

Operational impact of the situation in Ein El Hilweh Camp and protection partner operations

Operational impacts and partner adaptations were shared by protection sector partners in August in relation to armed fighting between Palestinian factions in Ein El Hilweh Camp in July. The Protection sector in close coordination and support of UNRWA prepared this overview and will continue to monitor the situation and support UNRWA where required.

The impact on Palestine, Syrian, Lebanese, and stateless individuals

Wide-spread displacement of women, men and children from conflict-affected areas of the camp to UNRWA installations, other community buildings and relatives inside and outside the camp took place during fighting between political factions in the camp on 30th July 2023. While, predominantly Palestine refugees, Syrians, Lebanese and stateless individuals are also affected.

Despite the recent ceasefire and the closure of UNRWA emergency shelters **not all displaced families staying in the installations have returned to their homes** but are now living with relatives in safer areas due to persistent instability. Those who were displaced or left the camp are understood to be living with relatives mainly in Saida district (Taamir el Hara, Haret Saida, and other neighborhoods).

Inhabitants of the camp continue to face threats to their physical and psychological safety. These include ongoing tensions in the camp, including the reported continuing public deployment of armed fighters in some areas of the camp and the possibility of renewed fighting, and **risk of unexploded ordnances (UXO) left over from the fighting.**

In addition, while UNRWA does not currently hold data, a significant **number of Palestine refugees, Syrians, Lebanese and stateless individuals who were living in conflict-affected areas are anticipated to struggle to meet the cost of repairing damage to shelters, water tanks and businesses** (preliminary assessment by Nabaa shows around 1,000 housing units have some form of damage ranging from minor to major damage). **Together these factors contribute to family's hesitancy to return to their homes.** Services in conflict-affected locations are largely inaccessible for example UNRWA hospital, schools and shops are closed.

The impact of the situation has extended beyond the camp with families residing with family members and relatives outside UNRWA recognized camp areas. **While the urgency and severity of the situation has calmed down in recent days there is sustained impact on the population who require security and wellbeing to be restored before they can resume their normal lives.** Partners report that inhabitants **report experiencing psychological distress and trauma** and that these events also trigger past memories of previous conflicts. **Children affected by the fighting are also likely to be particularly acute MHPSS needs.**

Movement was restricted inside and outside the camp with LAF only using one entrance, but since 7th August there are now multiple entrances open.

Who is most impacted and why?

Those households whose shelters are located in the areas in which hostilities were concentrated (primarily in the northern-most sectors of the camp and adjacent areas) are likely to have been particularly affected. Reports suggest widespread damage to shelters and infrastructure in those areas, although UNRWA has not yet been able to gain access to comprehensively assess damage.

Palestine refugees from Syria and Syrians whose shelter has been destroyed/damaged may be particularly at risk, as previous protection monitoring has shown that they tend to lack the same well-established social networks that Palestine refugees from Lebanon and Lebanese individuals enjoy, thereby potentially making their access to alternative shelter with friends or family less likely.

Children affected by the fighting are also likely to be particularly acute MHPSS needs.

It was further noted that **women and children formed the majority of those who were displaced inside UNRWA designated emergency centers**, with men often staying behind to protect their homes/shelters. It was reported that **older persons and persons with physical and sensory disabilities were less able to move from their shelters quickly.**

Associated measures being taken by factions, groups, or authorities inside and outside the camp which have impacted people's protection.

Partners have reported limited associated measures being taken, with protection partners observing the **closure of camp entrances opening intermittently** for people and vehicles during certain ceasefires and only the Hasbe entrance. Partners highlighted a notable deployment of military forces along Ein el Hilweh camp's borders, ostensibly to bolster security but inadvertently leading to movement constraints, exacerbating tensions, and affecting protection dynamics between camp residents and external forces.

The ongoing deployment of armed fighters reported in some sectors of the camp is **likely to be inhibiting movement for some camp residents and therefore access to essential goods and services.** In addition, ongoing tensions between factions with de facto control of different camp sectors, and the hardening of 'frontlines' between these sectors, **may also be limiting the freedom of movement and access to services of some camp residents.** Furthermore, the **need to repair the substantial damage** done to schools during the fighting and their use by armed groups could affect the start of the school year for nearly 3,000 students.

Unmet needs and protection risks

UNRWA's provision of safe spaces in schools outside the camp proved instrumental in mitigating immediate protection risks and providing temporary shelter for all population groups in Ein el Hilweh camp. Despite this, partners reported that the **schools used as temporary shelters were ill-equipped for emergencies, leading to overcrowding and with inadequate facilities.** UNRWA and its partners attempted to address these challenges, **yet certain essential provisions were lacking, resulting in the use of improvised methods such as bucket showers.** The discrepancy between available rooms and the number of families further **contributed to the crowded conditions and lack of privacy.** Medicine, mattresses, and clothes, particularly for children were/are flagged as major needs for those still displaced as people left their homes quickly and didn't take provisions.

Shocks to the incomes of families already living in a precarious state (80% of PRL in Lebanon estimated to be below the poverty line in March) could lead to negative coping mechanisms in coming weeks if cash assistance is not available and if households are not all able to return to their homes or they do not receive support for rehabilitation.

Further urgent relocation requirements for persons with disabilities were highlighted alongside other essential aid such as food, core relief items, and shelter improvements. **Partners mentioned that they do not have a good understanding of needs of those households who sought safety outside the camp.**

Impact on protection programming

Protection:

- **Protection partner interventions inside and outside the camp were disrupted with them either delaying or suspending services due to the impact of the hostilities and inaccessibility of services.** Temporary disruption to community center activities in Saida town were reported with all interventions halted including legal services due to the closure of public institutions during the conflict. **Community volunteers** were unable to support individuals in person and had shifted to contacting community members by phone. **Assistance was re-directed to displaced individuals in specific sites**, providing essential services such as shelter, food, clothing, water, health care, and protection services mainly through UNRWA implementing partners. **However, by 7 August, the emergency shelters were empty of people and have been closed, and most interventions are understood to have resumed, with some partners working remotely until this week.**
- **Protection partner staff have only limited access to some areas in the camp, with many UNRWA installations and services still closed.** This is affecting Palestine refugees' access to all UNRWA and local partner services in areas most affected by fighting. **More services are available in less-affected parts of the camp**, with one of the two UNRWA health centers in Ein el Hilweh camp reopening on 8 August and sanitation works taking place in the streets.
- **There has been increased demand reported for Shelter rehabilitation and MHPSS services.**
- **GBV risks was identified quickly in the temporary shelters. UNRWA worked on GBV risk mitigation** through the organization of families inside their temporary shelters **trying to keep families together and adding lights** to increase safety. **Awareness raising** on ensuring children do not go unaccompanied to toilets.

Education:

- Education services such as basic literacy and numeracy and the summer schools in Saida were temporarily disrupted. The challenges of accessing these services and concerns over the safety and security of children. The increased risks and uncertainties caused by the clashes have hindered our ability to provide vital support and services to those in need at that time.

Common questions from the community

- A significant number of questions about shelter repair and rehabilitation.
- Questions about healthcare and available assistance in the form of NFIs and Cash
- Questions in relation to current conditions in conflict-affected areas while people consider their prospects of returning to their homes given that many left belongings, documents etc.

Programmatic adaptations

1. **UNWRA and their partners took proactive steps to address displacement shifting** their programming to focus on provision of services inside UNRWA facilities, deploying school counsellors and social workers. **Referrals** were made for shelter, WASH and cash for rent needs where available.
2. **UNRWA re-activated the informal group of protection partners** providing services to Palestine refugees in the camp. One meeting focused on protection coordination and the other on CP and GBV. This group ensures information flow and coordination with the South PWG.
3. **Protection partners particularly local partners continue to monitor the situation.** This should lead to the sharing of reports for triangulation and to inform programming and advocacy.
4. **Partners put in place adaptive plans and measures to safely continue their work** in alternative forms such as remotely, online, communication trees, stopping home visits.

Protection Sector Recommendations

The protection sector recognizes the need for a localized approach to coordination of the response inside and outside Ein el Hilweh camp. The South PWG is playing a supporting role to UNRWA in coordinating the response closely with UN agencies, NGOs and Government and Palestinian counterparts. Effective coordination is being channeled through weekly Inter-Agency meetings in Saida. Protection partners remain ready to support response efforts where required, as needs emerge, and as much as possible within existing programming.

- **UNRWA should continue to work with LAF's Lebanese Mine Action Centre to carry out a rapid assessment of UXO presence in the areas most affected by fighting, as well as circulating awareness materials on UXO safety through social media channels and conducting training for relevant partners and staff.** Where required and in coordination with UNRWA protection partners should support provision of awareness sessions and materials on safety risks ensuring these are child friendly.
- **A comprehensive assessment of damage carried out jointly by UNRWA, other humanitarian actors, and governance actors including the Saida municipality is currently being planned.** Protection partners, where capacity allows and where requested and coordinated by UNRWA with close engagement by South PWG can support the planned joint needs assessments for those both inside and outside the camp with regards to protection needs.
- **Partners should continue the provision of Child Protection, GBV and Protection case management, MHPSS services particularly for children and ensuring identification and referral for essential needs** where available. Protection and GBV risk mitigation measures should continue to be employed as/when identified.
- **Protection cash assistance should only be provided after a robust risk assessment with close coordination with UNRWA** recognizing the potential risk of exacerbating tensions in the camp. **Cash for rehabilitation or for rent** needs to be carefully considered given the unregulated housing situation in Ein el Hilweh and the potential to exacerbate tensions.