

Cycles of displacement continue in Lebanon: NGO stories from families in limbo

The people behind the numbers

The escalation of hostilities in Lebanon has forced more than one million people across the country to flee their homes in search of safety. Displacement has become a daily reality: families have been forced to move, taking only what they could carry, and not knowing when, or whether, they will be able to return. Many have been displaced more than once, moving from one temporary place to another in an ever-shifting struggle for survival.

The ceasefire negotiations between the US and Iran bring little reassurance to civilians unable to return home due to ongoing insecurity and military occupation. The latest agreement, the details of which remain unclear for Lebanon, comes after two months of supposed ‘ceasefire’, during which Israeli strikes and displacement orders continued and Hezbollah maintained their attacks on northern Israel. Southern Lebanon is facing daily airstrikes and advancing ground operations. The casualties continue to rise: since 2 March more than 3,700 people have been killed and over 11,700 injured.¹ There have been more than 200 Israeli attacks on healthcare, resulting in over 130 deaths of health personnel.² Hospitals, water installations, fuel stations, bridges and tens of thousands of housing units have been destroyed.³ The estimated cost of the war so far extends into billions.⁴



Displaced families in Beirut, sheltering in tents along the streets © Norwegian Refugee Council

¹ Figures according to Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health

² OCHA Lebanon Flash Appeal Update #33, 8 June 2026

³ Lebanon's National Centre for Scientific Research estimated on 22 April that over 50,000 housing units had been damaged or destroyed by Israeli attacks on Lebanon. The figure will now be far higher.

⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2026/5/22/lebanons-economy-struggles-under-renewed-war-and-global-fuel-crisis>

Behind the numbers are ordinary civilians living with the consequences of prolonged insecurity, loss and uncertainty. Across Lebanon, families are trying to hold onto a sense of stability while facing damaged homes, disrupted services, vanished income and growing financial pressures. Many are moving between overcrowded shelters and costly rental accommodation, often with limited options and little certainty about what comes next. For those from bombarded and bulldozed villages at the southern border, the question is no longer only when they can return, but whether return will be possible at all.

'For three days, we were in cars, on the move, moving between places'

Ahmad, displaced from Tyre district, south Lebanon

NGOs are providing assistance to individuals reaching breaking point, cut off from their livelihoods, increasingly reliant on external support, fearful for their children's future. Humanitarian workers are often themselves displaced, sharing the same insecurity and emotional strain as the communities they support.



*Households leave Beirut's southern suburbs after the first mass displacement order, 5 March 2026
© Norwegian Refugee Council*

Living with uncertainty

For civilians in Lebanon, particularly those from the south, the Bekaa and Beirut's southern suburbs, life is now marked by constant flux, confusion and instability. Since the first week of the conflict, the country has become a chequerboard of overlapping displacement orders, issued on a near-daily basis both for individual targeted buildings and for whole swathes of territory, including up to the Zahrani river – approximately 40km from the southern border. Initially, many fled their homes in search of safety, some settling in collective shelters in Mount Lebanon or the north, and others renting accommodation at inflated prices. But any respite has been uncertain and temporary.

When a ceasefire was first declared on 16 April, those who chose to return home often could not stay, due to ongoing insecurity and evacuation warnings. Some found their buildings were badly damaged or no longer standing. As hostilities intensified again, many families sought refuge closer to home, sometimes shifting from rented flats to collective shelters due to a lack of money. Some still have no option but to sleep in cars or in public spaces. Others describe spending hours on the road, moving between places in search of somewhere safe to stay.



Ahmad speaks to an NGO worker in a shelter in Aley, Mount Lebanon, where he and his family are staying after being displaced from south Lebanon © Action Against Hunger

Ahmad, from Tyre district, was displaced in 2024 with his wife and two children, but this year he observed that the movement of people and pressure on shelters was greater. He describes the initial panic in the wake of the first mass displacement orders: ‘There was pressure everywhere. People were leaving with their children, their families. Everyone was on the move.’ He and his family travelled to and from Beirut in search of available accommodation, eventually finding space in a shelter in Aley, outside the capital. ‘For three days, we were on the road, in cars, outside, moving between places,’ he says. ‘We manage. But it is cold. The number of displaced people is much higher now.’

For many families, this is just the latest chapter in a prolonged cycle of disruption, uncertainty and loss. Displacement erodes families’ ability to secure stable housing, maintain employment, build social networks and plan for the future. The uncertainty itself becomes a source of chronic stress, anxiety and exhaustion. With the 2024 escalation having already drained savings and coping mechanisms for many, some families have been managing this constant uncertainty for two years, intermittently on the move, living from day to day.

‘We are 28 people in one room’

Displaced families in shelters frequently report overcrowded, uncomfortable living conditions with limited hygiene and sanitation facilities. They often share rooms with strangers, sleeping on mattresses in school classrooms, with possessions piled on and under desks. One woman is concerned about the impact on her mother, who has a brain tumour: ‘We asked if she could have a private room as she can’t handle any noise, but there

are so many people here, we have no choice but to share'. Another notes that her daughters can never take off their hijabs due to the lack of privacy: 'girls are getting headaches because they have to wear their hijabs all day and sleep with them on'.

'We didn't have time to think... I only counted my children and ran.'

Mariam, displaced from south Lebanon

Mariam*, from southern Lebanon, was displaced with her three children after a displacement order was issued late at night. 'When everything started, we didn't have time to think,' she says. 'I left in the dark. I didn't take anything. I only counted my children and ran.' She found a space in a shelter in Saida, where she and her children get by with the bare minimum to survive. 'We are 28 people in one room,' she explains. 'We only received a few blankets. The rest of us sleep in our clothes to stay warm.'

Prolonged exposure to unhygienic conditions in shelters is driving disease risks. Children reportedly suffer from respiratory diseases due to cold temperatures at night and the humidity from laundry hanging in corridors and stairwells. Many people are frustrated by the lack of cooking facilities, and the reliance on basic 'ready-to-eat' provisions. 'We want to cook, but there are no ingredients, no rice, nothing,' Mariam notes.

The psychological toll of displacement is perhaps the greatest challenge. Nour*, displaced to a collective shelter in Zahle with her three daughters and parents, summarises the frustration: 'the entire building needs mental health care. Everyone is on edge. There's not a day when there's no argument or fight. We are in an idle state; we can't do anything and yet everything costs money. We're stuck in a place that's not our home.'



In a shelter in Akkar, a displaced grandfather reads to his grandson during the early days of the escalation © WeWorld

Heightened vulnerabilities

Away from the safety and familiarity of home, displaced persons are vulnerable to exploitation in multiple forms. In addition to the lack of privacy in shelters, sanitation facilities are often inadequate, which is particularly challenging for women, children and persons with disabilities. Toilet blocks may be located some distance from sleeping areas, meaning many women and children are fearful of using them at night. 'There is one

bathroom on each floor,’ notes Nour, ‘and if you want to take a shower, you will feel a lot of pressure as there’s always someone waiting outside to use it after you.’ The lack of sanitation facilities makes it difficult for women and girls to manage their menstruation in a safe and dignified way, increasing risks of genital infections.

With families and strangers living in close proximity and growing psychosocial tensions, the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) is heightened. NGO data indicates a 205% increase in GBV referrals between March and April 2026, indicating the danger of increasingly prolonged displacement.⁵ This includes physical, emotional and economic abuse by spouses, alongside cases of sexual harassment in overcrowded living conditions.



Nabil, displaced from Bint Jbeil, being assessed by an NGO worker at a collective shelter in Beirut © Humanity & Inclusion

Shelters, repurposed from schools and other public buildings, are often not accessible for wheelchair users. Many people with physical disabilities choose not to leave their homes, risking exposure to airstrikes, as the challenge of relocating to shared accommodation is too great. Those who are displaced find their vulnerabilities are heightened. Nabil*, a father of four, has a significant hearing impairment since his hearing was damaged during the civil war in 1983. In the current escalation he moved from Bint Jbeil, a border town now under Israeli occupation, to the Sports City collective shelter in south Beirut. Now living in a small tent with his wife and children, he is increasingly isolated, relying on his wife to communicate on his behalf.

Childhoods interrupted

Hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren have seen their classes disrupted yet again, as educational facilities have been converted into collective shelters. While lessons have continued online, in practice many children and young people lack access to devices and internet connectivity. Teachers delivering lessons while displaced also face challenges due to the lack of privacy in shelters. Among the hills of Mount Lebanon, Aliya, an English teacher displaced from near the border, told how she would sit by a roadside where it was quieter, conducting lessons via her phone when the internet coverage allowed. ‘Learning is important,’ she emphasises, ‘Whatever happens, school must continue.’

⁵ Referral Information Management System (RIMS) data, May 2026; trend may reflect increases in reporting

Uprooted from familiar routines and environments, children long to return home. Tala*, a 10-year-old displaced from southern Lebanon, told of her homesickness: 'I really miss school,' she says. 'I want to see my teachers and be with my friends, and study and play again.' She explains how she had to flee with the most basic possessions: 'I brought my notebook to study and my football to play with. I just want the war to end so I can go home to my village and sleep in my own bed.'



Tala, 10, displaced from southern Lebanon. She brought with her a notebook to study and a football
© Save the Children

Hussein* fled his home in south Lebanon at the start of the escalation with his wife Lana*, their three young children, his mother and his sister. They eventually found space in a shelter in Tripoli, at the other end of the country. Shortly after arriving, they learned that their house was gone. 'This shelter was supposed to be a temporary solution,' he says. 'But temporary has turned into months of uncertainty, shared rooms with a dozen others, interrupted routines, boredom, and the emotional weight of starting over far from everything familiar.'

'It doesn't seem like we'll be able to leave here any time soon - needless to say, we have nothing to return to'

*Hussein, father of three
displaced from south Lebanon*

Hussein's three children are unable to study due to the unreliable internet connection, and are suffering from the loss of safety, comfort and routine. Their youngest child has started throwing herself against walls, running frantically around the room, and screaming. 'We don't know how to help

her,' Lana says. Their son is startled by loud noises and has been crying almost every day. The elder daughter dreams of studying nursing, but Hussein worries about the impact of her disrupted education. 'It doesn't seem like we'll be able to leave here any time soon,' he says. 'Needless to say, we have nothing to return to.'

Born into insecurity

Pregnant women, new mothers and infants are particularly at risk. Deteriorating living conditions in overcrowded shelters, including uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, reduced privacy and limited shared sanitation facilities, increase physical and psychological stress for pregnant women, and present practical challenges for those breastfeeding. Reports indicate an increase in the use of formula milk as an alternative to breastfeeding, which presents additional health risks due to the limited access to hygienic preparation facilities in many shelters. Rising food prices and overall economic insecurity lead to an increased risk of infant malnutrition.

One woman, displaced from her home in the south while eight months pregnant, describes her fear of having her child without the support of her family and local doctor. ‘I’m finding it very difficult, wondering how I’m going to give birth in the school, and my parents aren’t near me. Preparation-wise, I haven’t prepared anything, because I had things ready, but I forgot them at home. I hope the war ends soon so I can go back and give birth in my area.’



Maya with her baby boy, who was born in a shelter in Saida © Oxfam*

Maya*, also from the south, found herself going into labour soon after arriving at a shelter in Saida. She had an emergency C-section at eight months, giving birth to a baby boy. They returned home as soon as they could but fled again when hostilities reignited. ‘My son didn’t even get to enjoy his bed,’ she says. ‘He only slept in it for one day. We went through the same experience but this time the fear had increased, not for myself but for my children. There’s no safety for anyone here.’

Healthcare under fire

The influx of displaced people in focal areas like Mount Lebanon has placed huge pressure on healthcare services that were already under strain due to a lack of funding, equipment and trained personnel. NGO-managed mobile service units have helped meet basic needs, particularly for those without access to transportation, but demand is rising. Those with chronic conditions and specific medical requirements suffer from being cut off from their usual services. Meanwhile some patients are deterred from seeking hospital support when referred by NGOs, given the repeated attacks on facilities – including Jabel Amel hospital, the main hospital in Tyre district, which has been damaged in multiple Israeli airstrikes, most recently on 1 June. The frequent occurrence of ‘double tap’ strikes (and sometimes triple or quadruple) is a constant threat facing health responders and injured civilians alike.

‘My son kept telling me, ‘I don’t want to die’’

*NGO worker in Tyre,
south Lebanon*

One NGO worker in Tyre describes a harrowing experience when her 11-year-old son recently fell ill. With all nearby pharmacies closed, she had to appeal to neighbours to provide the medication he needed. When his condition worsened, she took him to hospital

for examinations and treatment, and on the way home, an airstrike hit close to their taxi. ‘We were both covered in black dust and rubble,’ she explained. ‘My son kept telling me, ‘I don’t want to die’.

Collapsing incomes

Displacement has meant an immediate end to countless livelihoods, as people already facing severe economic insecurity have been forced to leave their daily occupations in search of safety. The disruption has led to income loss for those who produced goods and provided services in their local areas, and interruption in essential supplies for those remaining behind. This is particularly significant in the south, where a high proportion of the local economy is dependent on agriculture. With input costs spiking and access to farmland restricted due to military presence, unexploded ordnance and potential contamination, food production has become impossible for most farmers in the area. The Minister of Agriculture reported in early May that 78% of farmers in south Lebanon had stopped working, with 10,000 farms damaged and 54,000 hectares of farmland affected by the destruction.⁶

The collapse in food supply is driving hunger across the country: an estimated 1.24 million people now face high levels of acute food insecurity. This situation is exacerbated by severe disruption to local markets in conflict-affected areas and rapidly rising food and fuel prices.

For many families, displacement has meant losing not only a home, but also the means to survive. Those who depended on farming, daily labour or small businesses have been cut off from their land, tools, customers and local markets. With savings exhausted by repeated displacement, rent, transport and food costs, many are now relying on humanitarian assistance to meet their most basic needs.



*Hekmat, pictured here following the November 2024 ceasefire, has lost multiple harvests after being displaced from his home in Saida in the current escalation
© Norwegian Refugee Council*

Hekmat, a farmer from Saida district, was still recovering from the impact of the 2024 escalation when hostilities erupted again on 2 March. He had just started cultivating his

⁶ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2642023/amp>

winter crops when he was forced to flee, leaving his land and harvest behind in search of safety. As attacks, evacuation orders and instability continue, Hekmat remains displaced and unable to return. He has already lost his winter harvest and missed the spring planting season, and now fears he will also miss the autumn season if the situation continues. He estimates his losses at around USD 15,000.

Call to action

The new ceasefire agreement has brought little relief to civilians at the centre of this conflict. A genuine, lasting end to hostilities is urgently needed to enable those locked in the displacement cycle to return to their land, with sufficient support to recover and rebuild what has been lost. Without immediate steps to de-escalate hostilities, ensure accountability, and restore access to essential services, the scale and severity of harm facing families in Lebanon will continue to deepen. As resources dwindle and physical and psychological pressures grow unsustainable, time is running out for Lebanon's fragile communities.

Those facing prolonged displacement know what they need from the international community.

'We need financial and psychological help. At the end of the day, we just want peace. Help isn't just food and somewhere to sleep, that's not living. We want to be able to live. I just want people to understand that we are not a part of this, we just want to be able to go to our homes. It's demoralizing, I feel like I'm a beggar. I don't want to live this way. I want to work.'

- Nour, mother of three children, displaced to a shelter in Zahle

'We just want peace; this is something that was done to us. It wasn't something that we wanted and yet we're paying the price. We just feel bad for the younger generation. They've been through so much already. We just want peace and the best for our kids. Just give us peace because our children will take care of the future.'

- Racha, mother of three children, displaced to a shelter in Zahle

'We only ask for one thing, to return to our homes and our lives.'

- Mariam, mother of three children, displaced to a shelter in Saida

International, National and Local NGOs in Lebanon call on all parties to the conflict to:

- Cease immediately all attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and commit to a genuine and permanent end to hostilities;
- Ensure safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to all those affected by violence and displacement, wherever they are living;
- Facilitate the safe, voluntary and dignified return of displaced communities by creating the conditions necessary for return, including the removal of military personnel and assets from civilian areas.

We call on the international community to:

- Deploy all available diplomatic levers to secure and sustain a full and permanent ceasefire;
- Support independent, impartial investigations into reported violations of International Humanitarian Law, including attacks on civilians, healthcare, and civilian infrastructure, and grave violations against children.
- Urgently mobilise sustained and flexible funding to enable the humanitarian community to meet immediate needs for those displaced and to support early recovery and reconstruction.
- Take concrete steps to ensure that collective shelters are inclusive and accessible, with protection for women, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable populations at the centre of the humanitarian response.

**names have been changed to protect identities.*

19 June 2026

The Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum (LHIF) is an informal and independent coordinating body comprising 73 international NGOs (INGOs) who are working to address the needs of vulnerable individuals, families, and communities throughout Lebanon. This statement reflects the endorsement of a majority of LHIF members.

The Lebanon Humanitarian and Development NGOs Forum (LHDF) is an independent network of over 90 local and national NGOs (LNGOs) working across Lebanon to respond to humanitarian needs, advance development, and strengthen community resilience. LHDF provides a platform for coordination, joint advocacy, and collective action, ensuring that local actors have a strong, unified voice in decision-making at national, regional, and global levels.

For questions, please contact inquiries@lhif.org, lngos.forum@gmail.com

Member organisations of the Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum (LHIF):

Acted	La Chaîne de l'Espoir
Action Against Hunger	Legal Action Worldwide
Action Aid	Malteser International
Anera	Médecins du Monde
Arche Nova	Medair
ARCS Culture Solidali	Mennonite Central Committee
Asmae - Association Soeur Emmanuelle	Mercy Corps
AVSI	Mines Advisory Group
Bioforce	Near East Foundation
CAFOD	Norwegian Church Aid
CARE International Lebanon	Norwegian People's Aid
Caritas Austria	Norwegian Refugee Council
Caritas Germany	Oxfam in Lebanon
Caritas Switzerland	Plan International Lebanon
Catholic Relief Services	Première Urgence Internationale
CESVI	Relief International
Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli	Right to Play
Clovek v Ohrozeni	SAMS
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CORUS International	Search for Common Ground
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Danish Refugee Council	Swisscontact
Dorcas Aid International	Taawon
Fondation Mérieux	Tearfund UK
HEKS/EPER – Swiss Church Aid	Terre des hommes Italy
HelpAge International	Terre des hommes Lausanne
Humanity & Inclusion	Trocaire
Humedica	Un Ponte Per
IECD	War Child Alliance
INSO	Welthungerhilfe
INTERSOS	WeWorld
Islamic Relief Worldwide, Lebanon	
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