

UNHCR: Lebanon crisis deepens as Israeli airstrikes intensify

This is a summary of what was said by Rema Jamous Imseis, UNHCR's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa – to whom quoted text may be attributed – at today's press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

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UNHCR staff support Syrian and Lebanese people arriving at the Jousieh border crossing in Homs governorate, Syria, after fleeing Israeli bombardments in Lebanon. © UNHCR/Ayham Al Kady

GENEVA – The escalating conflict and intensified Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon are taking an increasingly devastating toll on civilians in the country, pushing more people to flee to Syria.

More people are being displaced in Lebanon every day. On Monday, 20 villages in south Lebanon were ordered to evacuate; a quarter of Lebanon is now under Israeli military evacuation orders. Heeding the orders, many families are fleeing to open public spaces, desperate to escape the bombs but struggling to find shelter. The Government of Lebanon estimates that 1.2 million people have been displaced.

The crisis continues to spill into Syria. Syrian refugees, who had previously sought safety in Lebanon, are once again on the run for their lives. As of 12 October, over 283,000 people had crossed from Lebanon; 70 per cent Syrians and the remainder Lebanese and a few other nationals.

UNHCR is at five border crossings with other UN agencies and local partners, providing water, food, blankets and mattresses as well as transport to intended destinations. At the main Masnaa/Jdaidet Yabous border crossing, people are forced to cross on foot after a strike last week. Of the arrivals, over 5,500 individuals have been assessed by our teams as having specific needs, including 1,300 with disabilities and others with chronic illnesses.

UNHCR and partners are providing medical and legal assistance, including primary and emergency health services, transporting the most vulnerable families from border crossings to their destinations and supporting hosting centers in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama, Idlib, Tartous, and Latakia. New arrivals are receiving counselling and support including civil documentation.

Many Syrians are returning to places they fled years ago, uncertain of what they will find and with meagre resources. Where their homes are destroyed, Syrians are being sheltered by relatives or friends, who are themselves struggling. Lebanese are mainly staying with relatives or generous Syrian families, with a small number in hosting centres. There are currently more than 25 hosting centres in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama, Idlib, Tartous and Latakia governorates, with a collective capacity of 10,000 people. UNHCR and partners are actively visiting both Syrian and Lebanese arrivals at their points of return, including at hosting centres, conducting needs assessments and providing essential protection services including legal assistance, gender-based violence prevention, child protection case management and psychosocial support.

This influx is happening amid the existing humanitarian crisis in Syria. Millions in Syria are still displaced, and 90 per cent of the population requires humanitarian assistance. Support to the new arrivals and their host communities is critical. UNHCR is also supporting them through 114 community centres across the country.

In south Lebanon, meanwhile, humanitarians face further difficulties reaching affected populations due to the ongoing heavy airstrikes. There are currently 1,059 government-assigned collective shelters in the country hosting over 188,146 people. Of those, 876 shelters have reached maximum capacity. UNHCR is working with the authorities and partners to upgrade shelters with partitioning, weatherproofing and rehabilitation of water and sanitation facilities, as well as assessing more sites to host displaced people.

UNHCR is the main provider of core relief items for displaced people in Lebanon, with over 141,452 items – mattresses, blankets, kitchen sets and solar lamps – distributed to 78,612 people since 23 September. UNHCR is also expanding cash assistance to vulnerable refugee and Lebanese families. This will help address immediate needs including housing. Since 23 September, over 263,750 Lebanese and refugees have been assisted with cash assistance.

The heavy bombardments have also had a devastating impact on public services and infrastructure. According to the World Health Organization, of 207 primary health-care centres in conflict areas, 100 are now closed due to the escalation of violence. UNHCR is also in the process of procuring much-needed ambulances to support Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health and evacuate patients from destroyed structures and transfer critical patients between hospitals.

UNHCR and partners have launched two emergency appeals for Lebanon and Syria to meet the urgent and growing needs. The inter-agency Lebanon flash appeal aims to mobilize \$425.7 million for over 1 million people. UNHCR's portion is estimated at \$111 million over three months. For Syria, an inter-

agency [appeal for \\$324 million](#) was launched to assist 480,000 Lebanese and Syrians for six months. The figure also includes Palestine refugees in Lebanon, and 80,000 host community members.

UNHCR is also aware of over 11,000 Lebanese who have arrived in Iraq since the escalation of hostilities in Lebanon through various points including the Al-Qaim border crossing (6,925) and airports in Baghdad and Najaf.

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