcomers" face labor exploitation and heightened socioeconomic vulnerability.

For "newcomers" in Lebanon, obstacles accessing employment extend beyond economic instability, affecting their ability to secure the conditions necessary for a dignified life and to fully enjoy the rights protected under international instruments to which Lebanon is a party.

Restrictions on legal employment and dependency on the sponsorship system or being forced to engage in informal work would expose "newcomers"-as has been the case for long-standing refugees, to heightened legal and personal risks. The sponsorship system is often described as modern slavery, as a result of which "newcomers" would be at increased risk to threats, blackmail, exploitation, slavery and trafficking and other forms of abuse in order to maintain their valid residency permit and to secure their job [49].

Moreover, limited access to formal channels of protection further constraints their ability to seek justice and protection in cases of violations and threats.

Being trapped in informal work situations or under the sponsorship system, "newcomers" will be increasingly exposed to arrest, forced return, and deportation [50]. Hence, Lebanon would once again violate its international human rights obligations, particularly the principle of non-refoulement.

These structural barriers would engineer circumstances that would undermine household's ability to secure adequate living conditions. This, consequently, might push children into child labor in attempts to financially, potentially placing Lebanon at odds with its international obligations to prevent child labor.

On the other hand, the absence of regulation of the employment sector could carry broader economic consequences for Lebanon, potentially tensions and hostility between "newcomers" and the host community. The rise in informal employment will contribute to the expansion of Lebanon's informal economy. Amid the ongoing economic crisis, this will contribute to further fiscal pressure as income generated outside the formal economic spectrum is not subject to taxation and social security mechanisms leading to reduction in governmental revenue resulting in additional pressure on public finances [51]. This, in turn, could limit the capacity of the state to provide essential public services potentially further jeopardizing social cohesion and exacerbating tensions between communities.

49. Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon's Abusive Kafala (sponsorship) System", January 2022, https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/04/lebanons-abusive-kafala-sponsorship-system ; The Kafala System in Lebanon, The Skoll Center, 2023, S. MELHEM, A. RAHWANJI, E. NYABA, J. BOU SABA, "The Kafal system in Lebanon", Map the System, 2023, https://www.skollcentre.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/american-university-of-beirut-the-kafala-system-in-lebanon-compressed.pdf ; M. ZUCCONI, ***Sponsorship system and Syrian refugees: promoting exploitation and abuse. To which extent the Kafala system can be considered a form of human trafficking and the increasing vulnerability of Syrian refugee in Lebanon***, 2017, 73 pages.

50. Global Dialogue, "Surplus and Displacements, Refugees and Migrants", July 2024, https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/articles/surplus-and-displacement-refugees-and-migrants

51. M. ZREIK, "Macroeconomic impact of forced migration on Lebanon with a focus on labor market dynamics and policy strategies for sustainable economic growth", Discover Global Society, October 2024, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s44282-024-00093-1 ; International Labor Organizations, "Lebanon, The Employment, Environment, Climate Nexus Fact Sheet", August 2025, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/Lebanon_Employment_Environment_Factsheet_v5.pdf

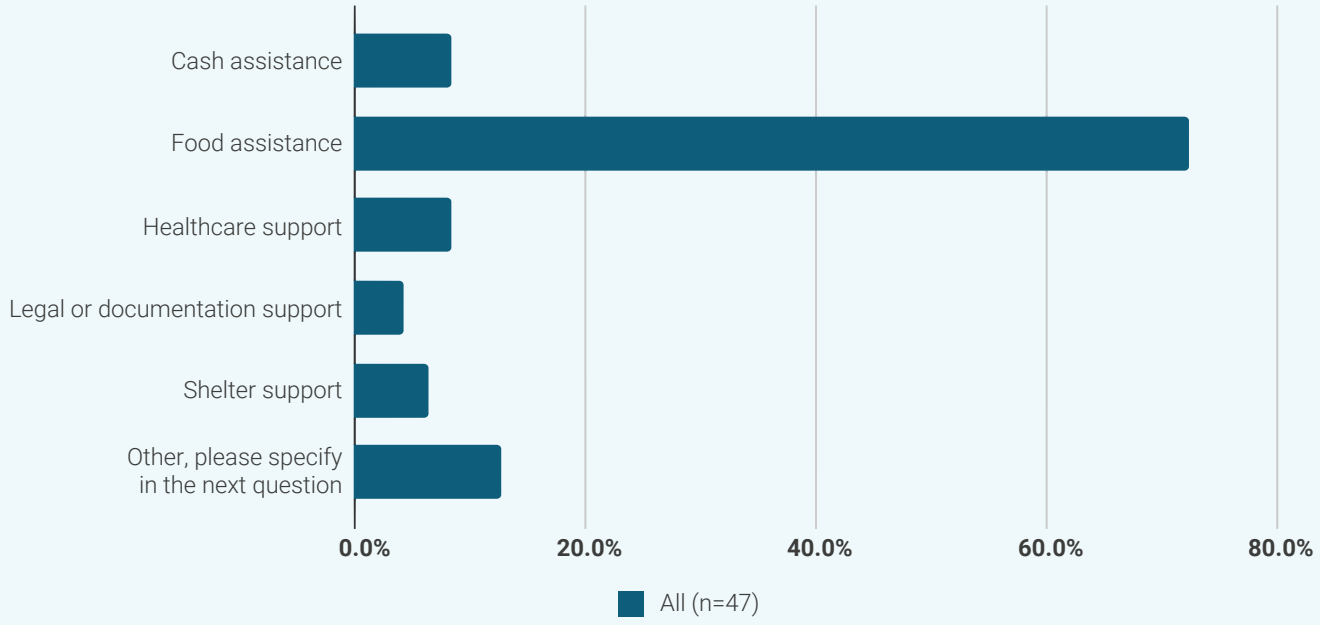
Shrinking Humanitarian Assistance and Growing Vulnerabilities among 'Newcomers'

Survey respondents indicated that more than half of "newcomers" (58%) remain with no access to assistance. Data shows that only 24% have access to assistance and services through UNHCR, while the minority received assistance either from local organizations (10.8%) or individuals (2.7%).

About 72% of the support received by respondents is in the form of food assistance, while cash assistance accounts for only 8.5% of services. Additionally, assistance in legal or documentation matters is the least common form of support, accounting for only 4% of the assistance provided to "newcomers". Almost 80% of "newcomers" respondents were dissatisfied with this kind of assistance.

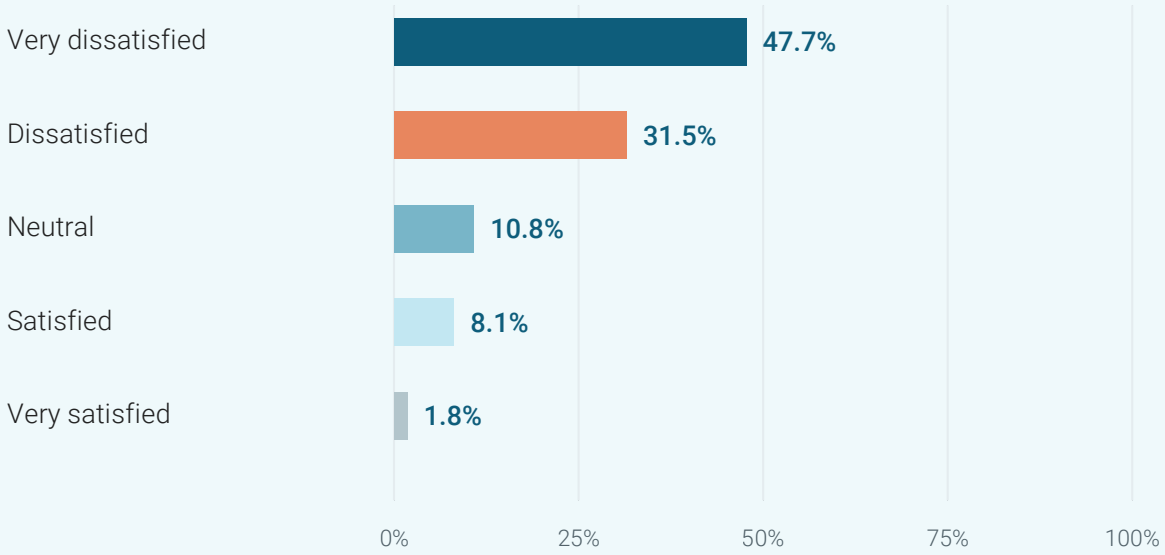
Question: What kind of assistance have you received?

01.04.01 - Kind of assistance - All %:



Question: How satisfied are you with the accessibility of aid and services in your current location in Lebanon?

01.05.00 - Satisfaction with access to aid:



According to Key Informant interviews in Bekaa, "newcomers" face increasing barriers to accessing services as funding cuts affect continuity and availability of the services. The funding constraints have resulted in a compromised quality and comprehensiveness, specifically impacting health care services. The availability of these services remains limited, resulting in inconsistent access to essential assistance among 'newcomers'.

Municipalities also play a key role in regulating access to organizations and service providers to camps. While municipalities are generally lenient regarding access, service delivery remains constrained by lack of funding and operational capacity.

The situation in Tripoli, however, differs, as one KII highlighted that access to health care is generally available to "newcomers" and is less constrained compared to other services, particularly legal residency and documentation services.

Funding constraints can be partly attributed to the shift in the Syrian context following the fall of the Assad regime, which have prompted reorientation of international aid priorities.

While the needs of refugees and host communities remain acute, international support is gradually declining [52]. Shifts in the political landscape across many donor countries have created an increasingly challenging environment for the aid sector [53]. These funding shortfalls [54] reflect broader regional priorities in humanitarian funding.

In light of Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis, sustained funding remains essential to support both refugees and host communities. However, international aid priorities are shifting toward supporting voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and reconstruction efforts inside Syria [55].

Following the fall of the Assad regime, several sanctions that had previously restricted engagement with Syria have been lifted, enabling renewed international political and economic engagement between third countries and Syria [56]. While this marks a significant development for Syria, the simultaneous reduction of funding for refugees and host communities demonstrates a disconnects between international aid priorities and the continued needs of Syrians living outside the country.

The fact that Ahmed al - Sharaa, who has been associated with actors involved in the conflict that has devastated Syria for more than a decade and was previously designated as a terrorist by several governments [57] —now holds a position of authority, appears to have had limited influence on the broader approach adopted by parts of the international community. This is observed despite continued reports alleging persecution by current authorities [58].

As a result, Syrians fleeing their country due to fear of persecution and insecurity under the new government are bearing the consequences of declining assistance, further deepening their exclusion and vulnerability.

The lack of funding of refugees' services and assistance and the lack of aid to support host communities, is likely to have social consequences also exacerbating hostility, and the potential risk of clashes between the host communities and refugees.

52. Access Center For Human Rights, "The impact of U.S. aid cuts on Syrian refugees in Lebanon", November 2025, https://achrights.org/en/2025/11/17/16028/

53. ALNAP, "Global Humanitarian Assistance", 2025, https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2025

54. UNHCR, "Protection monitoring situation of forcibly displaced Syrians in Lebanon", 2025.

55. UN refugee agency calls for greater investment in Syrians returnees, April 2025, https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162136 ; UNHCR operational framework, Voluntary return of Syrian Refugees and IDPs, 2025; AP news, "Qatar to invest hundreds of millions in Lebanon's electricity sector and help return Syrian refugees", January 2026, https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-qatar-electricity-syrian-refugees-army-hezbollah-6ecd22f05f1060ac1ad4c5b9ad1073cc

56. U.S. Department of State, https://www.state.gov/syria sanctions; European Council, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/syria/

57. Encyclopedia Britannica, "Ahmed Al-Sharaa", February 2026, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ahmed-al-Sharaa ; Le Monde, "US removes Syrian president from terror list ahead of Washington visit", November 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/11/08/us-removes-syrian-president-from-terror-list-ahead-of-washington-visit_6747248_4.html

58. The Middle East Forum, "Sectarian Violence Against Syria's Alawites Has Not Stopped", May 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/sectarian-violence-against-syrias-alawites-has-not-stopped#:~:text= ; International Rescue Committee, "Syrians on the move", https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2025

Disparity Between Long-Standing Refugees and "Newcomers"

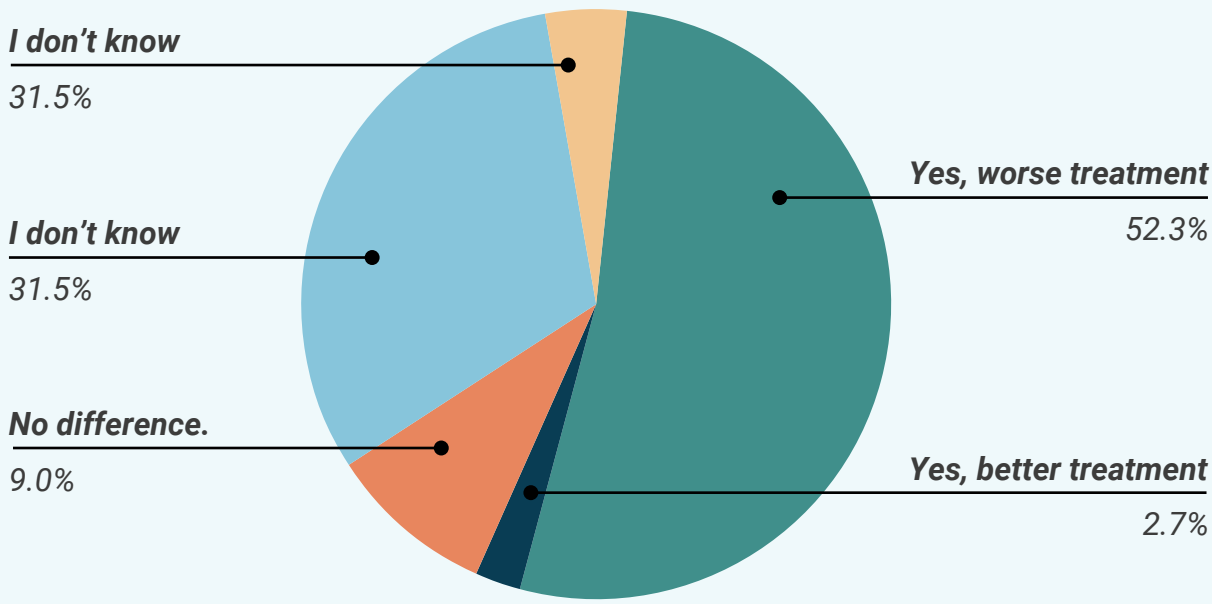
Data Reflecting Disparities

Data collected through the desk review; key informant interviews and surveys suggest that long-standing refugees generally were receiving better services and assistance than "newcomers".

52% of respondents believe that long-standing refugees (Syrian individuals who arrived to Lebanon before December 8, 2024) experience relatively more favorable treatment than "newcomers".

Question: Do you feel that newly arrived Syrian refugees are treated differently from refugees who arrived before the fall of the Assad regime in aid distribution?

01.06.00 - Treatment between new and old refugees:



A key informant in Bekaa highlighted this finding stating that there is a clear distinction in practice between earlier refugee populations shaped by both institutional and cultural factors. "Newcomers" do not receive the same level of support, as emergency responses is significantly affected by shifts in the international community and its funding policies and priorities.

Shifting Patterns of Support: Political and Religious Dynamics amid Humanitarian Funding Cuts

There is also another point that distinguishes between long-standing refugees and "newcomers". Syrian "newcomers" often exhibit identifiable cultural and religious characteristics, which appear to influence both their settlement patterns in Lebanon and their access to local support networks.

According to data collected from surveys, most "newcomers" originate from areas associated with support for the former Syrian regime [59]. Survey responses show that a significant number of these individuals settled in Baalbek / El Hermel region. In addition, key informant interviews highlighted the role of Hezbollah, a Shia political party in Lebanon, in providing assistance to refugees in Baalbek / El Hermel. Hezbollah's involvement can be understood in relation to the religious and cultural ties it shares with the affected population, as well as the vulnerabilities of a community that has been disproportionately affected by the post-Assad political order, with which Hezbollah had been aligned. This support serves as an alternative source of assistance in light of significantly declined international aid available to "newcomers", in contrast to the situation of refugees who arrived previously. This suggests that political and religious affiliations can influence access to assistance through informal networks, pointing to potential indirect effects of sectarian and political dynamics on displacement experiences. At the same time these dynamics may contribute to tensions within host communities, particularly in areas where local political parties have historically opposed Hezbollah. Such tensions may indirectly affect "newcomers'" experience, which may contribute to a discriminatory environment based on religion and sectarian divisions [60]. This situation could be illustrated by the key informant interview indicating that in Tripoli, specific groups, especially the Alawite community, are facing increasing pressure amplifying their vulnerability.

Drivers of Displacement and their Implications

Survey's findings indicate that the reasons inciting "newcomers" to flee Syria differ from those of long-standing refugees. While long-standing refugees fled Syria primarily due to generalized and indiscriminate violence resulting from the war [61], most "newcomers" are fleeing Syria because they are facing individualized persecution on account of their political or religious affiliation. According to the data collected, the majority of respondents (63%) in Baalbak El Hermel arrived in December 2024 and the vast majority (88%) located in this region originated from Homs. It must be noted that in December

59. European Union Agency for Asylum, "Former Assad government officials, and civilians perceived to be supporting the Assad regime", June 2025, https://www.euaa.europa.eu/interim-country-guidance-syria/former-assad-government-officials-and-civilians-perceived-be-supporting-assad-regime

60. Minority rights group international, "An uncertain future for Syrian refugees in Lebanon: The challenges of life in exile and the barriers to return", February 2019, https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2024/01/mrg-brief-leb-eng-feb19.pdf

61. L. VIGNAL, "Syria: the strategy of destruction", Books and Ideas, June 2016, https://laviedesidees.fr/IMG/pdf/20160329_syrie_destruction_en.pdf ; UNHCR, "Syria Refugee Crisis explained",December 2025, https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/

2024, following the collapse of the Assad regime, individuals perceived to be supporters of the former Assad regime reportedly fled Homs due to fear of targeted persecution by authorities or government affiliated militias [62].

On the other hand, the majority of respondents (61%) in North Lebanon arrived in March 2025 and primarily came from Tartous (61%). During this period, Alawite communities in Tartous reported experiencing religiously motivated persecution inciting displacement [63]. Druze community in Suwayda also lived similar level of threats in relation to their religious identity [64].

Hence, as the situation in Syria has evolved, many individuals are now fleeing due to heightened risk of persecution by state authorities and state-affiliated armed groups. These risks are linked to their political opinions or religious backgrounds, and meet the criteria set out in Article 1 A 2) of the Geneva Convention 1951 considering a refugee any person who fled their country of origin by fear of being persecuted for reason of "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social groups or political opinion." Consequently, these individuals have strengthened prospects of resettlement to a third country in line with the preferences expressed by the majority of survey respondents.

The majority of the respondents reported that they do not intend to return to Syria. 72% of respondents expressed their desire to relocate to a third country, and 13% indicated that while they wished to return to Syria it is conditioned to security improvements, economic stability and availability of adequate housing, and a mere 11% of respondents said that they wish to stay in Lebanon.

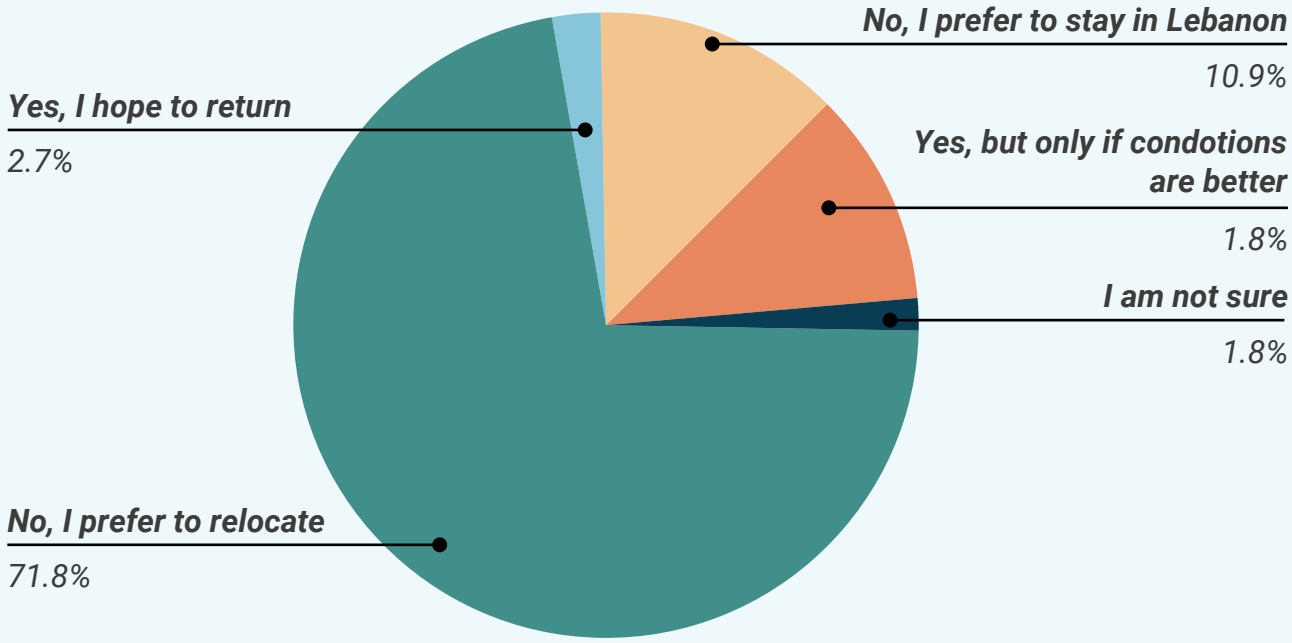
62. Euronews, "Thousands flee Homs as insurgents led by HTS advance on Syria's third largest city", December 2024, https://www.euronews.com/2024/12/06/thousands-flee-homs-as-insurgents-led-by-hts-advance-on-syrias-third-largest-city ; Middle East Forum, "Sectarian Violence Against Syria's Alawites Has Not Stopped", March 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/sectarian-violence-against-syrias-alawites-has-not-stopped ; Syrian Network For Human Rights, "Not fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicial killed in Homs city", April 2025, https://snhr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/S250405E.pdf

63. Human Rights Watch, ""Are you Alawi?" Identity based killings during Syria's transition", September 2025, https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/09/23/are-you-alawi/identity-based-killings-during-syrias-transition ; International Team For the Study of Security, "A year into Al Sharaa's rule and sectarian violence", January 2026, https://www.itssverona.it/a-year-into-al-sharaas-rule-and-sectarian-violence

64. International Team For the Study of Security, "A year into Al Sharaa's rule and sectarian violence", January 2026, https://www.itssverona.it/a-year-into-al-sharaas-rule-and-sectarian-violence

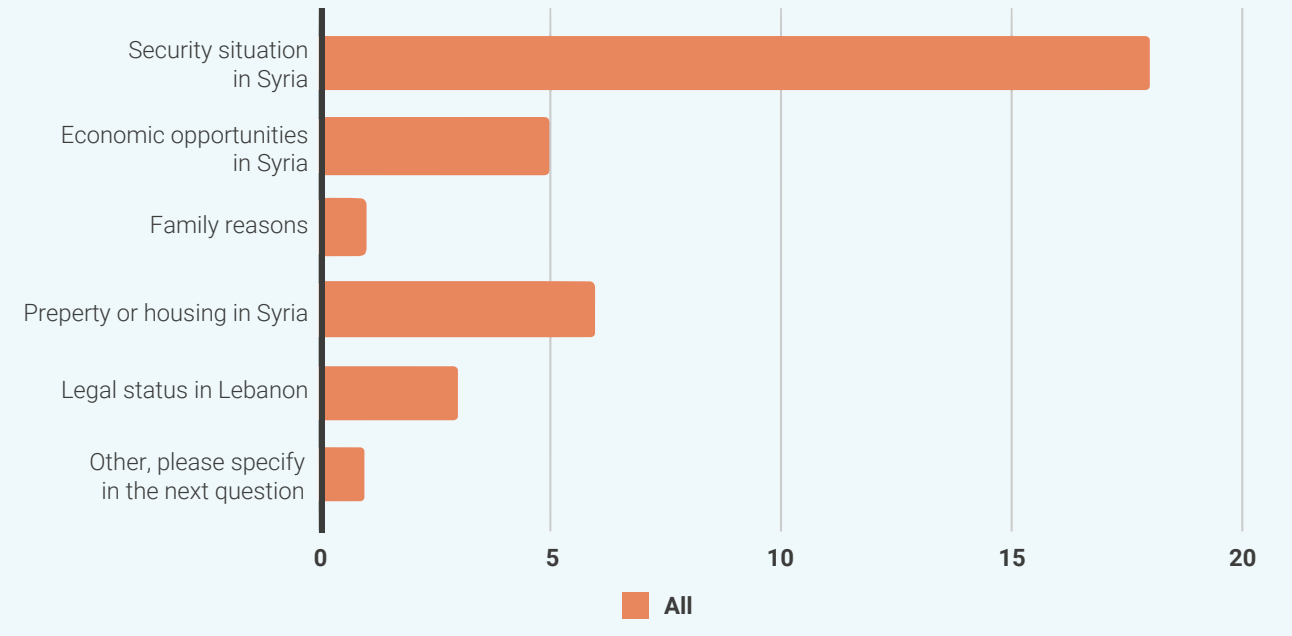
Question: Do you hope to return to Syria at some point in the future?

01.14.00 - Future Intentions:



Question: What factors influence your decision to return to Syria?

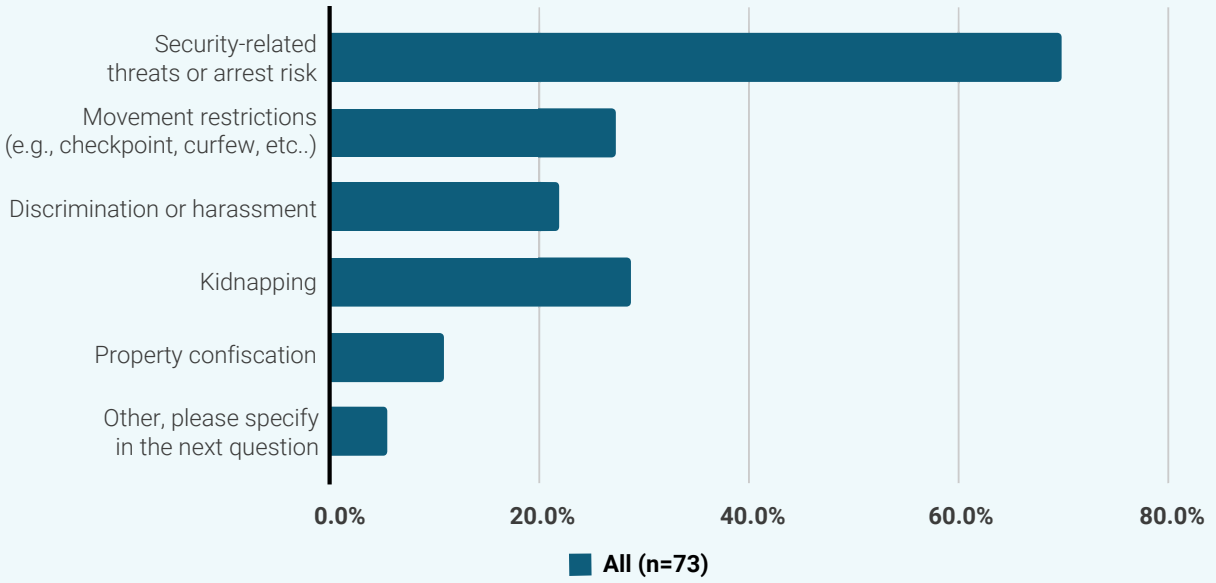
01.14.01 - Factors influence return decision:



However, this may not accurately reflect the situation in practice, as resettlement opportunities remain shaped by broader political priorities and policies of the international community.

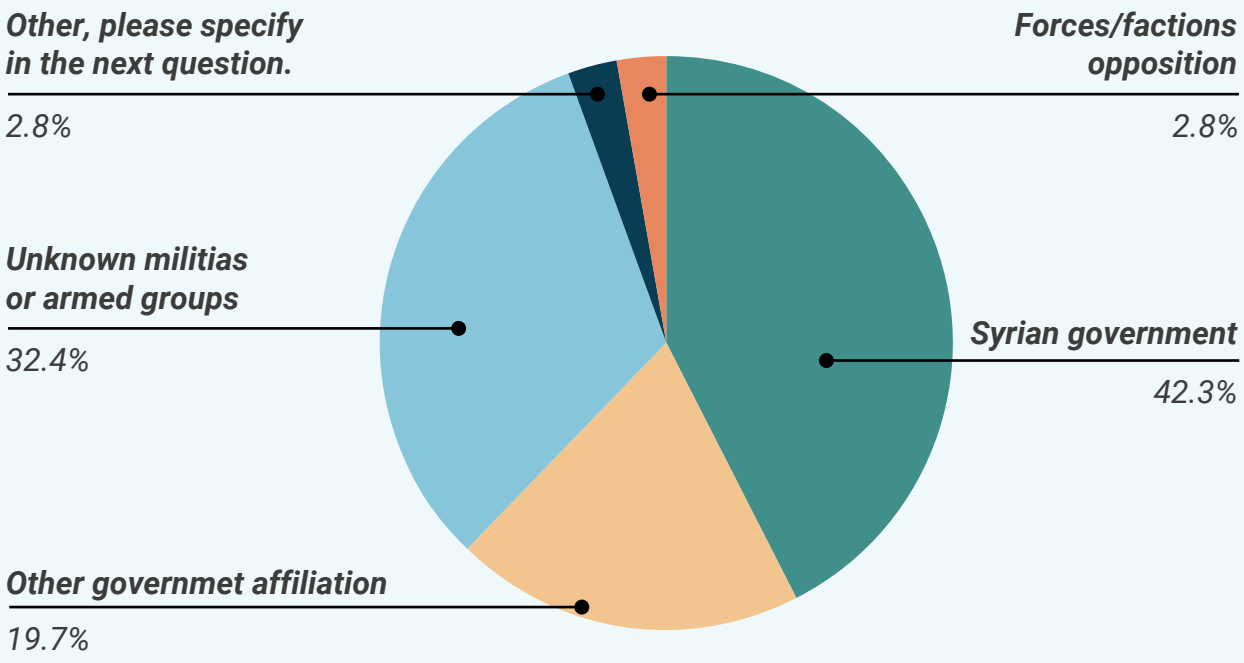
Question: What kind of restrictions or violations have they faced?

01.02.04 - Type of issues faced by relatives - All %:



Question: Who do you believe is behind these restrictions and violations?

01.02.06 - Factor responsible for issues faced by relatives:



06

Conclusion

Refugees in Lebanon have historically experienced persistent legal, social, and economic vulnerabilities and challenges. However, the situation of Syrian "newcomers" following the fall of the Assad regime in 2024 reveals a renewed and intensified pattern of vulnerability.

The persistent root of this situation lies in the depletion of international aid and the absence of a national asylum policy. In the absence of formal legal recognition, refugees are faced with restrictive, discriminatory, and discretionary security practices. This legal vacuum increases refugees' vulnerabilities and exposes them to heightened risks.

These practices stand in tension with Lebanon's obligations under international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention Against Torture. Moreover, there is a persistent risk of forced return raising serious concerns regarding continued violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

Rather than improving overtime, the situation is deteriorating. The ongoing economic crisis and continued Israeli war and aggression on Lebanon, combined with an ambiguous legal framework are worsening conditions for both refugees and host community.

The consequences of this situation are visible across multiple sectors including the threat to child protection, expansion of informal tented settlements, and the increase in informal labor. Restricted access to aid and basic needs further deepens the vulnerability of "newcomers" and host communities. Many of the regions where "newcomers" are concentrated are among the most longstanding marginalized regions characterized by longstanding deficiencies in infrastructure, services, and livelihood opportunities. As a result, additional strain is placed on host communities in these regions contributing to social fragmentation and tensions.

Funding reductions further compound these challenges. As international priorities are shifting from sustained assistance to refugees and host communities, "newcomers" are facing harsher living conditions compared to long-standing refugees.

Without long-term solutions and structural reforms, vulnerabilities will deepen, and social cohesion will further erode.

There is a pressuring need to enact actionable steps and effective measures that are needed on different levels, to accommodate the situation and alleviate the challenges that both refugees and host communities are bearing.

07

Recommendations

Legal and Administrative Interventions

- Establish a protection system aimed at safeguarding the legal status and fundamental rights of refugees in Lebanon.
- Resume refugee's registration by UNHCR, to ensure protection and legal recognition of individuals.
- Facilitate access to civil registration and legal residency with simplified procedures taking into consideration displacements' realities, including replacing the requirement for documents that cannot be safely retrieved from Syria.
- Suspend arrest, detention and deportation practices linked to irregular legal status of "newcomers".
- Suspend the sponsorship system.
- Enable refugees to participate in the formal economy and formalize the informal employment sector.
- Enhance child protection by facilitating access to birth registration, medical services, education, and other fundamental rights.

Access to Fundamental Services

- Halt the arbitrary dismantling of informal tented settlement and forced evictions.
- Allow basic living infrastructures in informal tented settlements.
- Guarantee decent housing conditions for refugees.

Host Communities and Social Cohesion

- Strengthen state support for marginalized host communities.
- Promote social cohesion and protect human rights through foresight and accountability mechanisms to prevent inter-community tensions and hostility.
- Facilitate local dialogues between refugees and host communities to foster a peaceful coexistence.

International Funding and Humanitarian Commitment

- Address funding priorities by recognizing the vital needs of Syrian refugees despite political context
- Lobby for funding allocations to remain needs-based and not driven by political considerations.
- Ensure access to third-country resettlement in accordance with international standards and commitments.



STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION AND PROTECTION GAPS:

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON IN THE POST-2024 REALITY

CLDH

AUGUST 2026

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