

The humanitarian impact of escalating Hezbollah-Israel hostilities

OVERVIEW

Since 8 October 2023, escalating hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel have been significantly affecting South and Nabatiye governorates (IOM 30/05/2024; Intersos accessed 03/06/2024). Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun, Saida, and Sour are among the districts most affected (FEWS NET 01/03/2024). The current Israel-Hezbollah escalation was sparked by Hamas's 7 October military operation on Israeli territory and the conflict that has since decimated Gaza and spread across the West Bank.

Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon have hit densely populated areas, affecting residents and resulting in displacement (OCHA 08/05/2024; BBC 01/05/2024). By 25 June 2024, nearly 97,000 people had been displaced from and within districts in southern Lebanon, and 435 people had been killed, including 97 civilians (IOM 27/06/2024; OCHA 29/06/2024). This escalation has increased the burden on Lebanon's already strained healthcare, education, and WASH sectors (Anera 23/05/2024; OCHA 30/05/2024).

Access restrictions, mainly resulting from insecurity and airstrikes, are impeding humanitarian organisations' delivery of aid and the population's access to public services in conflict areas (OCHA 23/02/2024; FEWS NET 01/03/2024; Save the Children 07/03/2024).

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KEY FINDINGS

- The **continuing Israel-Hezbollah conflict in southern Lebanon has aggravated vulnerabilities among displaced populations**, including children, women, Syrian and Palestinian refugees, and migrant domestic workers. For these groups, displacement has led to an increased risk of violence, exploitation, and limited access to essential services. Syrian refugees, in particular, face challenges evacuating southern Lebanon, as checkpoints mean they risk detention or deportation.
- Livelihoods, specifically in the agricultural sector, appear to be the most affected. The use of white phosphorus bombs and other attacks have damaged agricultural land, crops, and livestock, leading to financial losses and long-term environmental impacts. This has resulted in **loss of income for many families dependent on farming**.
- The **Israel-Hezbollah conflict has also disrupted healthcare services** in southern Lebanon. The closure of primary healthcare facilities and shortage of medical supplies, doctors, and nurses have limited access to essential healthcare, particularly affecting children under five and those with chronic conditions.
- **Humanitarian access has become even more restricted**. Insecurity is limiting people's movement and ability to access public and humanitarian services. Aid delivery is also severely challenged by insecurity, checkpoints, and infrastructural damage.
- **A full-scale war between Hezbollah and Israel has become increasingly likely**, especially since June 2024. Escalations since June are likely to affect more areas in Lebanon, such as Baalbek and Bekaa governorates, leading to increased internal displacement, migration outside Lebanon, and further food and fuel shortages.
- **Prolonged displacement will likely increase tensions between IDPs and host communities** in areas such as Nabatiye, Saida, and Sour, as competition over limited livelihood opportunities will increase, with both displaced households and host families struggling to meet basic needs.
- The escalation of hostilities since 8 October has severely affected Lebanon's economy, particularly the tourism sector. **The previously flourishing tourism industry has come to a near standstill as a result of insecurity**. Fewer tourists and decreased hotel bookings mean reduced income and job losses for those dependent on tourism, such as hotel and restaurant workers. The negative impact on tourism is expected to persist throughout 2024, further straining Lebanon's economy.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim: this report provides an overview of the impact of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict on southern Lebanon. It highlights the affected population's increasing need – including that of newly displaced individuals – and looks at access constraints resulting from the increase in hostilities. This report also provides a forward-looking analysis of developments with the potential to cause further deterioration in the humanitarian conditions of the affected population.

Methodology: this report is primarily based on a review of publicly available secondary data, including analytical reports by humanitarian organisations, think tanks, and media articles. ACAPS also conducted three interviews with journalists, think tanks, and humanitarian responders focused on Lebanon and the Middle East to complement the secondary data and triangulate analysis.

Limitations: as the situation in the Middle East is currently volatile, including in southern Lebanon, it is challenging to anticipate with any level of accuracy the exact events or developments that might unfold and result in an increase in humanitarian needs in southern Lebanon.

This report also considers the factors aggravating the current escalation in southern Lebanon and its impact on livelihoods and employment. Recent data on unemployment rates for 2023–2024, which reflect the country's economic situation, are, however, not publicly available.

BACKGROUND

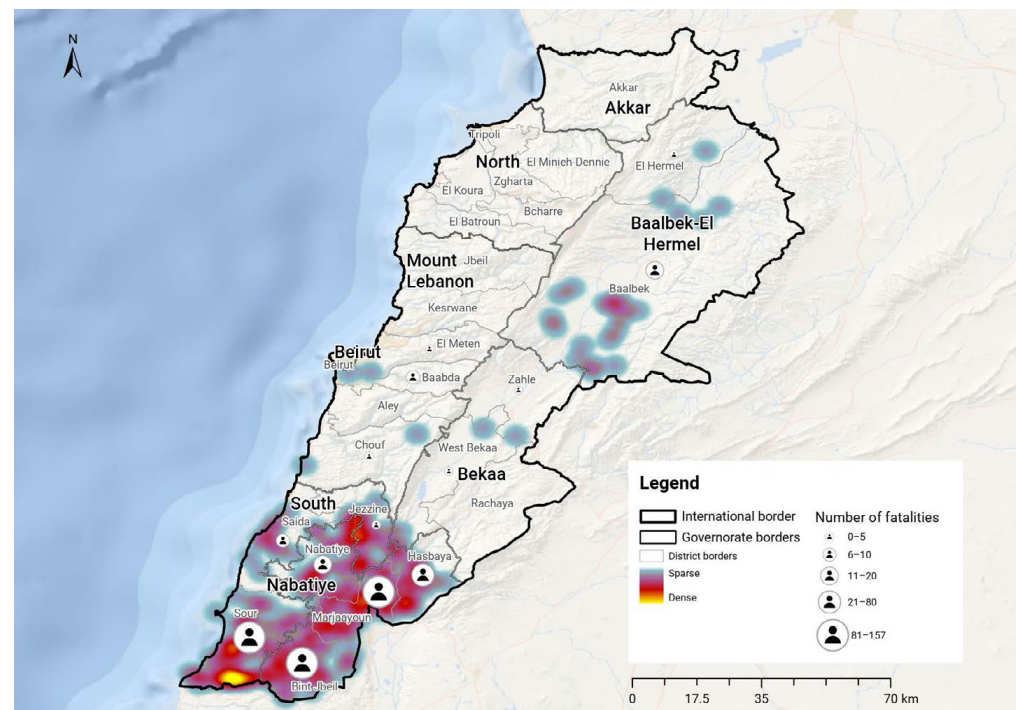
Lebanon has been facing an economic crisis since at least 2019, accompanied by mass protests denouncing deteriorating living conditions, increasing commodity prices, and government corruption and financial mismanagement. The economic crisis was aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, starting in March 2020, and the Beirut port explosion in August 2020, which resulted in increased humanitarian needs across population groups, disruption to business and trade, and increased currency depreciation and hyperinflation (ACAPS 19/10/2023; Reuters 23/01/2022; Bajis et al. 04/01/2023). Between 2019 and February 2023, the Lebanese Lira lost almost 98% of its value, and inflation reached its highest rate in April 2023 (nearly 269%) (WB 16/05/2023; TE accessed 07/06/2024). Between 2012–2022, the poverty rate increased from 12–44% as a result of the economic crisis (WB 23/05/2024). In 2023, 3.9 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, including 1.5 million Syrian refugees (only approximately 790,000 of whom were registered), 210,000 Palestinian refugees, and 81,500 migrant workers. Priority needs included health, food, and WASH assistance (OCHA 06/06/2023).

The country has also been affected by a lack of governance since October 2022. Lebanon has been unable to elect a president or form a government, leaving the country in a political

vacuum and vulnerable to more corruption. This has further aggravated the economic crisis, as the caretaker Government's inability to implement political and economic reforms has reduced foreign aid and investment (AJ 14/06/2023; MEM 19/06/2023).

Hezbollah was formed in 1982 following Israeli attacks on and land invasion of southern Lebanon up to the west of Beirut. Hezbollah is a Shiite Muslim political party and militant group, often seen as backed by Iran and opposing Israel and Western influence in the Middle East (CFR 02/07/2024; ICG accessed 30/06/2024). Since Hezbollah's formation, there have been skirmishes and sporadic exchanges of fire between the group and Israel, sometimes leading to serious escalations, such as in 2006, when a 34-day war was fought (AJ 17/10/2023). Hezbollah has often been an ally to Palestinian factions in Lebanon, mainly Hamas, who sometimes engage alongside Hezbollah in exchanges of fire with Israel, as is the case in recent escalations since 8 October (Reuters 10/10/2023; L'Orient Today 10/08/2023). Between 8 October 2023 and 25 June 2024, Israel, Hezbollah, and other factions have engaged in over 6,950 attacks, including airstrikes, drone strikes, shelling, artillery, and missiles. Israel conducted about 85% of these attacks, while Hezbollah and other factions were responsible for 15% (ACLEL accessed 25/06/2024). These attacks have caused damage to basic infrastructure and had a humanitarian impact on both sides.

Map: Israeli attacks on Lebanon between 8 October 2023 and 25 June 2024



Source: ACAPS using data from ACLED (accessed 25/06/2024)

CRISIS IMPACT

Increased internal displacement

IDPs

By 25 June, nearly 97,000 people had been displaced from districts in southern Lebanon, mainly Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun, and Sour. Most of the displaced people went to Baabda, Beirut, Nabatiye, Saida, and Sour. In Sour district, people are both arriving and being displaced (IOM 27/06/2024). Further, around 60,000 people have either been displaced to areas still near the conflict or have not left their homes because of the high cost of transportation or special needs that make movement a challenge. Others, especially the elderly, prefer not to leave their homes (OCHA 08/05/2024; KII 16/05/2024). Insecurity makes movement challenging, and many families choose to evacuate at night out of fear of Israeli airstrikes targeting moving objects (KII 29/05/2024).

There is an internal displacement movement back to southern Lebanon coinciding with the main harvest season (June–August) and the return of those living abroad during the summer break, which typically begins in July. Displaced individuals currently residing in vacant apartments, offered by Lebanese living abroad or their family members, are expected to vacate when the owners return to Lebanon. Without alternative shelter options, many are either returning to their homes or seeking other accommodation (KII 01/07/2024).

The continuing Israel-Hezbollah conflict and consequent displacement in southern Lebanon have aggravated vulnerabilities among several population groups. A detailed breakdown of the newly displaced population by group is not available, however, but there is some information on gender and age groups. About 32% of IDPs are children under 18 years old, 36% are women, and 32% are men (OCHA 21/05/2024).

Syrian refugees

Until 31 March, around 78,200 registered Syrian refugees were still living in southern Lebanon (UNCHR accessed 03/06/2024). It is unclear how many Syrian refugees have been newly displaced by the increased Israel-Hezbollah tensions, but Syrian refugees usually face challenges, mainly checkpoints, relocating out of southern Lebanon. When crossing checkpoints, Syrian refugees risk arbitrary detention or forced deportation if they lack any legal documentation (KII 29/05/2024; KII 01/07/2024). The total number of Syrian refugees deported between April–May 2024 is unclear, but about 300 refugees were deported on 14 May alone (AP 14/05/2024; KII 16/05/2024).

Even when refugees can evacuate from southern Lebanon safely, their situation remains particularly challenging, as they go to unfamiliar or less welcoming districts, such as northern Lebanon, which is largely inhabited by Lebanese Christians often more opposed to receiving (predominantly Sunni Muslim) Syrian refugees. Once evacuated, Syrian refugees often struggle to find humanitarian aid because they do not know the locations and names of organisations in unfamiliar areas (KII 29/05/2024).

Palestinian refugees

There are six Palestinian refugee camps located in South governorate: Mieh Mieh and Ein El Hilweh camps in Saida district, and Burj al-Shemali, El Buss, and Rashidieh camps in Sour district (UNRWA accessed 06/06/2024). It is estimated that 250,000 Palestinian refugees are living in Lebanon, nearly 36% of whom are in Saida and 15% in Sour (UNRWA accessed 06/06/2024; Encyclopaedia of Palestinian Camps accessed 06/06/2024). The current Israel-Hezbollah conflict has had no direct impact on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, except their camps being exposed to Israeli airstrikes and the impact of the disruption to services such as education and healthcare (KII 01/07/2024). It is unclear if Palestinians living camps in southern Lebanon have relocated to other camps.

Migrant workers

Migrant domestic workers also face challenges evacuating if they do not have access to their legal documents, as they risk being caught by security forces at checkpoints (KII 29/05/2024). Migrant domestic workers, predominantly women, endure discrimination and exploitation that is further compounded by the restrictive Kafala system, which ties their legal status to their employers (CARE/UN Women 09/03/2024). Migrant workers often do not have their legal documents on hand, as such are held by their employers. There are cases of migrant workers being abused and escaping to work with another employer, leaving their legal documents behind (KII 29/05/2024). In other cases, families evacuate and leave domestic workers behind (KII 01/07/2024).

Livelihoods

Escalating clashes between Hezbollah and Israel are affecting livelihoods in southern Lebanon, especially in the agriculture sector, which constitutes around 80% of southern Lebanon's GDP (FEWS NET 01/03/2024). By February 2024, the direct financial loss had reached USD 1.2 billion, including the estimated cost of affected agricultural land (Aawsat 08/02/2024; The Cradle 08/02/2024).

By June, shelling, airstrikes, and Israel's use of white phosphorus bombs had led to fires that destroyed an estimated 1,240 hectares of land. More than 47,000 olive trees and other crops have also been damaged and 340,000 farm animals lost (FEWS NET 13/06/2024; Save the Children 07/03/2024). This has resulted in farmers losing their incomes, and an estimated 70% of families in southern Lebanon are reliant on agriculture for livelihood (KII 16/05/2024; AI Arab 30/01/2024). Farmers were also unable to access their land out of fear of coming into contact with white phosphorous, as it can ignite and cause serious health issues (KII 29/05/2024).

The indiscriminate use of the white phosphorous on agricultural lands will likely have long-term impacts on southern Lebanon's agricultural sector, with potentially irreversible damage to land and crops. It is estimated that the rehabilitation of agricultural land will take years and at least USD one billion to be achieved (KII 29/05/2024). By 7 March 2024, evidence collected by international organisations and media revealed that Israel had dropped around 117 phosphoric bombs on southern Lebanon (AJ 25/03/2024; AI 31/10/2023).

Farmers often borrow seeds to plant crops, then pay it back after the harvest is sold. Following the economic crisis in 2019, merchants started demanding payment upfront, in cash, and so farmers had limited ability to purchase seeds. This issue is has been exacerbated by the current escalation and volatile situation (KII 16/05/2024; KII 29/05/2024). Insecurity has led to the displacement of farmers who normally harvest olives and other crops from October–November, resulting in reduced incomes (The New Arab 20/10/2023 and 27/11/2023; AJ 25/03/2024). Some newly displaced farmers have likely given up on farming and are seeking out other daily-wage jobs, such as driving taxis (KII 16/05/2024; KII 29/05/2024). Other displaced people are opening small businesses in displacement areas. Most of these jobs involve selling vegetables and other goods on the street, leading to increased competition and tensions between the displaced and host communities (UNHCR 12/06/2024).

For those who continue farming, fear of airstrikes is hindering their ability to transport their harvests to the market and prepare for next year's crops (The New Arab 20/10/2023). As a result of insecurity, and in order to avoid airstrikes, some farmer and agricultural workers are harvesting olives and other crops at night (KII 29/05/2024; AJ 25/03/2024; The New Arab 27/11/2023).

Other professions have also been affected. People who work in remote/online jobs, such as graphic designers, and still reside in southern Lebanon have reported that poor internet service and frequent power cuts have forced them to quit their jobs, reducing their income (SMEX 10/05/2024).

Food security

Food insecurity, mainly affecting northern and eastern districts with a large Syrian refugee population, was already an issue in Lebanon prior to the current Israel-Hezbollah conflict. Conflict-related impacts on agriculture and livelihoods, however, have been contributing to a further reduction in access to food. The loss of harvests and displacement have resulted in financial and agricultural asset losses, limiting people's access to food and income sources (FEWS NET 01/03/2024). Newly displaced households from and within southern Lebanon need food assistance, but the government response has been limited (MSF 21/03/2024; Aawsat 15/05/2024). Some displaced families in Sour have only received two–three food rations in the eight months since 8 October, instead of the one ration per day needed. Other families have sold their belongings – such as gold jewellery and cars – to buy food and other necessities for their families (Aawsat 15/05/2024).

The high cost of delivering commodities to southern Lebanon means that food prices are higher than normal (FEWS NET 13/06/2024). While food is distributed by multiple suppliers, checkpoints on main roads are causing delivery delays (KII 29/05/2024). At the national level, the Consumer Price Index increased from 0–1.7% between December 2023 and April 2024, indicating an overall increase in consumer prices, largely for food and clothing (WFP 20/05/2024; TE accessed 06/06/2024).

Between April–September 2024, about 1.26 million people across Lebanon (23% of the population analysed) are projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels of food insecurity, up from 19% between October 2023 and March 2024 (IPC 07/12/2023 and 30/05/2024). As compared to the rest of the country, however, districts in southern Lebanon are not among those most affected by food insecurity. Around 26% are food insecure in Marjayoun, 24% in Saida, 22% in Sour, and 20% in Bint Jbeil. Districts in northern and eastern Lebanon, including Akkar, Baalbek, El Minieh-Dennie, and Zahle, are experiencing the highest acute food insecurity levels (between 33–37%) (IPC 30/05/2024).

Some improvement to food access is likely to take place, especially after the barley and wheat harvest between May–June. It is also likely, however, that food prices will continue to increase, there will be shortages in market supply, and transport costs will increase, driven by the continuing Israel-Hezbollah conflict. In the meantime, affected households' food stocks will likely deplete because of disruptions to agricultural production (FEWS NET 01/03/2024).

Shelter and NFIs

It is estimated that, by 27 June, at least 1,700 buildings had been destroyed in southern Lebanon (OCHA 29/06/2024). Most newly displaced people, nearly 85%, are residing with host families in secondary residences or subpar dwellings improvised as shelters, with almost 45% co-living with host families and the remaining residing separately (OCHA 08/05/2024; WFP 30/04/2024; KII16/05/2024). Other displaced households (about 12%) are renting houses, while 2% are living in 18 collective shelters in Bekaa, Hasbaya, Nabatiye, Saida, and Sour districts (OCHA 08/05/2024). One such shelter, for example, is an abandoned hotel building in Al Marwaniya, a town near Saida, which was adapted to host 60 families (MSF 22/03/2024). Other displaced people are staying in school gymnasiums (KII 16/05/2024).

An unknown number of displaced households are receiving cash assistance – a monthly rent allowance – from Hezbollah’s Social Work Unit, alongside other assistance such as food rations and subscription fees for electricity generators (Al Akhbar 07/03/2024; Aawsat 15/05/2024). The Government, however, is not providing any shelter support to displaced people or the families hosting them (Euro News 31/01/2024; KII 16/05/2024; KII 29/05/2024).

16 of the 18 collective shelters are overcrowded; many families are living in small spaces. Although the centres have been in use for at least seven months, they have not received any maintenance. Using shared toilets has resulted in gynaecological diseases for a number of displaced women, and there are also cases of lice among displaced children (UNICEF 30/04/2024; Al Akhbar 07/03/2024; OCHA 29/06/2024). The NFI needs in collective shelters include pillows, feminine hygiene products, kitchen sets, mats, solar lamps, summer bed sheets, portable gas ovens, rechargeable fans, and refrigerators (OCHA 08/05/2024; AJ 12/01/2024).

Health

By 27 June, six primary healthcare facilities had closed, mainly in Marjayoun and Bint Jbeil districts, as a result of insecurity, affecting access to healthcare (OCHA 27/06/2024). About 16,000 children under the age of five have limited access to essential early childhood development and nutritional services (OCHA 08/05/2024).

Displaced people have access to primary healthcare in Ministry of Health facilities in Sour district, but this does not cover the provision of certain medications, particularly for chronic conditions, or include hospitalisation expenses. Private hospitals are not taking patients who require cash support from the Ministry of Health to cover expenses (Al Akhbar 07/03/2024).

Hospitals in southern Lebanon also lack medical supplies, as suppliers are not delivering to southern areas for fear of airstrikes. There is also a shortage of doctors, nurses, and paramedics, an issue that began following the 2019 socioeconomic crisis but now further aggravated by the general insecurity and lack of safety, which restricts the movement of

medical personnel (AJ 19/05/2024). Between 8 October 2023 and 22 February 2024, there were at least four Israeli airstrikes that targeted medical centres, resulting in the death of at least two paramedics and damage to an unknown number of ambulances (The New Arab 23/02/2024).

WASH

Israeli airstrikes have damaged water supply infrastructure, affecting access to clean drinking water for more than 100,000 people in South and Nabatiye governorates (Dorcas 05/04/2024). Access to safe drinking water for around 42 villages in southern Lebanon was disrupted following an Israeli airstrike in February that damaged a key water distribution centre (KII 29/05/2024).

Overcrowding at collective shelters and the use of shared toilets also leads to more health risks, including gynaecological diseases among displaced women (UNICEF 30/04/2024; Al Akhbar 07/03/2024). The lack of clean water and WASH facilities in collective shelters contributes to the burden on Lebanon’s healthcare system and the spread of waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, and typhoid, along with skin infections and respiratory diseases (ACAPS 19/10/2023).

In southern Lebanon there’s a possibility of water source contamination, as white phosphorus fragments embed themselves at the base of a water source and can seep down to the groundwater. This could have long-term effects on the quality of water over time (The New Arab 24/01/2024; KII 16/05/2024; KII 29/05/2024).

Education

Because of insecurity and displacement, many schools are either damaged or used as shelters, and access to education for more than 8,000 children, according to UNICEF, has been disrupted. The Ministry of Education, however, reports a higher figure of 11,000 affected children (UNICEF 08/04/2024; OCHA 08/05/2024; Aawsat 21/05/2024; KII 29/05/2024). Some students have been forced to leave their villages and, while displaced, receive online education, but online access is hindered by poor internet connectivity and high cost (AJ 08/04/2024; SMEX 10/05/2024). While some households have received a tablet with a monthly internet bundle from the Ministry of Education, this still does not fulfil the need, as one tablet is meant to be used by all children in the family (AJ 08/04/2024).

Other displaced students have been unable to attend any schooling. The few students whose families chose to remain in southern areas have been without education, as all the schools are closed (SMEX 10/05/2024). While they also have the online education option, they must contend with the same challenges of bad internet connection and unavailable equipment (AJ 08/04/2024).

Child protection

As a result of the crisis in southern Lebanon and families' inability to afford and provide education for their children, some pull children out of school, exposing them to child labour or child marriage (UNICEF 08/04/2024; OCHA 08/05/2024). In 2023, as a result of the economic crisis, it was already estimated that around 16% of Lebanese households had to put their children to work in order to support the family's income (UNICEF 08/04/2024).

Prolonged displacement and conflict-related trauma caused by, among other factors, exposure to the sound of bombs is aggravating mental health needs for affected populations in southern Lebanon, who are experiencing chronic stress, depression, or anxiety. As displacement continues, it is likely that the need for psychosocial support will continue to grow (MSF 22/03/2024). Prior to the escalation of tensions since 8 October, adults and caregivers were already grappling with elevated stress levels associated with the deteriorating economic conditions. The crisis is also affecting children, with nearly 38% of households reporting anxiety in children and 24% reporting cases of depression (UNICEF 08/04/2024).

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

By 21 February, it was estimated that around 60,000 people were still residing in villages along the border in southern Lebanon. With increased hostilities, insecurity, and movement restrictions, they are struggling to access basic services (OCHA 23/02/2024). There is limited access to markets and livelihood opportunities, compounded by rising inflation and above average prices for food and NFIs (FEWS NET 01/03/2024). The fear of travelling on roads and potential targeting by Israeli airstrikes is preventing people from relocating to safer areas. If they do leave, many families are evacuating at night (KII 29/05/2024).

Insecurity is also a challenge for humanitarian organisations' aid delivery and access to people in need, especially in remote border towns (OCHA 30/12/2023; FEWS NET 01/03/2024; Save the Children 07/03/2024). There are many checkpoints on the roads leading to southern Lebanon, resulting in delays in the delivery of goods and humanitarian aid (KII 29/05/2024). Checkpoints are the result of increasing security concerns in southern Lebanon, as clashes between Israeli forces and Hezbollah escalate.

Internet access is also a challenge, as the service has dwindled since escalations began. Often, internet service stations temporarily stop working as a result of either a lack of fuel or damage from Israeli airstrikes (SMEX 10/05/2024).

OUTLOOK

Further escalation of tensions

The likelihood of a full-scale war between Hezbollah and Israel is increasing, especially with the escalation of war rhetoric in June. From the Israeli side, official statements on potential mobilisation and war in southern Lebanon have been intensifying (The Conversation 24/06/2024; CNBC 19/06/2024). Hezbollah's rhetoric, on the other hand, has included warnings directed at Cyprus, in case the country allows Israel to use its airports to target Lebanon (AJ 25/06/2024). In the meantime, Hezbollah's strikes have reached targets deeper inside Israel and had more consequences, especially rocket attacks that caused wildfires in the north (Times of Israel 17/06/2024).

Before June, Hezbollah's actions and strategies seemed more focused on maintaining its influence within Lebanon while, at the same time, showing its presence and power in the region. Analysts and the media have described Hezbollah as adopting a calculated approach to avoid triggering a large-scale conflict, as such a conflict could destabilise its position or invite significant international intervention (AJ 02/04/2024; CSIS 21/03/2024).

If a ceasefire is reached between Hamas and Israel, some analysts suggest that Israel might shift its focus to southern Lebanon (The Economist 17/06/2024). Such a scenario could be driven by increasing domestic pressure on the Israeli Government to address its internal displacement crisis, as over 90,000 Israelis remain displaced from their homes in northern Israel. There might be an attempt to push Hezbollah back from the border to ensure Israelis' safe return to the north (AJ 13/06/2024; The Economist 17/06/2024). An escalation of attacks will likely mean that more areas of Lebanon could be affected, such as Baalbek and Bekaa governorates. In that event, it is likely that internal displacement will increase and possibly more migration outside Lebanon (FEWS NET 01/03/2024; ICG 23/05/2024). More food and fuel shortages are also likely (FEWS NET 01/03/2024).

Other analysis suggests that neither side can afford a full-scale war. Escalating rhetoric between Israel and Hezbollah is, instead, psychological warfare to maintain domestic relevance and does not necessarily indicate impending war (Chatham House 26/06/2024). Even if there is no escalation between Israel and Hezbollah, security may still not be completely restored. The situation could, instead, return to the status quo prior to 8 October, with sporadic attacks over the Blue Line area – an internationally recognised 'withdrawal line' established by the UN to mark the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in 2000 (Aawsat 13/05/2024; UN Peacekeeping 05/03/2021).

Increasing tensions between host communities and newly displaced people

In areas hosting displaced people, such as Nabatiye, Saida, and Sour, it is likely that tensions between IDPs and host communities will increase, primarily as a result of competition over limited livelihood opportunities (OCHA 08/05/2024; IOM 07/05/2024; KII 29/05/2024). Displaced households are struggling to earn incomes and meet basic needs, and most are staying with host families who also have limited resources. Already in 2023, 8 of 10 households in Lebanon were borrowing money or buying on credit to purchase essentials (UNICEF 08/04/2024). Some displaced people are opening small businesses, such as selling vegetables and other goods on the street, leading to increased competition and tension with the host community (UNHCR 12/06/2024).

Prolonged displacement leading to increased tensions could possibly force some displaced families to either return to conflict areas in southern Lebanon or be displaced again to other governorates.

Worsening economic and living conditions

Lebanon's economy, especially the tourism sector, will likely see a further deterioration as a result of escalating hostilities since 8 October. The tourism sector, which flourished in early 2023, producing the largest revenues since 2019, is a main contributor to the Lebanese economy, generating around USD seven billion in 2022 (AGBI 20/03/2024; The New Arab 10/11/2023).

Since fighting between Hezbollah and Israeli forces began, this sector has been brought to a near standstill. Fewer tourists are coming to Lebanon because of insecurity, and hotels are receiving fewer bookings. World Bank data suggests that Lebanon's tourism industry has been more affected than its neighbours, i.e. Jordan and Egypt. In Lebanon, the ratio of tracked-to-scheduled flights dropped from 98.8% on 7 October to 63.3% on 4 November, meaning that tourists are cancelling their planned trips (WB 21/12/2023). It is projected that tourism will remain weak throughout 2024 (IMF 31/01/2024). This not only affects the country's economy, but also causes reduced income and job losses for those dependent on the tourism sector, such as hotel and restaurant employees.

The socioeconomic crisis of 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 meant that livelihood needs in southern Lebanon were already high before the current escalation. Unemployment rates in Lebanon increased from 11.4% to nearly 30% between 2018–2022 (UNICEF 08/04/2024). Since the 2019 socioeconomic crisis, inflation has been increasing, reaching a record high of 268% in April 2023 and declining to 60% in April 2024 (TE accessed 03/06/2024). The crisis also pushed more people below the poverty line. Between 2012–2022, the number of people living below the poverty line rose from 12–44% (WB 23/05/2024). Many people have depended on remittances and other diaspora inflows to survive.

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

There is an international and national humanitarian organisation presence in southern Lebanon responding to the needs of the newly displaced in coordination with the Lebanese Government.

International organisations

About 25 international and local organisations provided some type of relief at the beginning of the displacement crisis, in coordination with the Disaster Management Unit (Al Akhbar 07/03/2024). Many UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations are affected by funding shortfalls, however, which are likely to continue in 2024 and lead to a further decline in humanitarian assistance (FEWS NET 01/03/2024). Specifically, food assistance for Syrian and Palestinian refugees is expected to drop, while assistance for host communities is likely to remain stable or increase slightly (IPC 07/12/2023). In December 2023, as a result of funding shortfalls, the WFP reduced assistance to Syrian refugees by 16%, providing only a one-time food assistance to about 52,700 people affected by the Israel-Hezbollah conflict (FEWS NET 01/03/2024).

Local organisations

Local humanitarian organisations are actively responding to the impact of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in southern areas. Some are providing primary healthcare, social services, financial aid, and educational programmes for children, while others have supplied hospitals with essential medical equipment and medicine (TNH 29/02/2024; Amel accessed 04/06/2024).

Government response

The Ministry of Social Affairs has provided only limited contributions to the response in southern Lebanon. The South Council, established in 1970 to address the needs of people in South governorate following repeated Israeli attacks and linked to the Prime Minister, has provided aid (PWS accessed 06/06/2024). About 5,000 food rations, along with blankets, mattresses, milk, and diapers, have been distributed. Aside from this, no government body is consistently providing aid to affected governorates (KII 16/05/2024; Al Akhbar 07/03/2024).

Since the beginning of escalations, reported contributions – namely for the Disaster Management Unit in Sour – have included only 6,000 litres of diesel, seven tons of flour, 70 fans, 250 hygiene kits for women and children, and 1,000 blankets (Al Akhbar 07/03/2024). The unit closed in January 2024, however, after attacks on personnel and offices by displaced and non-displaced people unhappy with the services provided (Nida Alwatan 28/01/2024; L'Orient Today 28/01/2024). The unit was established in September 2020 to address urgent risks affecting the governorate and follows the Federation of Municipalities in Sour (Mustaqbal 29/09/2020).

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