



# **Human Rights Situation of Newly Arrived Syrian Refugees in Lebanon**



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the Mediterranean  
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## 1- Context analysis:

Since the fall of the Assad regime, thousands of Syrians have fled the country, seeking refuge in Lebanon amid growing fears of human rights violations, revenge killings, and generalized insecurity. Months later, following a series of attacks against minorities in Syria's coastal areas, a new wave of refugees arrived in Lebanon after being targeted and terrorized because of their religious identity, in what amounted to deliberate sectarian attacks and killings. These developments reflect the deep instability and rapid changes Syria is undergoing. With continued violence against minority communities, including Alawites, Christians, Druze, and Kurds, many Syrians are facing serious human rights violations and life-threatening conditions in several regions, pushing them to seek safety and assistance in neighboring countries like Lebanon. Syrians fleeing violence in coastal and other regions of Syria have sought refuge not only in Lebanon, but also in neighboring countries, including Turkey and Iraq, reflecting a broader regional displacement pattern driven by insecurity, sectarian targeting, and the absence of protection inside Syria.

In Lebanon, already established Syrian refugees are themselves under increasing pressure, facing rising hate speech, curfews, movement restrictions, and limited access to adequate services and protection. This is taking place in the context of an already fragile national situation, marked by Israeli attacks, internal protests, an overstretched healthcare system, and a shrinking humanitarian response due to funding cuts. Post December 2024 Syrian Refugees face additional layers of vulnerability, including discrimination both from host communities and within refugee communities themselves. Many newly arrived refugees report being rejected by earlier Syrian arrivals, who are unwilling or unable to host them in their areas or support them in accessing information and available services. Based on CLDH's observations, a significant number of newcomers are deeply traumatized, afraid to move freely due to fear of reprisals, and lack any social networks or community connections in Lebanon, further compounding their isolation and vulnerability.

## 2- Data Collection Method:



The report adopted a mixed-method approach. Through its established partnership with Upinion<sup>1</sup>, CLDH designed a questionnaire to assess the situation of Syrian refugees who entered Lebanon after December 2024, with a focus on their reasons for leaving Syria, their current living conditions in Lebanon, and any violations they may have experienced.

The questionnaire was distributed online to 126 refugees across multiple regions, including Akkar, Baalbek-Hermel, Beirut, the Bekaa, Mount Lebanon, Nabatieh, North Lebanon, and South Lebanon. A total of 116 respondents completed the questionnaire in full.

Of the respondents, 81% were male and 19% female. Regarding age distribution, 32% were between 36 and 45 years old, 31% between 26 and 35, 26% between 46 and 55, 10% between 18 and 25, 3% between 56 and 65, and 2% under the age of 18.

### **3- Findings:**

The following findings provide an overview of the main trends and patterns identified through the research. While the data reflects diverse experiences, it points to consistent structural issues and recurring challenges that shape refugees' access to documentation, basic services, healthcare and safety and security situations. The analysis follows details of these findings with supporting data.

- **Reasons for leaving Syria**

94% of respondents cited seeking safety and security as the main driver for leaving. As a matter of fact, respondents cited grave and immediate threats to their lives as the primary reasons for leaving Syria. Many described pervasive fear stemming from home invasions, beatings, death threats, and targeted persecution based on sectarian and religious identity, particularly against Shia and Alawite communities. The pervasive sense of insecurity within these communities is largely a result of targeted displacement of minorities. This form of displacement is inherently difficult to reverse, as it is driven by identity-based violence and systematic exclusion, rendering return increasingly unsafe over time. The findings therefore underscore the need to approach this type of displacement as a distinct and structural phenomenon, rather than framing it as a temporary or short-term humanitarian situation. Some respondents also referred to sectarian threats from dominant groups, racist practices, and massacres carried out on



the basis of identity, especially in coastal areas. Several respondents reported losing their homes due to violence and being persecuted both for their religious affiliation and, in some cases, for their secular or atheist beliefs, which became life-threatening after extremist groups took control. Accounts also included kidnapping, murder, intimidation, and the lasting psychological trauma resulting from years of conflict, with some survivors stating that the collapse of state authority further worsened their sense of insecurity. Many emphasized the complete absence of accountability, noting that killings continue without investigation, the fate of the missing remains unaddressed, and young people are being targeted solely because of their sect, leaving them with no choice but to flee in search of safety and protection.

- Legal Status in Lebanon

When asked about attempts to register their stay or apply for legal status in Lebanon, 37% of respondents tried to apply while 63 reported they haven't tried to do so. Among the respondents who tried applying for legal status, 54% reported that it was not successful, while 39% confirmed that it was still pending. These findings reflect widespread fear and distrust among respondents toward official entities in Lebanon, as they prefer to stay irregulars than having to face authorities, fearing arrest, and having to navigate the complex process of legal status application. Some respondents reported that they contacted UNHCR for urgent help with their papers, but UNHCR rejected their application, while others fear being handed out to the Syrian authorities.

- Difference in treatment between already established refugees and post December 2024 refugees

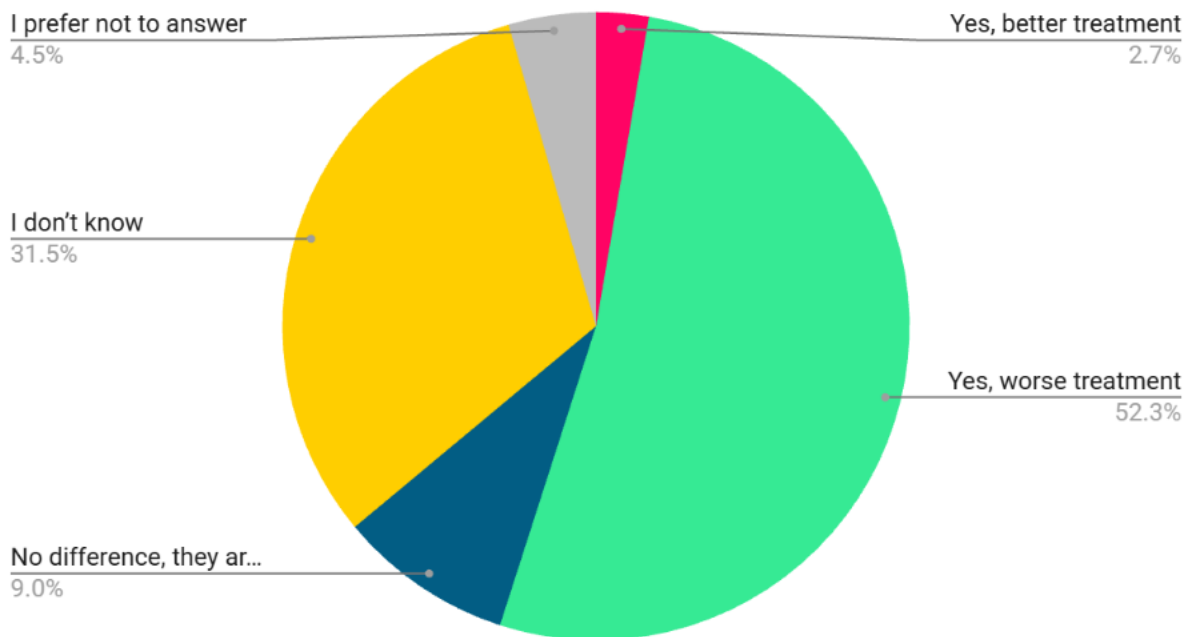
When asked if they feel that newly arrived Syrian refugees are treated differently from refugees who arrived before the fall of the Assad regime in terms of aid distribution, 52% of respondent said they were treated worse than their counterparts.

The distinction between refugees who arrived before and after the fall of the Assad regime functions as a key organizing principle through which access to protection and legal legitimacy of the refugees is shaped. Newly arrived refugees remain largely unregistered, socially disconnected and institutionally invisible, placing them at an immediate disadvantage. For post December 2024 refugees, many of them who belong to minority groups fleeing targeted violence, the perception of being treated worse is therefore not only material but also symbolic and reinforcing feeling of exclusion. This



differentiation functions as a broader politics of recognition whereby earlier refugees are perceived as more legible and manageable in existing frameworks than new ones. In this way the vulnerabilities of newer groups of refugees are not recognized and are deferred.

### 01.06.00 - Treatment between new and old refugees



- Access to Assistance and Services:

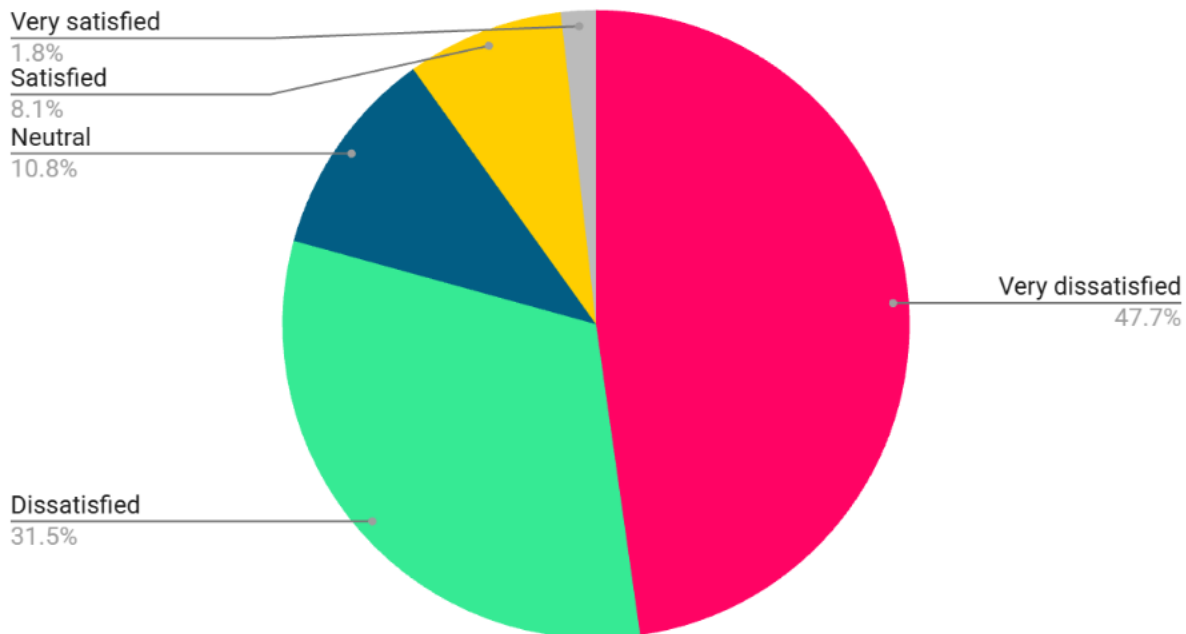
When asked if they received any assistance or guidance from UN agencies or local organizations in the past six months in Lebanon, 24% of respondents reported receiving support from UNHCR, 11% received support from local organizations, 4.5% received support from other sources, while 58% reported that they have not received any assistance or guidance. Of the respondent who received assistance, 72% received food assistance, 8.5% received cash assistance, 8.5% received health support, 6% received shelter support, and 4% received legal support.

48% of respondents reported feeling very dissatisfied with the aid received, 31.5% were dissatisfied, 11% were neutral, 8% were satisfied while 2% were very satisfied.



These findings point to significant gaps in outreach, coverage, and adequacy of assistance for post-December refugees in Lebanon. The fact that a majority of respondents received no support at all, combined with high levels of dissatisfaction among those who did, suggests that existing aid mechanisms are failing to meet urgent needs or to reach newly arrived and particularly vulnerable populations. Assistance appears to be heavily concentrated on short-term food support, with minimal access to legal, health, or shelter services, despite the protection risks and complex vulnerabilities reported by respondents. This imbalance, coupled with limited guidance and information, exacerbates insecurity and undermines refugees' ability to navigate residency, access services, and pursue durable solutions.

#### 01.05.00 - Satisfaction with access to aid



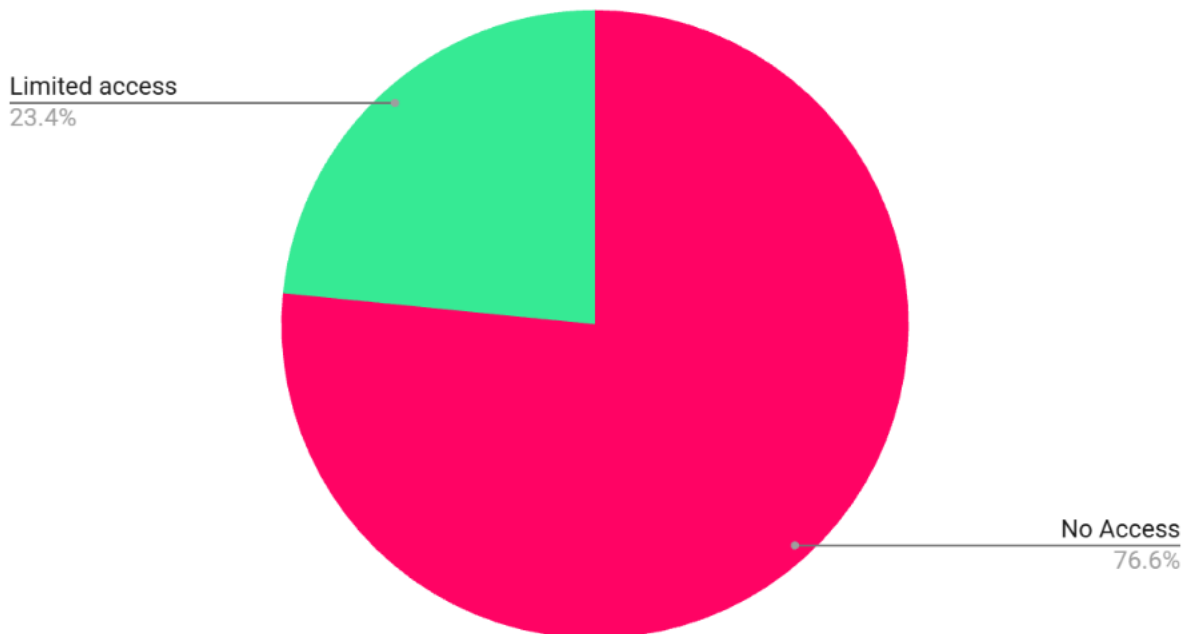
- Access to healthcare

When asked to describe their access to healthcare, the majority of respondents – 77% of them – reported having no access to healthcare at all while the rest of them reported having limited access to healthcare. It is important to stress that access to healthcare is



a legally recognized human right under Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Lebanon is a State-party.

### 01.07.00 - Access to healthcare



- Access to education

When asked about their access to education, 59% of respondents reported they had no access to education, 39% had limited access to education, and only 2% had access to education, raising concern over the situation of refugee children in Lebanon.

Children who are out of school are more likely to be subjected to child labor, often in hazardous and exploitative conditions; early and forced marriage, particularly for girls; recruitment or use by armed groups; violence, abuse, and exploitation, including sexual exploitation; and trafficking. Prolonged exclusion from education also increases exposure to street violence, criminalization, and detention, while deepening poverty, social exclusion, and long-term dependency. The findings also suggest that access to education is strongly influenced by the timing of displacement. Prolonged exclusion from education for these communities further contributes to the intergenerational



transmission of vulnerability, undermining prospects for durable solutions and long-term integration. Additionally, lack of schooling severely affects children's mental health and psychosocial well-being, erodes protective routines, and limits future livelihood opportunities, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of vulnerability and marginalization.

- Access to aid

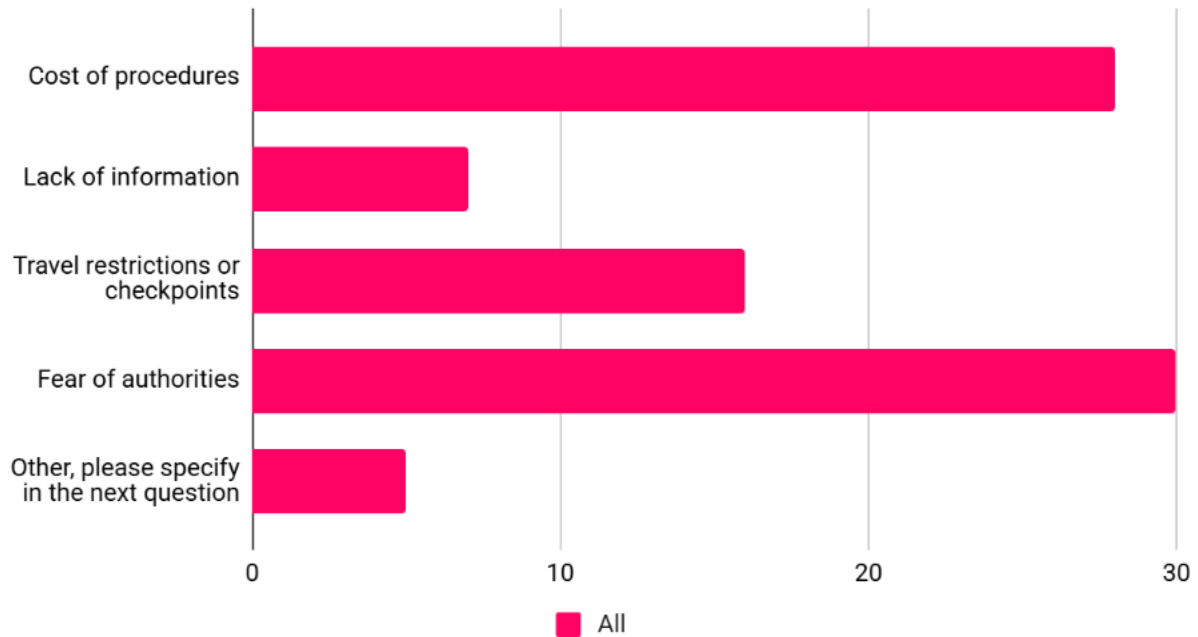
When asked if their access to aid changed since they arrived in Lebanon, 50% of respondents reported that it got worse, 47% reported it stayed the same and 3% said it improved. Respondents consistently described severe gaps in assistance and protection since their arrival in Lebanon. Many reported receiving aid only once or twice, often limited to short-term food or winter items, before support was abruptly discontinued. Several remain unrecognized by UNHCR despite repeated attempts to register, while others were told to return multiple times without follow-up, leading them to stop seeking assistance altogether. Families highlighted the heavy burden of rent, lack of employment opportunities, and the absence of support for food, healthcare, education, and heating, particularly for children, the elderly, and persons with chronic illnesses. Movement away from initial reception areas further cut them off from aid, leaving many without access to organizations, information, or referral pathways. Overall, respondents expressed a strong sense of abandonment, insecurity, and despair, describing their situation as one of extreme vulnerability with no consistent humanitarian or legal support. This only goes to show that Syrian refugees fled a precarious and dangerous environment to be met with uncertainty in Lebanon, exacerbating their living conditions.

- Documentation

When asked whether they or their family members had faced difficulties in obtaining or renewing legal documentation, 47% of respondents reported experiencing such difficulties. Meanwhile, 48% indicated that they had not attempted to obtain or renew their documents at all, reflecting deep mistrust toward authorities and widespread fear of arrest, deportation, torture, or handover to the Syrian regime. Among those who did not attempt to regularize their status, 58% cited fear of local authorities as the primary reason, and 54% identified the high cost of documentation renewal as a major barrier to access.



### 01.13.03 - Main barriers in accessing documentation



#### ○ Future intentions

When asked about their future intentions and whether they envisage returning to Syria, the majority of respondents expressed a clear reluctance to do so. Some 72% stated that their preferred option is to move to a third country, while 11% indicated a desire to remain in Lebanon. Only 13% said they would consider returning to Syria, and even then only if conditions significantly improve, with an additional 3% expressing a general hope of return at some point in the future. This overwhelming lack of intention to return reflects the depth of fear, insecurity, and trauma experienced by respondents, as well as a profound loss of trust in safety guarantees. Notably, 95% identified the ongoing security situation in Syria as the primary factor shaping their decision, underscoring that return is currently perceived as neither safe nor sustainable.

#### 4- Legal Analysis:

One of the main sources of vulnerability for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is the State's non-ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. These instruments



oblige States Parties to establish a structured legal framework governing the status of refugees and to guarantee them a set of fundamental rights, including legal residence, access to basic services, and protection from refoulement.

Lebanon's decision not to accede to these treaties has resulted in the absence of a national legal and institutional framework regulating the legal status of refugees and ensuring their protection. Consequently, Syrian refugees remain in a precarious legal situation, exposed to heightened risks of exploitation, arbitrary detention, and rights violations.

In practice, responsibility for the management of the refugee situation in Lebanon has been delegated to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, since 2015, UNHCR has suspended refugee status registration for newly arrived Syrians, further exacerbating their legal vulnerability and limiting their access to protection mechanisms and humanitarian assistance.

As a result, newcomers face serious barriers to meeting their basic needs, with limited or no access to education, insecure and inadequate housing, and a heightened risk of labor exploitation.

However, the lack of a legal status for newcomers doesn't mean that they don't have rights. Lebanon, through its ratification of international conventions, has obliged itself to respect international standards when it comes to human rights, and for everyone, despite their nationality.

However, the absence of a formal legal status for newcomers does not imply the absence of rights. Through its ratification of multiple international human rights conventions, Lebanon has undertaken binding obligations to respect and uphold international human rights standards for all individuals within its territory, without discrimination, regardless of nationality or legal status.

Lebanon has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and is therefore legally bound to ensure the protection and dignity of newcomers. Article 9 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to liberty and security of the person for everyone, without distinction, while Article 26 affirms the principle of equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on any ground, including nationality. Accordingly, the absence of a legal status cannot justify arbitrary detention or discriminatory treatment of newcomers.

In addition, the labor exploitation faced by newcomers is prohibited under the Forced Labor Convention (ILO Convention No. 29), which Lebanon ratified in 1977 and which explicitly prohibits forced or compulsory labor. Such practices also contradict Lebanon's



obligations under Articles 2(2) and 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Lebanon is a party, which guarantee the right of everyone to just and favorable conditions of work without discrimination. It is also worth noting that, under Lebanese law, such acts may amount to the crime of human trafficking pursuant to Article 586 of the Penal Code, as amended by Law No. 164/2011 on the Punishment of the Crime of Human Trafficking. This is due to the coercive and compulsory nature of the labor imposed on these individuals, carried out under threat and without their genuine consent.

The limited access to housing and education afforded to newcomers constitutes a violation of Lebanon's international obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which, in Article 11, guarantees everyone the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing, and housing. It also breaches Lebanon's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Lebanon has ratified, as Article 28 affirms the right of every child to education on the basis of equal opportunity and without discrimination.

In conclusion, Lebanon must immediately take concrete measures, in accordance with its international obligations, to ensure that newcomers are afforded adequate living conditions and basic human rights.

## 5- Recommendations

### To the Lebanese Authorities

1. **Ensure protection from refoulement:** Publicly reaffirm and effectively implement the principle of non-refoulement, including by halting deportations, forced returns, and any practices that expose refugees to the risk of handover to Syrian authorities.
2. **Remove barriers to legal residency and documentation:** Simplify and reduce the cost of residency renewal procedures for Syrian refugees, particularly newly arrived individuals, older persons, persons with disabilities, and those with chronic illnesses.
3. **End discriminatory practices and movement restrictions:** Refrain from imposing curfews, arbitrary movement restrictions, or discriminatory measures targeting Syrian refugees, and ensure equal protection under the law regardless of date of arrival, religion, or legal status.



4. **Guarantee access to essential services:** Ensure that access to healthcare, education, and basic services is not conditioned on legal status, in line with Lebanon's obligations under international human rights law.
5. **Take immediate action** to investigate and prosecute those responsible for labor exploitation of newcomers, in full compliance with its domestic and international legal obligations.

### To UN Agencies

5. **Strengthen registration and protection referral mechanisms:** Improve outreach and registration procedures for post-December 2024 arrivals, ensuring timely registration, clear information, follow-up, and access to protection services, including legal aid and case management.
6. **Enhance access to healthcare and education:** Expand support for primary and secondary healthcare, mental health and psychosocial services, and inclusive education for refugee children, with particular attention to those currently out of school.
7. **Prioritize protection-based assistance:** Ensure that assistance strategies move beyond short-term food aid and adequately address protection risks, legal needs, shelter insecurity, and the specific vulnerabilities of minorities, survivors of violence, and persons with medical conditions.

### To Donors

9. **Increase and sustain funding for protection-focused programming:** Reverse cuts to protection, legal aid, healthcare, and education programs, and provide flexible, multi-year funding that allows actors to respond to evolving needs and new arrivals.
10. **Fund pathways to durable solutions:** Support resettlement, humanitarian admission, family reunification, and other safe and legal pathways for refugees who cannot safely return to Syria or sustainably remain in Lebanon.



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