

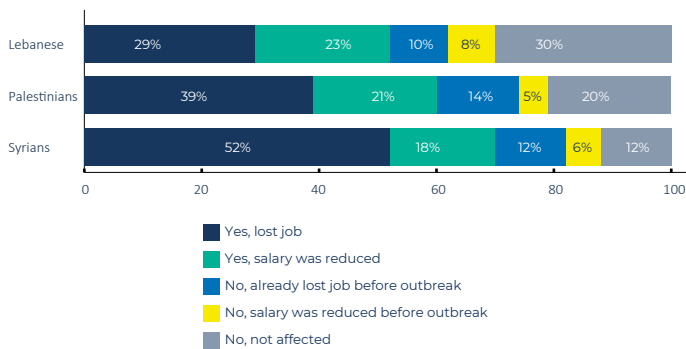


Evictions and eviction threats are a critical risk affecting refugees and other vulnerable populations in Lebanon. An increasing number of families are currently threatened with eviction. This dashboard compiles current available data relating to evictions, and outlines the response by partners under the 2020 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) as well as key advocacy messages.

REDUCED ACCESS TO INCOME AND LIVELIHOODS

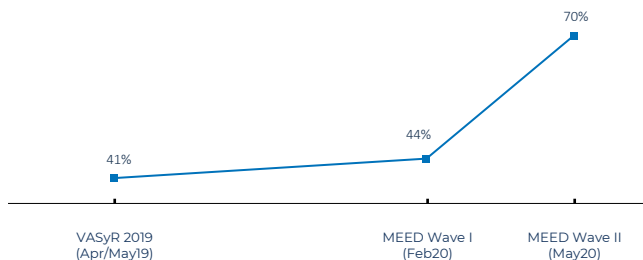
Syrian refugee and other populations in a vulnerable situation have been increasingly unable to pay their rent since the deepening of the economic and financial crisis in the fourth quarter of 2019. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures Lebanon has had to take to prevent and contain the spread of the virus. As in all countries around the world, COVID-19 had had a huge impact on the socio-economic situation of people. A State of Medical Emergency was announced by the Government of Lebanon on 15 March 2020, encompassing a nation-wide curfew and other movement restrictions which led to the accelerated loss of livelihoods and reduced household income for many refugee and Lebanese families.

Across Lebanon, nearly 90% of Syrians and almost 80% of Palestinians have either lost their income-generating possibilities or have had their salaries reduced since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak or even before. Some 61% of Syrians working in the construction sector, one of the of employment sectors in which Syrians are permitted to work, reported losing their jobs.¹ The negative impact is also being felt by Lebanese, with 70% of them having lost their jobs or having had their salaries reduced.



Change in employment status since start of COVID-19 outbreak

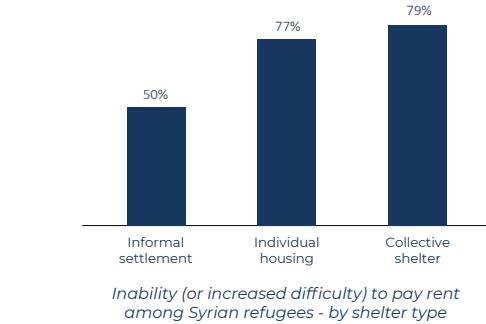
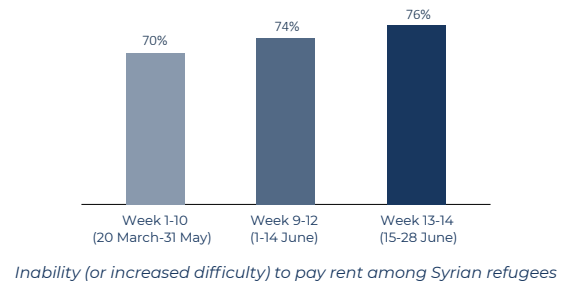
In May 2020, 70% of Syrian refugee families reported having no working members in the last week, a steep increase from 44% reported in February 2020, before COVID-19.



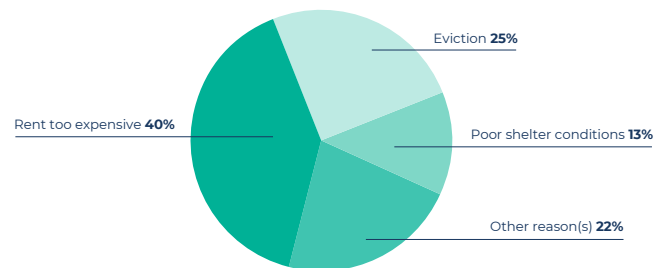
Percentage of Syrian households having no working members during last 7 days

INCREASED INABILITY OR DIFFICULTY TO PAY RENT

The lack of income has made paying rent more difficult for already vulnerable populations, notably for Syrian refugees.² Syrian families living in collective shelters are reportedly among the most affected with 81% unable to pay rent, followed by those living in individual housing with 76% unable to pay rent.³

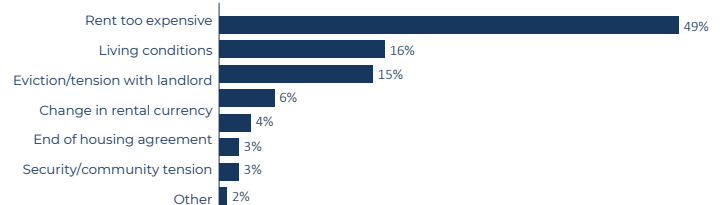


Many Syrians are finding that rent is now too expensive, as a result of their increasingly limited household income. Some 40% of Syrian refugee families surveyed who had changed accommodation since October 2019 reported doing so because they could no longer afford the rent, and another 25% were evicted.⁴



Main reason for having changed accommodation

The percentage of refugees who indicated that the rent was too expensive to afford further increased to 49% among those who were planning to change accommodation during the next three months.⁵



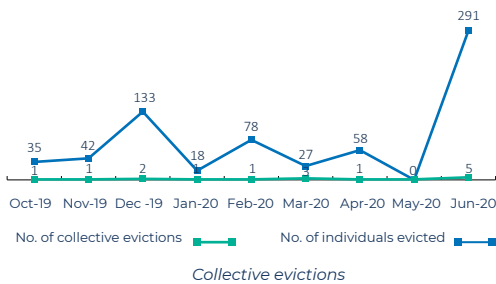
Main reason for planning to change accommodation

ALARMING INCREASE IN EVICTION THREATS

A decrease has been witnessed since the last quarter of 2019 in collective evictions⁶ (involving five households or more), where authorities' decisions related to shelter demolition and on environmental protection led to a sharp increase.

1. WFP, *Assessing the Impact of the Economic and COVID-19 Crises in Lebanon*, June 2020.
2. UNHCR, *Protection monitoring on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees*, 20 March – 28 June 2020. Some respondents also indicated loss of shelter or homelessness, inadequate shelter (e.g. due to rodent infestation), and lack of privacy in their shelter among the main problems faced in relation to COVID-19.
3. UNHCR, *Protection monitoring on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees*, 20 March – 28 June 2020 (cumulative).

4. Out of a total of 13% of households who changed accommodation, among a nationally representative random sample. UNHCR, *Monitoring of the Effects of the Economic Deterioration on Refugee Households (MEED), Wave I*, February 2020.
5. UNHCR, *MEED Wave I*, February 2020.
6. Data on collective evictions from the Evictions Tracking Tool in ActivityInfo, recorded by UNHCR in collaboration with protection partners.



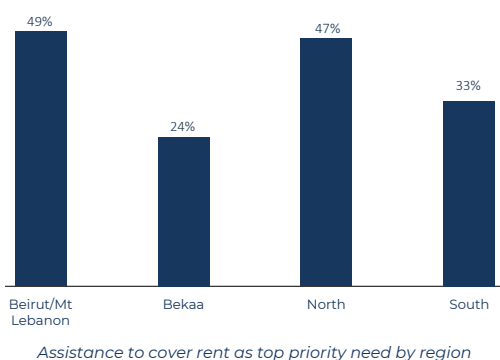
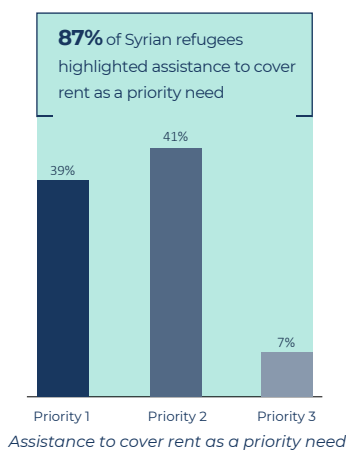
The trend in the first half of 2020 for household level or individual evictions indicates a significant increase in the number of households at risk of eviction due to their inability to pay rent.⁷ This has been reported across all population groups in the country, including Palestinian refugees,⁸ Lebanese nationals, refugees from other nationalities, and migrants; however, quantitative data currently available pertains to Syrian refugees.

LCRP partners are very concerned about the likelihood of a higher number of actual evictions taking place as movement restrictions have been lifted, as many eviction threats were conceivably “on hold” due to the public health situation. This could lead to increased protection, public health and safety concerns among Syrian and other vulnerable populations in the second half of 2020.

Moreover, while the Lebanese legal framework⁹ is protective of the rights of tenants, most evictions are occurring outside of this framework and without the due process considerations, therefore exposing refugees to heightened protection risks. In addition, relocation options following eviction are very limited, and in certain areas the identification of alternative accommodation post-eviction has become more restricted, requiring approval from several authorities.¹⁰

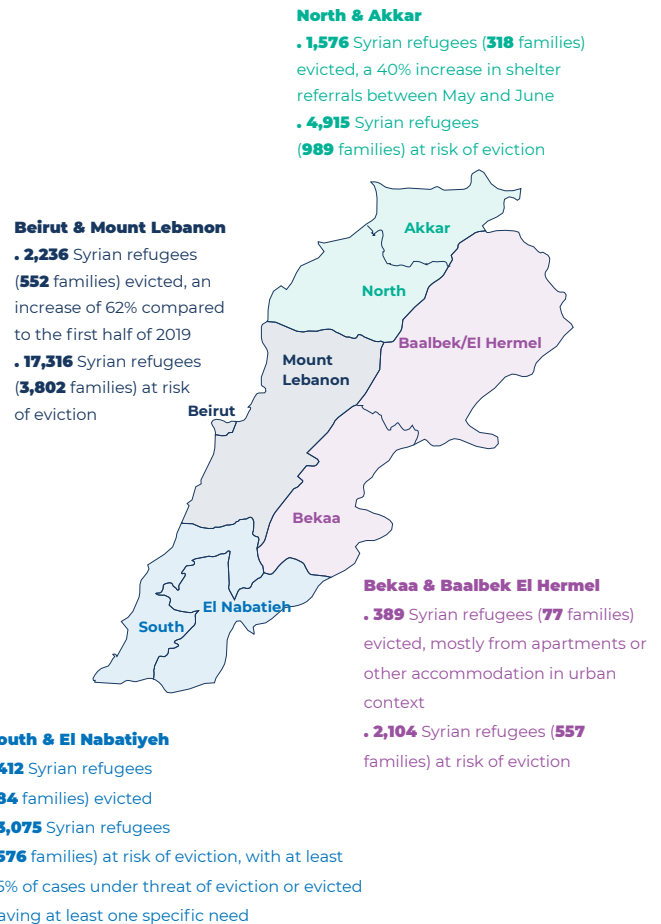
INCREASED NEED FOR RENT ASSISTANCE

As a result, refugees and other vulnerable groups across all regions have reported that assistance to cover rent is currently one of their main needs, with more than one-third of Syrian refugees surveyed citing it as their top priority.¹¹



Individual evictions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon (January-June 2020)

Individual or household-level evictions are not systematically tracked, so the figures presented below are indicative and based on information available to UNHCR. The actual number of individuals at risk of eviction is likely to be much higher, as many more are believed to be unreported. The vast majority of cases, across all regions, was based on the inability to pay rent.



The need for rent assistance is particularly high in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, where refugees are more often living in residential shelter and where rent is generally higher compared to the national rental average, and in the North, where there is reduced support for security of tenure due to severe underfunding of Shelter sector activities.

More than half of UNHCR’s disbursements of emergency cash assistance¹² (ECA) between January and June 2020 concerned eviction-related requests, including eviction threats, evictions whereby individuals are temporarily hosted by relatives, evictions resulting in homelessness, and evictions requiring urgent relocation. This was particularly high in Mount Lebanon, where some 84% of ECA disbursements related to evictions, while this ranged between 22% and 33% in other regions.

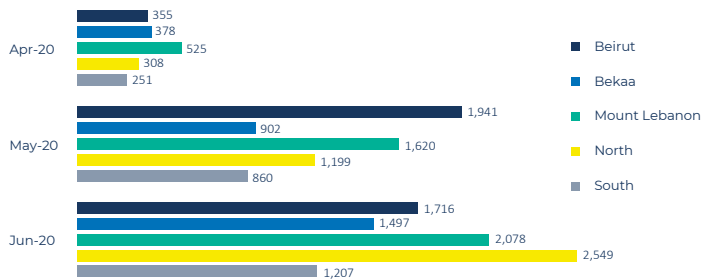
Persons with specific needs, including disabilities, are increasingly affected, with 46% citing assistance to cover rent as their highest priority need in June, followed by assistance to cover cost of food at 44%.¹³ The inability or increased difficulty to pay rent is the second most frequently cited impact of COVID-19 among persons with specific needs and their households at 77%, after difficulty buying food due to lack of money at 80%.

⁷ As reported by partners through their regular protection update to the Protection Working Group.
⁸ UNRWA reported a rise in the number of cases of Palestinians at risk raised with its legal aid unit and field protection colleagues, although an increase in actual evictions has not yet been noted.
⁹ On the international and Lebanese legal framework, see: *Protection Sector Guidance on the Response to Evictions in Lebanon*, 2018, “Forced evictions affecting refugees in Lebanon: legal considerations”.

¹⁰ Lebanon Protection Consortium (LPC) and International Rescue Committee (IRC), *In Constant Fear of Eviction; An Analysis of Shelter Insecurity for Vulnerable Refugee Households in Lebanon During COVID-19*, July 2020.
¹¹ UNHCR, *Protection monitoring on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees*, 20 March – 28 June 2020 (cumulative).
¹² A total of 1,602 out of 2,917 cases.
¹³ UNHCR, *Protection monitoring on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees*, 1-28 June 2020. The cumulative percentage (20 March – 28 June 2020) for those persons with specific needs who cited assistance to cover rent as their highest priority is 40%, compared to 38% for others.

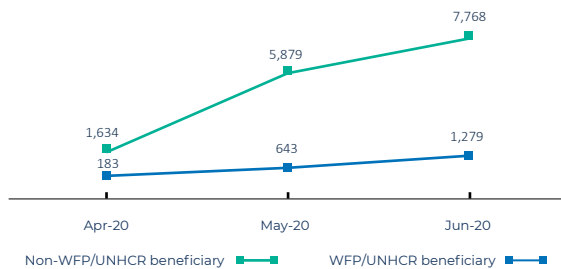


There has been a steady increase in the number of calls received at the UNHCR/WFP national call centre related to requests for rent assistance¹⁴ observed from April to June across all regions. The sharpest increase was observed in the North, followed by Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Bekaa and the South. Rent assistance calls were highest in Mount Lebanon in April, but the North surpassed it by June.



Number of calls to UNHCR/WFP national call centre relating to rent assistance - by governorate

The situation has been especially acute for those who do not receive any assistance from either WFP or UNHCR, exemplified by the fact that those benefiting from assistance are less likely to call in need for rent assistance to avoid eviction.



Number of calls to UNHCR/WFP national call centre relating to rent assistance - by beneficiary type

Protection partners reported similar findings from local hotlines, with many callers citing the risk and threat of eviction and asking for financial support due to accumulated debt and rent fees.¹⁵

RISING SOCIAL TENSIONS

At the beginning of the economic crisis, it was still possible for households to negotiate with some landlords for flexible rental payments and deadlines. However, landlords are increasingly relying on rental fee income due to COVID-19's effects on the deteriorating economic situation, and are reportedly becoming stricter regarding rent payment deadlines and more frequently threatening to evict those who are not able to pay on time.¹⁶ Conflicts with landlords also appear to be an increasing factor driving internal relocations.¹⁷

The COVID-19 emergency is further fueling intra- and inter-community tensions, mainly driven by fear of the virus spreading, stigmatization of persons infected or perceived to be infected, and accusations that individuals are not adhering to measures.

This has resulted in localized cases of evictions for COVID-19-related reasons (South – 14 individuals, North – 11 individuals, and Nabatieh – 9 individuals)¹⁸ and increased reports of harassment,¹⁹ with social media playing a major role in spreading rumors and stigmatizing messages.

NEGATIVE COPING MECHANISMS

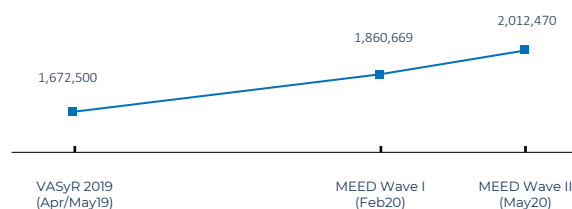
Vulnerable families have had to resort to a range of negative coping mechanisms to be able to pay their rent and therefore avoid eviction:

Downgrading shelter type – Families moving from residential to non-residential shelter or to informal settlements, where rents are usually lower.

Downgrading shelter conditions – Families moving to shelter in poorer condition, which raises additional public health concerns when there is limited access to water and sanitation facilities.

Living in overcrowded conditions – Families moving together into combined shelter, often done to share the rent burden, but potentially becoming a risk factor for spreading COVID-19 to others sharing the shelter.

Going into debt or increasing existing debt – Creating additional problems when families are unable to repay their debt due to lack of income.

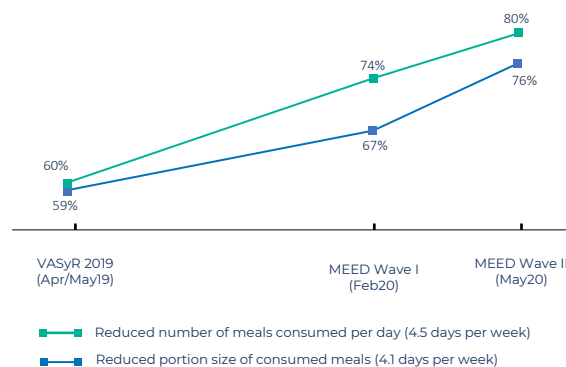


Average debt (in LBP) of Syrian households with debt

Some 97% of Syrian households were in debt in May 2020, up from 91% in February. Those with newly incurred debt increased from 83% to 92%.²⁰ While the average debt level among Syrian families increased by more than 11% in 11 months between May 2019 and February 2020, the debt level increased even more rapidly by another 8% between February and May.

While Lebanese households have on average taken on less debt to cover rent than Syrians and Palestinians, Lebanese residents have frequently cited among their main concerns not having enough income to cover food, rent and medication.²¹

Reducing food consumption, to save money for rent – Driving malnutrition and health risks in the medium- and long-term, especially for children.



Reduced food consumption

Syrian families are reducing their daily food intake by reducing the number of meals or portion size, restricting food consumption of adults, or relying on less expensive/preferred food. MEED Wave I and II data indicates that in the last year there has been a 20% increase in those reporting having reduced the number of daily meals and a 17% in those who have reduced their portion sizes.

Other negative coping mechanisms to address the general economic crisis and the inability to pay the rent include engaging children in income-generating activities and other forms of exploitation, which have increasingly been reported by partners.

14. The call centre changed its way of collecting information as of 16 April 2020; hence, the figures provided for April only represent half a month.

15. See, for example: Intersos Lebanon, *Trend Analysis of Evictions and Emergency Cash Assistance*, January – April 2020.

16. This was assumed based on the MEED Wave II findings and has been confirmed by Shelter partners.

17. LPC/IRC, *In Constant Fear of Eviction*, July 2020.

18. As recorded by UNHCR in cooperation with partners.

19. Social Stability sector, Lebanon: COVID-19 Impact on Social Tensions, 22 March 2020.

20. UNHCR, MEED Wave I (February 2020) and Wave II (May 2020).

21. WFP, *Assessing the Impact of the Economic and COVID-19 Crises in Lebanon*, June 2020.

CROSS-SECTORAL RESPONSE

Household-level evictions are extremely difficult to address, especially when they are related to the inability to pay rent in a context of a severe and generalized economic crisis. The Protection, Shelter, Livelihoods and Social Stability sectors are working closely together to strengthen linkages for a more sustainable and holistic approach to the evictions issue.

Modalities for prevention and response are being reviewed under the Protection and Shelter sectors, and strengthened coordination with other sectors is being explored, including the Livelihoods sector. Underfunding of the Shelter sector and the scarce livelihood opportunities in the current situation for all vulnerable population groups remain major challenges in finding an adequate response to the issue.

Other ongoing interventions include:



Protection Sector

- Mediation and negotiation with landlords including on extension of payment deadlines, on potential for instalment payments, on reduction of rent fees and accumulated debt, and on exchange rates.
- Provision of legal aid, including counselling and representation in relation to evictions.
- Advocacy on due process on eviction cases.
- Provision of protection and/or emergency cash for the most vulnerable families.
- Liaison with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities to prevent evictions in relation to COVID-19.
- Case management and referrals.



Shelter Sector

- Provision of “cash for rent” to vulnerable families.
- Shelter rehabilitation activities for security of tenure.
- Guidance preparation on Shelter Sector evictions response targeted to individual household profiles and shelter conditions.



Livelihoods Sector

- Strengthened referrals for livelihood opportunities.



Social Stability Sector

- Tension monitoring and conflict sensitive mainstreaming within other sectors in relation with evictions.

ADVOCACY MESSAGES

Call for authorities:

- Ensure that due process is followed in the event of evictions in accordance with relevant Lebanese and international legislation.
- Declare a moratorium on evictions during the COVID-19 outbreak with a view to protecting public health.
- Declare a moratorium on rent increase.
- Foster the search for an equitable common ground between tenants and landlords, exploring options such as progressive payments, rental fees reduction and grace periods given the exceptional circumstances.
- Foster access to inclusive income-generating opportunities for all population groups to be able to meet their basic needs, including securing adequate shelter, and to support an inclusive contribution to the economic growth of the country.

Call to donors:

- Scale up funding for the Shelter sector (currently funded at only 8%) to support the right to adequate housing and foster security of tenure through the sector’s tailored modalities, including cash for rent for the most vulnerable and shelter upgrades to improve physical living conditions including in urban areas.
- Ensure sufficient funding for adequate livelihoods opportunities (e.g., cash for work) and for basic assistance programmes to increase self-reliance within communities.
- Increase funding of comprehensive protection mechanisms, including mitigation interventions for eviction threats (e.g., mediation and ECA/PCAP programmes) as part of a holistic response to support those most at risk, including persons with specific needs.
- Continue to encourage a conflict-sensitive approach and inclusive community engagement in programming.
- Support the development of an inclusive assessment mechanism to identify trends on individual evictions at country level across population groups to inform programmatic needs and advocacy efforts.