

Protection Monitoring Findings

Lebanon - 4th quarter 2020



UNHCR conducts protection monitoring with partners on an ongoing basis to analyse trends in the protection environment and risks facing refugees in all regions of Lebanon. UNHCR's protection monitoring partners - Caritas, Intersos, IRC and SHEILD - conduct interviews with refugee households to elicit their feedback on the overall protection environment in Lebanon and the impact of COVID-19 on their lives. The sampling of households and findings presented are representative both at the regional and at the national level. In addition, partners conduct a number of interviews with key informants of different profiles to complement the quantitative analysis from the household interviews. When needs for specific services, assistance or information are identified during interviews, UNHCR's protection monitoring partners refer the individuals concerned accordingly. Information on COVID-19 is systematically provided during each call.

In March 2020, the protection monitoring questions were reviewed to adapt them to the emerging COVID-19 crisis and assess its impact on refugees. As of October 2020, UNHCR reverted to a more expanded version of the questionnaire to collect information on the broader protection environment, while retaining relevant COVID-19 related questions. This report provides a summary of the findings from protection monitoring conducted in all regions in the 4th quarter of 2020 (October-December)¹. The feedback from refugees is used to inform UNHCR's advocacy and programmatic interventions and modes of implementation with the aim of improving refugees' access to protection and essential services, assistance and information.

Key numbers October to December 2020



7,262
refugee households interviewed



98%
of households are Syrian and 2% are refugees of other nationalities



10%
youth (16-25 yrs)



41%
women



5%
older persons (60+ yrs)



10%
persons with disabilities



1071
consultations with key informants



1372
referrals made to date

Contributing organizations

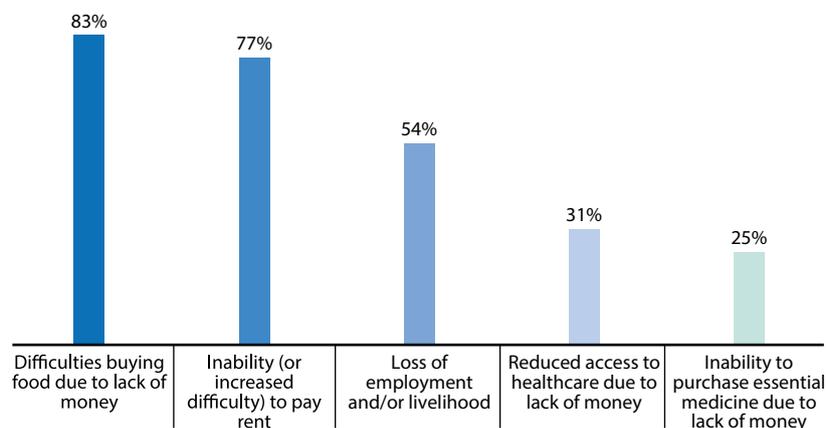


¹ Numbers and percentages presented are for the quarter (Oct-Dec 2020) unless otherwise specified.

Impact of the socio-economic situation

- Since the 4th quarter of 2019 Lebanon has endured multiple crises that have led to a severe deterioration of the socio-economic situation for all population groups. There has been a drastic increase in the number of people living below the poverty line and the extreme poverty line. Refugees who were already struggling to cover their daily costs have become even more vulnerable as livelihood opportunities have decreased, while prices for basic necessities have multiplied. Protection risks are increasing in this environment as families turn to harmful coping strategies and are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. Data elicited through protection monitoring during the 4th quarter of 2020 confirms this trend towards greater impoverishment and its impact on the safety, health and well-being of refugees.

Most widely experienced impacts of the socio-economic situation



- With the deepening economic crisis, the proportion of refugees affected continues to grow, with the vast majority now unable to cover their basic needs (see chart).

- As refugees face more and more difficulties meeting their basic needs in a safe and dignified manner, many have had no choice but to resort to harmful coping strategies to survive. Most refugees have had to reduce their spending on food and forgo meals (74%), and more and more refugees are reporting reducing or not paying rent, reaching a high of 60% in December 2020; this marks a stark increase in the proportion of those resorting to this coping mechanism (up from 44% in October 2020). About 1 in 3 households consulted also report entering into or increasing their debt (35%), and it is more and more common for families to reduce expenses on health-related costs in order to meet other basic needs.
- In line with these findings, refugees throughout the country reported that their priority needs were food assistance (85% of respondents) followed by assistance to cover rent, which steadily rose over the quarter to reach 82% of respondents in December.



We have no food for our children, they often go to sleep with empty stomach. We cannot afford to buy milk for our one and half years old child. We need food.

- Single mother who called the UNHCR call center for help

- Children are increasingly at risk of being sent to work by their parents given the deteriorating economic situation, with 4% of all households interviewed reporting having at least one child working. This figure is in line with VASyR data which has shown a rise in child labour from 2.6% in 2019 to 4.4% in 2020. Children were reported to be working either because parents' income was not sufficient to meet the needs of the family, because the parents could not find work, or were physically unable to work. Over half of all children involved in child labour were not attending school, with this issue increasing with the child's age. School attendance (both in person or online) was only 46% for children aged 5-11 years involved in child labour and just 32% for children aged 15-18.

- Working in agriculture and in shops was the most common form of child labour, with older children working more often in agriculture and younger children more often working in the high-risk area of street selling.
- The deteriorated economic situation also greatly contributed to mental health issues among refugees, with almost one in four adults surveyed (22%) reporting mental health needs during the quarter. Out of those, 95% linked the deterioration of their psychological state to the pressure of the economic crisis. Other leading causes were worries around COVID-19 (56%) and the situation in Syria (13%). For a majority of respondents, symptoms are mild or isolated; however, each month a small number of those surveyed also report critical mental health issues, including self-harm, suicidal ideation and attempts.



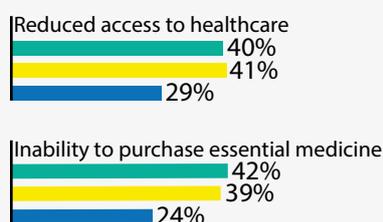
I had to force my two children, 9 and 5 years old, to sell tissues and beg on the street because I cannot provide them food anymore.

- Syrian father

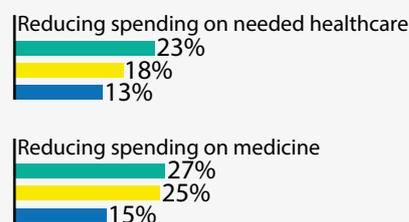
The most vulnerable are the most impacted

The multiple crises are particularly affecting specific groups in a vulnerable situation such as older persons and persons with disabilities. These vulnerable groups report higher rates of negative health impacts when compared to the rest of the refugee population. **Many are reducing expenses on health-related costs in order to meet other basic needs.** The fact that persons with disabilities and older persons have had to reduce spending on healthcare and medicine to a higher degree than the average population is very concerning as they have the highest health-related needs. This is compounded by the fact that 3 out of 4 also report having had to reduce spending on food, which is in line with other population groups, despite their fragile situation.

Impacts of the deteriorating economic situation on access to health



Coping strategies impacting health



■ Persons with disabilities
 ■ Older persons
 ■ Other populations

Given their specific situation, and the high impact of the crisis on their health, **requests for health-related assistance** are higher than average for older persons and persons with disabilities. Half of them said that assistance to pay for healthcare was a priority need; about 20 points higher than younger respondents and persons without disabilities.

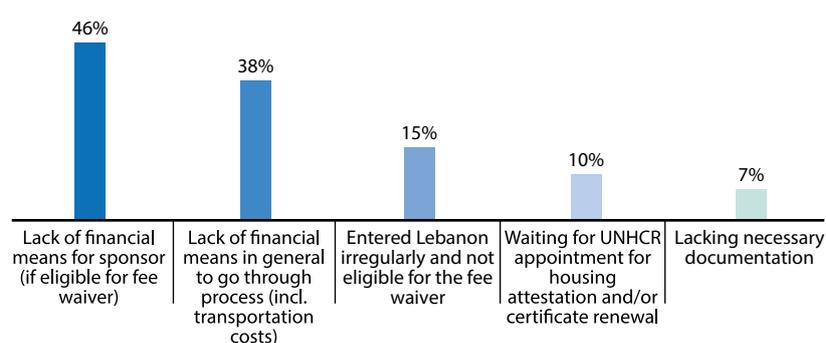
Finally, it should be noted that as of December 2020 close to 1 in 5 older persons and persons with disabilities reported that they are unable to **access necessary care services**, more and more frequently because services were interrupted due to Covid-19.

Legal residency

- Findings from protection monitoring that relate to legal residency are consistent with those of the 2020 VASyR, namely that only 20% of individuals over the age of 15 report having legal residency (declining from 22% in 2019 and 27% in 2020). Refugees living in the North are facing the greatest problems in this regard, as only 14% of households reported that all members over 15 years had legal residency. Rates among women remain slightly lower than amongst men, with 47% of women vs. 53% of men reporting having a valid legal residency.

- This remains a key protection problem affecting core aspects of refugees' lives. Lack of valid residency limits refugees' ability to move freely (65%), their ability to access livelihood opportunities (21%), and their ability to interact within their own community (8%), amongst other. Refugees who needed to turn to the courts also report that lack of residency has either impeded their access to the justice system or meant they feared accessing it for lack of a legal status.

Main reasons respondents reported not having legal residency



- Lack of financial means to pay for residency renewal is the main constraint reported by refugees, which affirms the critical importance of an inclusive fee waiver, especially in the current context of economic and health crisis in the country.

COVID-19

- From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR and humanitarian partners have used multiple channels to share lifesaving COVID-19 information on a large scale. Survey results suggest that these efforts have been successful as knowledge among refugee populations is strong in most areas. Nevertheless, important knowledge gaps remain (see table). The need for continuing communication efforts were highlighted by declines in December of knowledge in how to access testing, and knowing that testing and treatment is covered. Communication needs related to COVID-19 were highest in the South, where only 29% of respondents said they did not need any information, while they expressed higher needs for specific information related to COVID-19 than in any other region.

Knowledge of COVID-19

93%

reported knowing COVID-19 symptoms

93%

reported knowing preventative measures

73%

reported knowing how to access testing

62%

report knowing the MoPH hotline number

56%

knew that costs of testing and treatment are covered

44%

did not need additional COVID-19 information

- A good level of trust with UNHCR was shown as most respondents preferred to receive COVID-19 information through SMS from UNHCR (69%). SMS from MoPH (47%), and via traditional media such as TV and radio (53%) were the other most frequent choices. However, many refugees also expressed interest in receiving information through a wide range of channels, such as UNHCR WhatsApp and Facebook, social media, other humanitarian organizations and local officials, suggesting that these channels should not be overlooked in outreach strategies.

Restrictive measures

- Government measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 accounted for most (96%) of the restrictions reported by refugees during the 4th quarter. Many of these measures target and impact refugees and host communities similarly. However, refugees also concerningly reported that they are frequently disproportionately targeted by restrictive measures, exacerbating their already difficult socio-economic situation by limiting access to health, livelihoods and other supports.

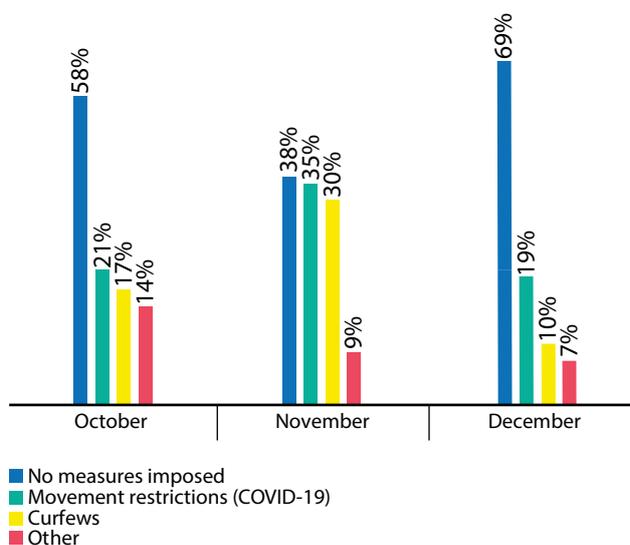
- Curfews and COVID-19 movement restrictions made up over four fifths of reported restrictive measures (82%), while the other 18% included diverse measures such as obligations to obtain municipal IDs, obligations to inform the municipality about guests visiting or about movement outside of its boundaries, unlawful taxes and fees, and raids.

- In December 2020, there was a concerning rise in some of the negative impacts of the restrictive measures: 44% of refugees reported loss of livelihoods (33% average for October and November), 22% reported psychological distress or anxiety (14 % average for October and November) and 21% reported isolation and loss of family support (5% average for October and November).

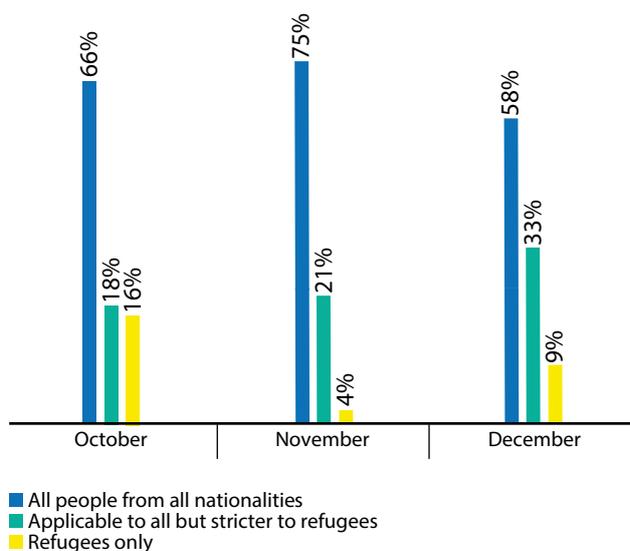
- While most measures were applicable to all population groups, the discriminatory nature of some of the measures, or of their implementation, is concerning. Households consulted in December reported that 33% of the restrictive measures were applied more strictly to refugees, and that 9% applied only to refugees.

- Refugees in the South reported the highest amount of discrimination related to restrictive measures with half of all restrictive measures either targeting refugees only, or applied more strictly to them, followed by a rate of 32% in the Bekaa and 20% in BML and the North.

Restrictions in place impacting refugees



Who is targeted by restrictions?



Evictions

- Loss of income and accumulated debt have led to a notable increase in the number of refugee families living under threat of eviction (8% in the last quarter compared to 5% in 2020 VASyR).
- While the number of refugees at risk of eviction increased, most families were not evicted during the last quarter, in keeping with the yearly trend. This was primarily due to a recognition by the authorities that changes of location and homelessness can exacerbate the risk of COVID-19 transmission, thus discouraging evictions, and to landlords being understanding of the exceptional circumstances.

Key numbers related to evictions

8%

reported living under an eviction notice

96%

reported inability to pay rent as reason for eviction notice

80%

responded by negotiating financially with the landlord

1%

reported being evicted in the past 30 days

- Almost all eviction notices (96%) were due to refugees' inability to pay their rent, but other reasons include the owner reappropriating the property, or general tensions with the landlord.
- Respondents in the Bekaa reported the lowest issuance of eviction notices, at 2% (12% in other regions), and actual eviction at 0.4 percent (1.4% in other regions; national average of 1%). However, refugees in the Bekaa are still at high risk of eviction. These lower rates are likely due to the fact that the Bekaa has the highest refugee population living in informal settlements, where rent is lower, and UNHCR and partners have been able to advocate for temporary reprieves during COVID-19 in particular for whole sites at risk of eviction. The risk of a surge in evictions once the COVID-19 situation subsides however remains considerable.
- Out of the respondents who received an eviction notice, 3% reported that they received legal, mediation or financial assistance from NGOs or UN agencies that helped prevent the evictions. Out of those evicted, 2% report that they found new housing through humanitarian actors.

Social stability

- Despite serious incidents in the 4th quarter of 2020, such as in Bcharre and Bhannine, refugees overall reported relatively low levels of tensions with the host community throughout the quarter, with just 4% of respondents reporting incidents, primarily due to personal issues (31%). This is in line with the VASyR 2020 findings, which showed a small minority of refugees rating their relations with the host community as negative (4%), while most refugee families rated this relationship as positive or very positive (54%). Tensions may, however, be underreported because of respondents' focus on basic needs, that refugees have become used to a degree of discrimination, and concerns about the security of phone interviews.
- Refugees consulted noted continued instances of inter-community support in the context of the worsening socio-economic and COVID-19 crises affecting both populations. Despite the hardships they themselves face, Lebanese people occasionally supported refugees, with 13% of surveyed households reporting being aware of such instances of assistance. This support most frequently took the form of helping to buy or share food (33%), allowing to buy food on credit (32%), and agreeing to reduce rental fees (28%).