

# UPROOTING THE DISPLACED: THE FORCED EVICTIONS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

As of October 2024

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) | Lebanon - Beirut



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The escalating socio-economic crisis in Lebanon and the recent Israeli bombardment have worsened the already dire conditions faced by 1.5 million Syrian refugees. This report examines the widespread forced evictions of Syrian refugees, exploring causes, impacts, and providing legal analysis of the violation of forced eviction from a human rights lens. Lastly, recommended actions are provided.

### **Key findings:**

- 1- Evictions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon have significantly increased in the last few years and they occur in both individual and collective forms, often involve the use of violence and coercion - include verbal and physical abuse, threats, and destruction of their houses – and occur within a wider context of systematic push factors including systematically depriving refugees of legal protection, leaving them further vulnerable to involuntary returning to Syria.
- 2- There are multiple drivers of forced evictions that shape why, how and where evictions occur. Prior to this current crisis, evictions were seen to be part and parcel of a systematic policy adopted by the Lebanese government to create a hostile environment for refugees.
- 3- Anti-refugee policies, discriminatory measures, the use of force by security forces and longstanding structural challenges have all fed into forced eviction policies.
- 4- In Lebanon, forced evictions of Syrian refugees are often arbitrary and carried out without due process or the necessary protection requirements and guarantees that are required. As such, Lebanon continues to adopt a number of illegal measures with regards to forced evictions.
- 5- In this current context of Israeli attacks, evictions continue to occur in a context of large-scale displacement that has presenting new push factors and compounded and exacerbated existed discriminatory policies for Syrian refugees, forcing some to involuntary return to Syria. Refugees that are forcibly evicted from their homes face additional challenges and are more vulnerable to violations including the risk of forced deportations, particularly during their current internal displacement with additional barriers such as restrictions to accessing emergency shelters and humanitarian aid.
- 6- Widespread Israeli attacks have compounded challenges that refugees face leading many to involuntary return to Syria where they face additional protection risks and challenges.

### **Recommendations**

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) calls on the Lebanese government to immediately cease systematic forced evictions, and revoke discriminatory policies and security operations that worsen the already dire conditions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Authorities must ensure access to adequate shelter, protect refugees' housing rights, provide protection and guarantees in terms of housing and shelter. The UNHCR must reiterate that Syria is not safe for returns and ensure that its protection mandate encompasses the safeguarding of refugee rights including their housing and shelter needs. The international community should prioritize the provision of humanitarian aid to all affected populations – in line with humanitarian principles – based on needs and without discrimination.

## INTRODUCTION

Multiple crises in Lebanon over the last decade have disproportionately impacted Syrian refugees, who continue to live in an extraordinarily difficult and complex environment of political polarization and instability, weak governance, a collapsing economy, and growing socio-political challenges and tensions. Syrian refugees in Lebanon face immense challenges, with over 1.5 million Syrians residing in the country (UNHCR),<sup>1</sup> with 90% of them unable to afford their basic needs (UNHCR)<sup>2</sup>. A significant percentage lack access to sufficient healthcare, and education. Furthermore, most Syrians lack valid residency permits due to increasingly strict measures imposed by Lebanese authorities. Adding to these difficulties, ACHR has monitored thousands of cases of Syrian refugees being forcibly evicted across Lebanon, an increasingly alarming pattern that demands urgent intervention from the international community and relevant organizations.

Syrian refugees are also facing growing hostility fueled by orchestrated media campaigns demanding their immediate return to Syria. These campaigns are often accompanied by an anti-refugee rhetoric from many political and religious leaders who scapegoat refugees and blame them for Lebanon's economic collapse, and advocate for increased collaboration with the Assad regime to facilitate their return despite the risks they may face. These narratives exacerbate the tension between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host community and foster a dangerous environment that justifies ongoing discriminatory policies and actions that have led to gross violations of refugees' human rights.

Amidst the Israeli hostilities in Lebanon that began in September, the forced eviction of Syrian refugees has manifested and been exacerbated in different ways. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as of 25 November, the ongoing violence in Lebanon has resulted in around 899,725 Internally Displaced People (IDPs).<sup>3</sup> However, an accurate estimate of the number of Internally Displaced Refugees (IDRs) remains unknown given numerous data gaps and challenges with the reliability of available data.

The report aims to examine the forced evictions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon by analyzing the various factors that contribute to evictions and their effects on Syrian refugees. It defines the term 'forced evictions' and emphasizes how Lebanese authorities have seemingly attempted to portray evictions as a "voluntary" decision. It then outlines the different patterns of forced evictions, analyses the various direct and indirect causes, and assesses its impacts on Syrian refugees with a specific focus on how these challenges have evolved during the current context of Israeli bombardment. This is followed by a detailed legal analysis and concludes with key messages and recommendations.

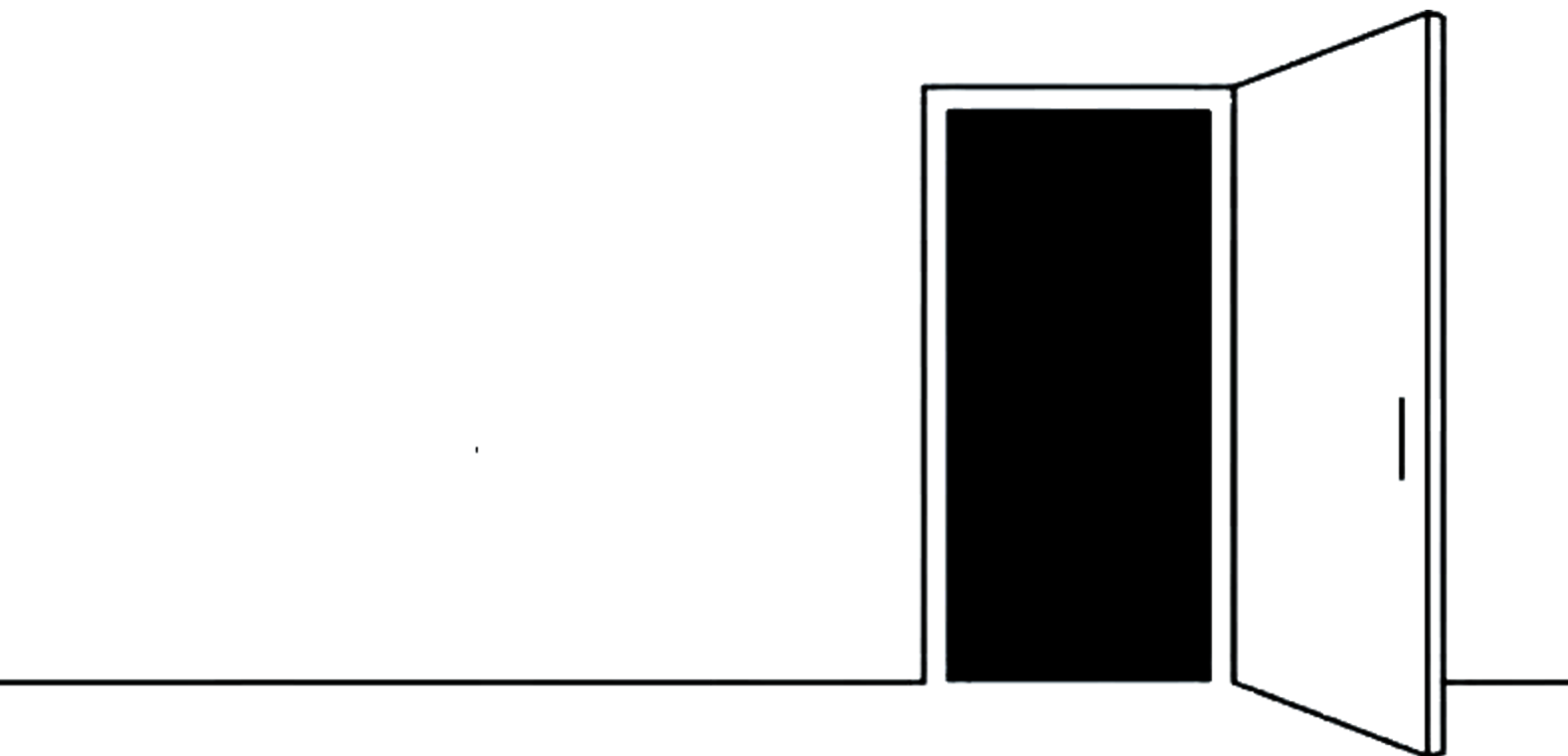
1-United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Lebanon - UNHCR Global Focus," accessed November 19, 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/lebanon>

2-United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "UNHCR Lebanon at a Glance," accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/at-a-glance>

3- Lebanon, "Flash Update #46: Escalation of Hostilities in Lebanon, as of November 21, 2024," ReliefWeb, November 23, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-flash-update-46-escalation-hostilities-lebanon-21-november-2024>



This report's methodology combines primary - including testimonial sources obtained by interviews with several Syrian refugees who were evicted - and secondary data from sources such as news articles, journals, and human rights reports. ACHR's methodology for this paper involved a rigorous systematic approach to ensure that the findings and recommendations represent the reality of the forced evictions in Lebanon. Qualitative interviews were conducted with ten victims of evictions providing lived personal experiences. Additionally, Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) monitored over 4,000 individual and collective cases of forced evictions carried out by municipal police and various security forces between January and October 2024. All interviews were transcribed, translated from Arabic, and analysed in-depth to identify recurring patterns of systematic violations and behaviours. ACHR adhered to its usual methodology and ensured that the analysis was neutral and served as an illustrative representation of the realities faced by Syrian refugees in Lebanon.



FORCED EVICTIONS, PATTERNS, AND STATISTICS

Forced Evictions

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines forced evictions as: **“The permanent or temporary removal of individuals, families, and/or communities from their homes and/or lands which they occupy against their will, without the provision of, and access to appropriate forms of legal or other protection.”**<sup>4</sup> As Lebanon continues its crackdown on refugees, thousands of Syrians have been evicted from their homes, and thousands more are facing the risk of eviction. Lebanon’s recent “voluntary” return campaign targeting Syrian refugees is fuelled primarily by anti-Syrian sentiments, discriminatory practices and coercion that make the “voluntary” nature of these returns questionable. The Lebanese authorities’ mass eviction operations often subjected refugees to violent practices, such as physical or verbal abuse, and intimidation. As resources such a shelter become scarcer due to the ongoing violence in Lebanon, community tensions and anti-refugee rhetorics are increasing, further marginalizing vulnerable refugee populations.

Forced evictions are involuntary. However, in the Lebanese context, they are often presented as voluntary to ostensibly appear more legitimate. This is mainly achieved through various forms of coercion, which appears in forms of social, political, or financial pressure, all contributing to an environment of insecurity and fear that directly and indirectly shapes decisions to leave the country. The narrative of the voluntariness of evictions benefits the authorities as it legitimizes evictions and avoids international backlash and condemnation. In Lebanon, forced evictions can be categorized into two types: individual and collective evictions.



	Targets	Carried out by	Reasons	Enforcement
 Individual Evictions	specific households, including individuals living alone.	Landlords.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The inability to pay rent promptly</li><li>- Tenancy disputes</li><li>- Discrimination.</li></ul>	Dialogue, either civil or hostile.
 Collective Evictions	Numerous households in a particular area or community.	The Lebanese Armed Forces, Municipal Police, State Security, & the Military Intelligence.	Lack of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- legal rental agreement</li><li>- valid residency permits</li><li>- other compliance with municipal regulations</li></ul>	Mostly violent methods such as intimidation, humiliation, and physical/verbal abuse.

Figure 1. The types of evictions Syrian refugees are subject to and their characteristics.

4-Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Forced Evictions," accessed June 27, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/forced-evictions>

It is vital to note that neither type of eviction is legal unless a court order is obtained, and certain obligations related to protection are upheld<sup>5</sup>. In practice, rental agreements between landlords and Syrian refugees are typically verbal rather than formal legal contracts so that landlords can avoid legal obligations, evade taxes and retain the ability to evict tenants or raise rents at any time. Refugees often have no choice but to accept these terms, even if the agreement is not formally registered with the municipality. Legal barriers to necessary paperwork often mean that refugees are caught in legal catch-22s: they are not allowed to sign rental agreements (without legal residency permits), but it is also nearly impossible to renew or obtain those permits. Residency complications and further expensive paperwork by authorities also function as a push factor that pressure refugees to leave their homes and subsequently leave Lebanon.

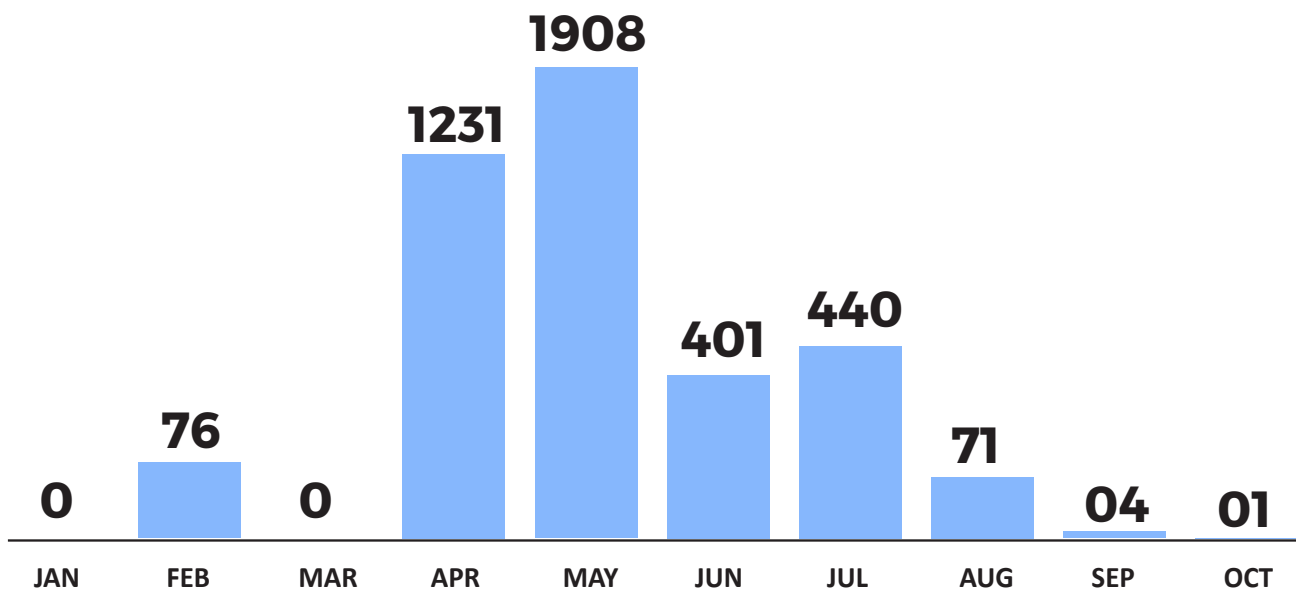


Figure 2. The number of forcibly evicted syrian refugees from January to October 2024

Note: These are the figures documented by ACHR, the true number of forced evictions exceeds the documented figures

As shown in Figure 2, forced eviction rates fluctuate depending on Lebanon’s social and political climate. For example, eviction rates significantly peaked during April and May. This coincided with the Brussels Conference on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region,” held in May 2024 and suggests that international attention on Syrian refugees in Lebanon and/or the large amount of funding given to the government by the EU during that period empowered security authorities to crack down on refugees. These practices have been observed systematically, with what seems to be an attempt by the local authorities to draw the attention of the international community to secure more funding from the conference. For example, prior to the 2023 Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region Conference in Brussels, Lebanese authorities launched a campaign of forced deportation of Syrian refugees. The authorities justified this by referencing a 2019 decision by the Supreme Defense Council to deport all Syrians who entered Lebanon irregularly after that date.

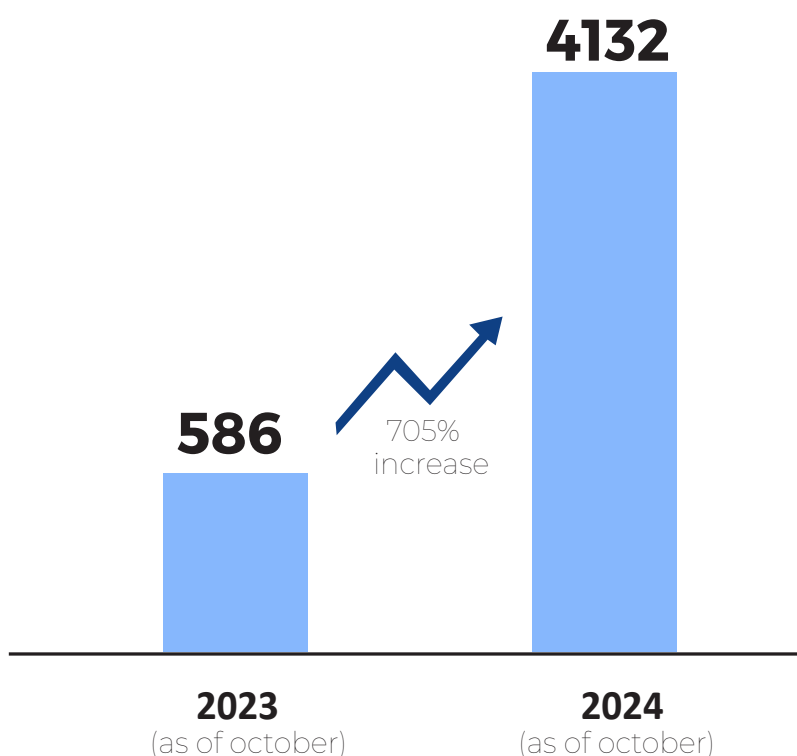


Figure 3. The number of forcibly evicted Syrian refugees in 2023 and 2024

Note: the true number of forced evictions exceeds the documented figures

Figure 3 compares documented eviction rates between early **January and October** for the years 2023 and 2024. The approximately 7-fold increase highlights the gravity of the Lebanese authorities’ intense crackdown on refugees<sup>6</sup>. The surge in eviction rates reflects the government’s intentions to significantly reduce the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

<sup>6</sup>These cases represent only those documented by ACHR; the actual numbers may be significantly higher.

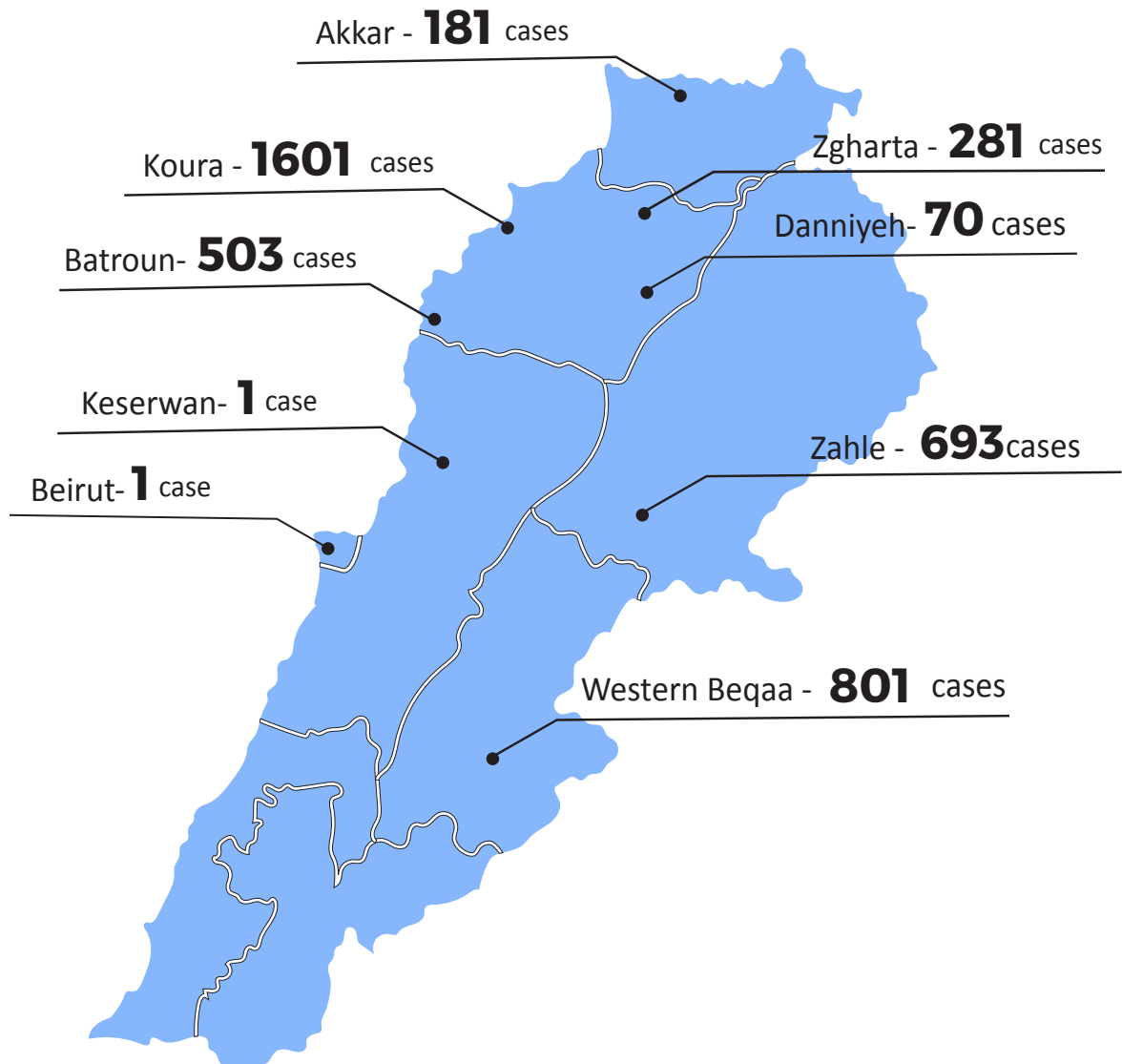
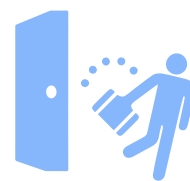


Figure 4. Geographical Locations of Evictions

Between **01 January** and **31 October** 2024, ACHR recorded **4132** cases of forced evictions.

**4132**

## DIRECT AND INDIRECT CAUSES

The statement above is often echoed by many Lebanese politicians who claim that refugees are guests being supported by the government, who is forced to cover their expenses for rent, healthcare, and education. The intolerance towards Syrian refugees in Lebanese society is not a new phenomenon, but one that has become increasingly violent. Peaks of this violence have occurred over time, including after a Syrian transnational gang operating between Syria and Lebanon was linked to the murder of a Lebanese Forces official.<sup>8</sup> Following his death, Syrians who reside in Christian-majority communities have increasingly become targets of hate crimes and discriminatory practices by both the Lebanese authorities and civilians affiliated with political parties that promote anti-refugee patriotic rhetoric. There have also been numerous instances of refugees getting evicted and beaten by local vigilantes or gangs<sup>9</sup> and abducted by the Lebanese Hezbollah militia.<sup>10</sup>



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**"Where they  
(Syrian refugees)  
go next is not  
my problem."**

Ramzi Nohra  
*The Governor of North Lebanon*

In Bourj Hammoud, a town northeast of Beirut, a group of Lebanese citizens ganged up on a Syrian refugee and physically assaulted him<sup>11</sup>, and threats targeting other Syrians worked to coerce them to leave the town.<sup>12</sup> Over the past months, several videos have circulated on social media platforms that show the assault and harassment of innocent Syrians whom the culprits seemingly arbitrarily target.<sup>13</sup> These practices can be understood to be one of the direct causes of forced evictions as refugees are socially pressured into leaving their homes due to the intensified hostility and fear of security raids and other crackdowns.



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**"The solution begins by considering most of the regions in Syria to be secure so that Syrians who have come to Lebanon as refugees can be deported there .... Once there are secure regions in Syria and the international community recognizes this, most of the Syrians who are in Lebanon without a job or legal pretext will be deported."**<sup>14</sup>

Najib Mikati  
*Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister*

7-La Croix International, "Lebanon: Syrian Refugees Facing Wave of Expulsions," June 19, 2024, <https://international.la-croix.com/bakhtastories/lebanon-syrian-refugees-facing-wave-of-expulsions>

8-Lyana Alameddine and Michel Hallak, "Around 1,100 Syrian Refugees Forced to Evacuate Kouba, North Lebanon," L'Orient Today, May 29, 2024, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1415455/around-1100-syrian-refugees-forced-to-evacuate-kouba-north-lebanon>

9-Ammar Musarea, "Protecting Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," Washington Institute, May 8, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/en/protecting-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon>

10-Philippe Pernot, "In Crisis-Hit Lebanon, Syrian Refugees Kidnapped for Ransom," The New Arab, September 12, 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/crisis-hit-lebanon-syrian-refugees-kidnapped-ransom>

11-"X (Formerly Twitter)," April 10, 2024, [https://x.com/jamil\\_el\\_sayyed/status/1778094264502604058](https://x.com/jamil_el_sayyed/status/1778094264502604058)

12-"X (Formerly Twitter)," April 10, 2024, [https://x.com/jamil\\_el\\_sayyed/status/1778094264502604058](https://x.com/jamil_el_sayyed/status/1778094264502604058)

13-Nada Maucourant Atallah, "Attacks Against Syrians in Lebanon Surge After Killing of Christian Party Official," The National, April 14, 2024, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2024/04/12/syrians-lebanon-attacks-lebanese-forces-pascal-sleiman>

14-"Most Syrians in Lebanon Will Be 'deported,' Mikati Says From Bkirki," L'Orient Today, April 13, 2024, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1410127/most-syrians-in-lebanon-will-be-deported-mikati-says-from-bkirki.html>

Communal violence against Syrian refugees has considerably increased and has grown to encompass more organized violence through, for example, organized crime.<sup>15</sup> Here, Syrian refugees are targeted by groups of nationals and are physically and verbally assaulted, humiliated, and abducted. For instance, in certain communities in Beirut, Syrians are threatened by civilians to leave or face consequences, and according to the UNHCR, in predominantly Christian towns, reports have indicated that citizens imposed unofficial curfews for refugees, threatening them with mass evictions, and creating an environment of fear.<sup>16</sup> Religion has often been used to justify coercion and discrimination, with popularized Islamophobic tropes being weaponized to perpetuate false narratives such as that Muslim-majority refugees are part of a plan to alter the country's demographic balance.

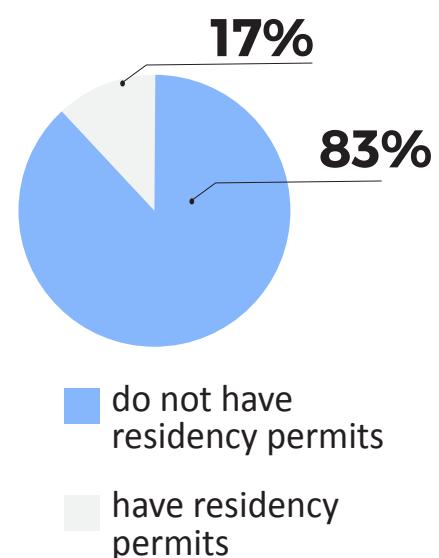


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**“Hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, who are destabilizing the state of Lebanon and jeopardizing its future... They have now become a real demographic, political, and security threat”<sup>17</sup>**

• Cardinal Bechara Boutros al-Rahi  
*Maronite Patriarch of Antioch*

Another significant cause for forced evictions is the government's residence permit restrictions. On 3 May 2023, the Minister of Interior, Bassam Mawlawi, announced a set of restrictions banning the rental of properties to refugees who are not registered with the municipalities and who do not possess legal residency.<sup>18</sup> For context, around 83% of Syrian refugees do not have residency permits.<sup>19</sup> In collaboration with military intelligence, municipal police forces arbitrarily evict Syrian refugees from their buildings and informal settlements, sealing them with locks to restrain them from entering.<sup>20</sup> In a documented case, ACHR observed a case of a couple whose children were trapped inside their sealed home.



15-Andrea López-Tomás, "Anti-Syrian Sentiment Intensifies in Lebanon Amid Economic Crisis," The Media Line, April 24, 2024, <https://themedialine.org/top-stories/anti-syrian-sentiment-intensifies-in-lebanon-amid-economic-crisis/>.  
 16-Atallah, N. M. (2024, April 14). Attacks against Syrians in Lebanon surge after killing of Christian party official. The National. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2024/04/12/syrians-lebanon-attacks-lebanese-forces-pascal-sleiman/>.  
 17-Catherine Pepinster, "Lebanese Church Leader Calls for Repatriation of Syrian Refugees," The Tablet, January 12, 2023, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/16393/lebanese-church-leader-calls-for-repatriation-of-syrian-refugees>.  
 18-The Cradle, "Lebanon Tightens Restrictions on Syrian Refugees," May 4, 2023, <https://thecradle.co/articles-id/523>.  
 19-Lebanon: Hundreds of Thousands of Syrian Refugees at Imminent Risk of Deportation - Lebanon, ReliefWeb, May 17, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-hundreds-thousands-syrian-refugees-imminent-risk-deportation>.  
 20-Daraj, "Arbitrary Eviction Notices: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Forced to the Streets - Daraj," Daraj, July 15, 2024, <https://daraj.media/en/arbitrary-eviction-notices-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-forced-to-the-streets/>.

**Mr. Hamza and Mrs. Yasmine had to step out of their home to take care of some obligations, leaving their children at home. Upon returning, they quickly realized that the forces were there as their home was sealed shut, with their children inside. The parents were advised not to break the seal and search for alternative ways to get the children out. They then located a small, high window, had someone slender enough to fit through it climb into the home, and lifted the children out.**

On 8 May 2024, Lebanon's General Security imposed new draconian rules, emphasizing that citizens must not employ, shelter, or rent to irregular refugees.<sup>21</sup> It also suspended renewing residency permits as a basis for housing contracts and resumed the "voluntary and safe" return operations of Syrian refugees. Following this decision, shops owned or run by Syrians have been forcibly shut down by municipalities, curfews have been set, arbitrary arrests and security raids have taken place, and there have been numerous reports of residency permits being revoked.<sup>22</sup> In some regions, forces initiated the expulsion of refugees from villages and of students from their Lebanese schools.<sup>23</sup> The General Security's new residence permit regulations force refugees to remain in Lebanon illegally<sup>24</sup> and consequently justify the authorities' claim that only unlawful refugees will be deported. These residency regulations not only heighten refugees' housing vulnerability through forced evictions but also pave the way to legitimized forced deportations.



**Shops owned or run by Syrians have been forcibly shut down by municipalities, curfews have been set, arbitrary arrests and security raids have taken place, and there have been numerous reports of residency permits being revoked.**



**"The Syrian crisis could easily extend for another 13 years. The presence of all refugees, except those with residency permits, is illegal, with the number of legitimate Syrian refugees being around 300 thousand only."**<sup>25</sup>

• Samir Gaegea

*Head of the Lebanese Forces Party*

21-Lebanese General Security, "منط وتظيم ملف السوريين," Lebanese General Security - posts. Accessed July 25, 2024, <https://www.general-security.gov.lb/ar/posts/418>.

22-ReliefWeb, "Lebanon: Hundreds of Thousands of Syrian Refugees at Imminent Risk of Deportation."

23-Paula Asth, "Lebanese Interior Ministry, General Security Take Steps to Resolve Syrian Refugee Crisis," Asharq Al-Awsat, April 20, 2024, <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/4975506-lebanese-interior-ministry-general-security-take-steps-resolve-syrian-refugee>.

24-"EU-Lebanon Deal: Turning a Blind Eye to Reality | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Brussels Office - European Union," Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Brussels Office - European Union, July 16, 2024, <https://eu.boell.org/en/2024/07/16/eu-lebanon-deal-turning-blind-eye-reality>.

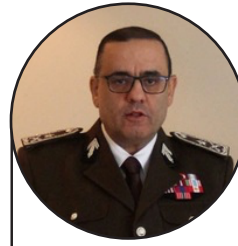
25-Enab Baladi, "Samir Gaegea: 40% of Syrians in Lebanon Are 'Illegal Refugees,'" April 19, 2024, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2024/04/samir-geagea-40-of-syrians-in-lebanon-are-illegal-refugees/>.



In April 2024, Lebanon's Minister of Social Affairs, Hector Hajjar, announced a roadmap to address the status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.<sup>26</sup> The plan includes surveying Syrian refugees to determine who meets the conditions of being classified as a displaced person. Under his proposed plan, all refugees who do not meet the criteria might have their informal settlements and tents dismantled, facing a heightened risk of being forcibly evicted and deported.

Despite the above-stated national strategy to "organize" the legal status of Syrians and "manage" their "voluntary return," Lebanon has taken no serious steps towards this goal since 2015 and instead current strategies appear to be focused on forcibly deporting refugees through Lebanon's security forces by deliberately exacerbating difficult living conditions and using other 'push factors' to pressure refugees into leaving.

Some indirect causes include escalating authority-initiated anti-Syrian refugee media campaigns. These campaigns aim to paint Syrian refugees in the most negative light, as criminals, economic burdens, and threats to Lebanese society. In doing so, these campaigns work to demonize refugees and use them as scapegoats for the country's problems. For instance, a recent controversial campaign, "Undo the damage... before it is too late"<sup>29</sup>, was launched to frame Syrian refugees as responsible for Lebanon's financial collapse. Of note, many economists and other experts have debunked these narratives, indicating that the Lebanese economic crisis was not produced by the Syrian refugee influx, for which Lebanon received great amounts of international aid but was primarily caused by structural factors that were visible before the crisis.<sup>30 31</sup> These false narratives perpetuate societal tensions among refugees and host populations which in turn, leads to push factors and violations including that of forced evictions. The Lebanese government's policy for the last two years included a decision to ban the development of new tents or camps that house refugees, exponentially decreasing their accommodation options.<sup>32</sup>



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**“(Organizing the legal status of Syrians and managing their return) is a national strategy that adheres to the principle of voluntary repatriation and diffuses possible animosity between the Lebanese and Syrian populations.”<sup>27</sup>**

Major General Elias Al-Baysari  
*The Acting Director General of Security*



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**"There are dangerous demographic changes underway, we will become refugees in our own country."<sup>28</sup>**

Hector Hajjar  
*Lebanese Minister of Social Affairs*

26-Malek Jadah, "Syrians who are not 'displaced' could face forced repatriation under new government proposal," L'Orient Today, April 2, 2024, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1408960/syrians-who-are-not-displaced-could-face-forced-repatriation-under-new-government-proposal.html>.

27-Kulluna Irada, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: Managing the Crisis and Ensuring the Right of Return," May 16, 2024, <https://kulluna-irada.org/article-172>.

28-Rudaw, "I'd Rather Die: Syrians in Lebanon Fear Deportation," April 28, 2023, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/280420231>.

29-Info Migrants, "Posters, Ads Against Syrian Refugees Spark Uproar in Lebanon," March 1, 2024, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/55946/posters-ads-against-syrian-refugees-spark-uproar-in-lebanon>.

30-Nadia Al-Faour, "How Syrian Refugees Became a Scapegoat for Lebanon's Man-made Catastrophe," Arab News, September 25, 2022, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2168811/middle-east>.

31-Ward, C. (n.d.), "The ad campaign in Lebanon fuelling violence against Syrians," The New Arab, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/ad-campaign-lebanon-fuelling-violence-against-syrians>.

32- Mateo Nelson, "Syrians Fleeing Lebanon's South Struggle Amid Lack of Support," Syria Direct, January 28, 2024, <https://syriadirect.org/syrians-fleeing-lebanons-south-struggle-amid-lack-of-support/>.

The EU-Lebanon migration deal, which will provide Lebanon with €1 billion over three years to strengthen the country's support for its refugee population and to curb irregular migration to Europe, is understood by many as deeply problematic. As noted by CSIS, providing financial support to governance and security actors who are the primary violators of human rights violations may work to embolden their impunity and will likely feed into corrupt governance structures and illegal policies.<sup>34</sup> While the package was indeed criticized by many officials, the EU deal and a recent call for the re-evaluation of Syria's safety to increase the "voluntary return" of Syrian refugees illustrates rising anti-refugee sentiments and the EU's willingness to outsource this challenge to Syria's neighboring states along main migratory routes.<sup>35</sup> However, the root causes of anti-refugee sentiments remain long-standing structural problems related to corruption, the mismanagement of international funds, and poor governance.

Even prior to the current Israeli bombardment of Lebanon, Syrian refugees faced unprecedented challenges and threats but continued to opt to stay in Lebanon rather than return to Syria. Many Syrian refugees come from areas on the Syrian-Lebanese border controlled entirely or partially by Hezbollah, where fierce fighting has resulted in mass displacement of hundreds of thousands since mid-2013. Their immobility is compounded by legal barriers preventing them from leaving Lebanon, the destruction of their hometowns, and fear of being arrested and held in the Syrian regime's detention centers. These factors and significant risks are often dismissed and instead, Lebanese officials have perpetuated securitized narratives of refugees potentially fleeing Lebanon by sea to Europe as a strategy to receive more financial aid.



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**“The displacement of Syrians has cost Lebanon more than 40 billion U.S. dollars since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011.”<sup>33</sup>**

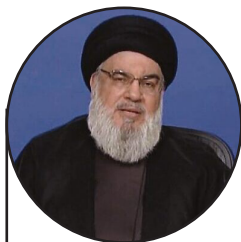
Abdallah Bou Habib  
*Lebanon's caretaker Foreign Minister*



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**“This is a risk. Corruption could undermine the EU's financial package.”<sup>36</sup>**

Youssef Khalil  
*Lebanon's caretaker Finance Minister*



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**“I call for a national decision that says: we have opened the sea, whoever wants to leave for Europe, for Cyprus, the sea is in front of you. Take a boat and board it.”<sup>37</sup>**

Hassan Nasrallah  
*Former Secretary-General of Hezbollah.*

33-Xinhua, "Syrian refugees cost Lebanon over 40 bln USD since 2011: FM," China.org.cn, January 23, 2023, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2023-01/23/content\\_85072361.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2023-01/23/content_85072361.htm).

34-Natasha Hall and Will Todman, "Lebanon's Dangerous Campaign Against Refugees," CSIS, June 4, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/lebanons-dangerous-campaign-against-refugees>.

35-Menelaos Hadjicostis, "7 EU Members Say Conditions in Syria Should Be Reassessed to Allow Voluntary Refugee Returns | AP News," AP News, June 7, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/migrants-refugees-syria-eu-lebanon-safe-zones-returns-3b52a8b2d55acb6838c1e34916638f4b>.

36-"Corruption Could Undermine EU Financial Package, Says Lebanon's Finance Minister," <https://kataeb.org/>, May 4, 2024, <https://en.kataeb.org/articles/corruption-could-undermine-eu-financial-package-says-lebanons-finance-minister>.

37-Afp, "Hezbollah Chief Urges Beirut to Allow Syrian Migrant Boats to Leave for Europe," Arab News, May 13, 2024, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2509611/middle-east>.

## CURRENT CONTEXT: ISRAELI BOMBARDMENT AND HEIGHTENED EVICTIONS AND HOUSING CHALLENGES

In the current context of significant and ongoing Israeli bombardment of Lebanon, Syrian refugees have become internally displaced once again. Large numbers who fled from the south for fear of being targeted or after having their homes destroyed have been unable to secure alternative safe housing or shelter and approximately 500K people have reportedly “returned” to Syria since 07 November according to UN-OCHA.<sup>38</sup>

During the first few weeks of Israeli attacks on the south of Lebanon, multiple municipalities issued warnings that refugees fleeing the south would not be welcomed in their governorates and that any refugee hosting another family fleeing the south would be forcibly deported. In some cases, certain municipalities also threatened those who help the displaced with punitive action.

Further, many landlords are raising rental rates including for refugees who are in desperate need for housing, others asked for unaffordable monthly advances to secure housing and in some cases landlords reneged on previously established rental agreements to evict refugees. This has exacerbated their already vulnerable position and has led to largescale homelessness among refugees with multiple reports of refugees living on the streets and in limited public spaces.<sup>39</sup>

The Lebanese State’s National Emergency Plan announced on 31 October 2023, made limited reference to refugee communities and of the 1,000 plus established collective shelters for those internally displaced, many have turned away Syrian refugees. Reports indicate that some local authorities and/or host communities have refused or restricted access based on nationality.



**500K**  
people have returned  
to Syria



**During the first few weeks of Israeli attacks on the south of Lebanon, multiple municipalities issued warnings that refugees fleeing the south would not be welcomed in their governorates and that any refugee hosting another family fleeing the south would be forcibly deported.**

38-UN OCHA Flash Report, No. 42. As of November 07. [https://daleel.madani.org/sites/default/files/ocha\\_lebanon\\_flash\\_update42\\_20241107.pdf](https://daleel.madani.org/sites/default/files/ocha_lebanon_flash_update42_20241107.pdf)

39-“Syrian Refugees Among Hundreds Sheltering on Beirut’s Beaches As Israel Wages War on Lebanon” - <https://www.newarab.com/features/syrian-refugees-find-shelter-beirut-beaches-amid-israels-war>

For instance, Lebanon's Caretaker Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi on sheltering Syrian refugees, said "The response is for Lebanese who are displaced. There are shelters in the Bekaa dedicated to Syrians." While a few separate shelters have reportedly been established for displaced Syrian refugees within Lebanon, Syrian refugees continue to cite that they are being turned away from emergency shelters designated for Lebanese and in some cases, refugees have even been evicted from shelters to accommodate displaced Lebanese populations.<sup>40</sup> Given that these shelters remain a key centralized point of aid provision for multiple needs, those Syrian refugees that are unable to access these shelters are often excluded from other forms of humanitarian aid provision and heavily reliant on NGOs and forms of ad hoc aid.

The ongoing conflict has left refugees in an impossible state, forcing many to involuntarily return to Syria. Those without shelter in Lebanon are especially vulnerable to being forced to return to Syria and compounding and longstanding stressors also act as significant push factors shaping decision-making. Significant forced returnee numbers have led many Lebanese politicians including Caretaker Social Affairs Minister, Hector Hajjar Hajjar and Caretaker Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi to suggest that Syria is safe for refugees to return to.

Such statements stand in direct contradiction to the conclusions of numerous UN agencies and human rights organizations. The United Nations (UN) maintains the consensus that Syria is not safe for return.<sup>41</sup> The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) states that Syria continues to exhibit high levels of violence across the country with a prevalent risk of persecution.<sup>42</sup> The UN Commission of Inquiry for Syria issued a report that emphasizes that not only is Syria unsafe for return, but its returnees are especially targeted by the Syrian regime.<sup>43</sup> Amnesty International<sup>44</sup>, Human Rights Watch<sup>45</sup>, and various other human rights groups affirm the same notion about insecurity in Syria. Syrian refugees who resort to returning after being forcibly evicted or deported are in imminent danger of torture, imprisonment, and countless other human rights violations. The refugees who remain in Lebanon are at high risk of being forcibly evicted, internally displaced, and made homeless, with every aspect of their lives interrupted and in jeopardy.



**The ongoing conflict has left refugees in an impossible state, forcing many to involuntarily return to Syria. Those without shelter in Lebanon are especially vulnerable to being forced to return to Syria and compounding and longstanding stressors also act as significant push factors shaping decision-making.**

40-Syria Daily, "Under Israeli fire in Lebanon, many Syrians have nowhere to turn," <https://syriadirect.org/under-israeli-fire-in-lebanon-many-syrians-have-nowhere-to-turn/>

41-"Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview (February 2024) - Syrian Arab Republic," ReliefWeb, March 3, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-2024-humanitarian-needs-overview-february-2024#:~:text=In%202024%2C%2016.7%20million%20people,of%20the%20crisis%20in%202021.1.&text=Syria%20remains%20a%20protection%20crisis.>

42-"Country Guidance: Syria (April 2024)," European Union Agency for Asylum, April 15, 2024, <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/country-guidance-syria-april-2024>.

43-The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "UN Commission of Inquiry: Syria, Too, Desperately Needs a Ceasefire," March 11, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-commission-inquiry-syria-too-desperately-needs-ceasefire>.

44-Amnesty International, "Human Rights in Syria," accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/syria/report-syria/>.

45-Nadia Hardman, "Our Lives Are Like Death," Human Rights Watch, March 28, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/10/20/our-lives-are-death/syrian-refugee-returns-lebanon-and-jordan>.

## REFUGEE TESTIMONIES ON THE IMPACTS THEY FACE

### The Danger of Returning to Syria

Refugees may resort to returning after being evicted, despite the possible dangers that await them in Syria. Those unwilling or unable to return to Syria may opt to move to a third country, often through dangerous sea routes.

**In June, ACHR interviewed Mrs. Muna, a Syrian refugee who lived with her husband, Mr. Kamal in the Batroun District. The couple was ordered to evict their home by authorities but remained at the request of their landlord. They were physically assaulted by State Security officers and Mr. Kamal was arrested. They shortly left for Syria after the incident.**

### Socio-Economic Impacts:

Refugees who work are mostly employed in Lebanon's informal and low-wage sectors, earning minimum wage. Getting evicted disrupts their entire livelihoods, from employment to educational opportunities. As their poverty levels increase, they struggle to access new housing.



(Mrs. Rania, June 2024)

**“Until when am I going to sleep between the trees? I am going to die, tell my story.”**

### Health and Psychological Impacts

One of the services evictees may lose access to following their eviction is healthcare. The physical and mental toll of displacement and the struggle to find new housing significantly impacts their health.



(Mrs. Amira, June 2024)

**“My child is disabled, and I have no one. I can't sleep at night in fear for my children's lives.” – A Syrian mother to two young children evicted in the Zgharta district.**

## Internal Displacement and Homelessness

Amidst navigating increasingly restrictive policies, refugees may be internally displaced in Lebanon numerous times in search of safety and stability. In between moving, they become homeless as they lack alternative and immediate housing options.



(Mr. Rami, June 2024)

**“Our children and our women are stranded on the streets, they have no shelter.” – A young Syrian man evicted in the northern Lebanon district.**

## Heightened Legal Insecurity

The absence of the rule of law and arbitrary nature of forced evictions, leaves refugees further vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, arbitrary arrest, detention, or deportation – without any adequate access to legal support or justice.

**During one of the eviction raids that occurred this June, a group of refugees heard municipal officers humiliating them by saying “We want to get rid of you... we are disgusted by Syrians.”**





## LEGAL ANALYSIS

Under international law, the protections and guarantees against forced evictions are enshrined in different provisions in international instruments such as The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 25(1))<sup>46</sup>, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - ICESCR (Art. 11)<sup>47</sup>, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – ICCPR (Art. 17)<sup>48</sup> and provisions in non-discrimination conventions with additional stipulations on housing and groups such as “women, religious and ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees face discrimination concerning housing”.<sup>49</sup> The Commission on Human Rights has recognized in Resolution 1993/77 the “practice of forced eviction” as a “gross violation of human rights” and reaffirmed the right to a “secure place to live in peace and dignity” including that legal responsibility “rests with Governments”.<sup>50</sup> While these international legal obligations are not legally binding, Lebanon has signed and ratified the ICCPR and ICESCR in addition to other International Human Rights Law (IHRL) treaties, and the Lebanese Constitution expressly recognizes and abides by the broader IHRL framework thereby making these internationally recognized rights constitutionally protected.

As such, Lebanon has contravened the rights and obligations outlined by these international instruments and has enacted coercive and discriminatory administrative practices and laws against refugees including limiting their ability to rent accommodation. For instance, Law No. 296/2001 - which amends the 1969 Presidential Decree on the Right to Real Estate Acquisition for Foreigners (Art. 1(2)) - states that “no real right of any kind may be acquired by a person who does not have citizenship issued by a recognized state or by any person if such acquisition contradicts the provisions of the Constitution relating to the prohibition of permanent settlement”.<sup>51</sup> While the amendment of the law was interpreted to specifically prohibit Palestinian refugees in Lebanon from acquiring property rights, the law also applies limits to other refugees including Syrians. The Code of Obligations and Contract (1932), and the Tenancy Law (2002) outlines property rights and notes that evictions must be mandated by a court and that landowners do not have the right to evict a tenant without a court order.<sup>52</sup>



**Lebanon has contravened the rights and obligations outlined by these international instruments and has enacted coercive and discriminatory administrative practices and laws against refugees including limiting their ability to rent accommodation**

46-“Universal Declaration of Human Rights,”The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/english>.

47-“International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966),”The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>.

48-“International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,”The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

49-“The Human Right to Adequate Housing,”The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/human-right-adequate-housing>.

50-UN Commission on Human Rights (49th sess.: 1993 : Geneva), “Forced Evictions,” Refworld, February 12, 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unchr/1993/en/6639>.

51-Norwegian Refugee Council, “Palestinians Right to Inherit Under the 2001 Amendment Law-Beirut Test Case,” Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), January 2016, <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/palestinian-refugees-right-to-inherit-under-the-2001-amendment-law.pdf>.

52-Civil Judge of Beirut (president Mekie), Decision No. 501, issued on 11 November 2002.

Although these protections align with the obligations and guidelines on the right to adequate housing by UN bodies, these legal rights have rarely been extended to refugees in Lebanon with a “majority of evictions...undertaken without the adequate legal protection or due process” which amounts to forced evictions.<sup>53</sup> This contravenes the guideline set up by the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing emphasizing that “States must ensure the equal enjoyment of the right to housing without discrimination for all internally displaced persons and all migrants, regardless of documentation”.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the Lebanese State, as a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, is obliged to “guarantee the equal enjoyment of the right to adequate housing for citizens and non-citizens”,<sup>55</sup> and it should aim to eliminate all forms of formal, substantive, direct, and indirect discrimination that might lead to depriving any individuals of equal access to adequate housing.<sup>56</sup> Specifically, with regard to Syrians and as outlined in this report, several municipalities and local governors have adopted informal administrative decrees using inconsistent and arbitrary justifications for evictions without the provision of adequate legal protection or due process.

These local bodies and representatives have often acted beyond the scope of their legal mandate to issue and exact such policies and responsible authorities making them directly and indirectly complicit in evictions. The Lebanese State has also failed to put in place “effective protective mechanisms to secure effective remedies for violations of the right to housing and non-discrimination” against Syrian refugees,<sup>57</sup> including ensuring: the provision of genuine consultation, reasonable notice, transparent communication, alternative housing options, legal support (and possible compensation) and lastly, ensuring that evictees are not subject to human rights abuses arising because of eviction.<sup>58</sup> National laws that have been adopted and the informal practices by local governance bodies do not provide legal justification for these evictions and as such the nature of the evictions, amounts to “nationality-based or religious discrimination” given its systematic targeting of Syrian refugees.<sup>59</sup> It is crucial to note that States must ensure that any laws or regulations that permit the interference with a person’s home “should be per the provisions, aims and, objectives of the [ICCPR] and should be, in any event, reasonable in the particular event”.<sup>60</sup>

Syrian refugees remain especially legally vulnerable in Lebanon, given that the State has not ratified the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees (or the 1967 Additional Protocol) and that they are not sufficiently protected by domestic asylum legislation outlined in the Foreigners Law (1962). Therefore, even if Lebanese national courts or laws indicate that an eviction is carried out in conformity with national legislation, the situation may still constitute forced eviction, which is thereby considered illegal if it does not comply with international human rights standards and State-related international obligations.<sup>61</sup>

53-Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), “In Constant Fear of Evictions: An Analysis of the Shelter Insecurity for Vulnerable Refugee Households in Lebanon During Covid-19,” Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), n.d., [https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/sets/pdf/reports/in-constant-fear-of-eviction/in-constant-fear-of-eviction\\_ipc-irc\\_july-2020.pdf](https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/sets/pdf/reports/in-constant-fear-of-eviction/in-constant-fear-of-eviction_ipc-irc_july-2020.pdf).

54-“A/HRC/43/43: Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing - Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context,” The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), May 26, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc4343-guidelines-implementation-right-adequate-housing-report-special>.

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56-Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 20: Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), E/C.12/GC/20, 02 July 2009, paras. 7-10.

57-Human Rights Council, Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing, Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, A/HRC/43/43, para. 58(c).

58-Refworld, “General Comment No. 7: The Right to Adequate Housing (Art.11.1): Forced Evictions,” Refworld, February 11, 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/cesrcr/1997/en/53063>.

59-Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Lebanon: Mass Evictions of Syrian Refugees” April 20, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/20/lebanon-mass-evictions-syrian-refugees>

60- UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 16: Article 17 (Right to Privacy), The Right to Respect of Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence, and Protection of Honour and Reputation, 8 April 1988, para. 4.

61-UN Habitat, “Forced Evictions,” The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/FS25.Rev.1.pdf>.



This is especially problematic in a context in which Lebanon has adopted coercive measures to pressure Syrian refugees to return collectively to Syria, in violation of the customary international principle of non-refoulement, especially due to the lack of accessible administrative or legal remedies that allow Syrian individuals, who have well-founded fear of persecution if returned to Syria, to challenge refoulment decisions. As stated in CESCR General Comment 07, forced evictions “also take place in connection with forced population transfers, internal displacement, forced relocations in the context of armed conflict, mass exoduses, and refugee movements”.<sup>62</sup>

UNHCR also asserts that the principle of non-refoulment does not only concern direct forced returns but also applies in situations where refugees feel that they have been left with no other choice but to “voluntarily return”. As such, repatriation is not considered voluntary when refugees are coerced by the host country’s authorities to limit refugees’ freedom of choice through direct coercion or by enforcing push factors like cutting essential services and fostering anti-refugee sentiment among the local population.<sup>63</sup> As such, systematic and mass forcible evictions of Syrian refugees to pressure refugees to return to Syria, should be assessed within broader legal frameworks of international human rights law. Lebanon has failed to live up to its obligations to create the necessary conditions for, and treat refugees in line with, international human rights, including housing rights, and has adopted a policy of mass and systematic eviction of Syrian refugees both using formal legal instruments and informal coercive and discriminatory practices.

62-General Comment 07: The right to adequate housing, CESCR.

63-United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Geneva, “Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Geneva (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Geneva, 1996), [https://www.unhcr.org/bg/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2016/12/Handbook\\_Voluntary-Repatriation\\_1996.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/bg/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2016/12/Handbook_Voluntary-Repatriation_1996.pdf).



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### • TO THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON

- The Lebanese authorities must immediately cease forced eviction campaigns of Syrian refugees and halt all security operations that target refugees and any other vulnerable populations.
- Lebanon must fulfil its international obligations to protect housing, land and property (HLP) rights of Syrian refugees and ensure they have access to adequate shelter.
- Lebanese authorities should guarantee that Syrian refugees, and other vulnerable populations, are not subjected to systematic deportations and involuntary returns to Syria, where they may face huge security risks.
- Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) urges the Lebanese authorities to ensure that Syrian refugees have inclusive access to officially designated government collective sites and/or ensure the allocation of specific sites and resources to accommodate these population groups.
- The Lebanese Government should abide by its obligations outlined in international legal instruments that mandate the protection of housing land and property (HLP) rights and refrain from any direct or indirect actions that could result in the forced deportation or involuntary return of Syrian refugees to Syria.

### • TO THE UNHCR

- ACHR requests that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) uphold its mandate to monitor, report on and protect refugees from human rights violations.
- UNHCR must take proactive steps to address the ongoing violations of forced evictions and forced displacement of refugees and ensure that their fundamental rights are guaranteed and safeguarded.
- UNHCR and other UN organizations should provide humanitarian aid in accordance with humanitarian principles, ensuring that assistance is accessible to all, including victims of forced evictions and refugees displaced due to the recent Israeli escalations.

### -TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- The international community should prioritize humanitarian aid in line with need and to those vulnerable groups in Lebanon, particularly Syrian refugees, to ensure access to basic needs such as shelter, food, and healthcare.
- Especially in light of the ongoing forced evictions and recent internal displacements during the Israeli attacks, the international community should reiterate Lebanon's non-refoulement obligations.

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