

## Winter and Syrian refugees in Lebanon

### A recurring crisis and a modest response

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Syrian refugees in Lebanon are experiencing a difficult humanitarian situation with the onset of winter.

The first winter storms are hitting the camps in the absence of a real humanitarian response to their situation. This report highlights the situation in the camps, and urgent humanitarian needs.

#### First - the situation in Lebanon's camps

The winter of the year 2020 started with the Lulu storm that struck Lebanon in the first weeks of January, with strong winds, rain and snow, affecting refugee camps in various Lebanese regions. As a result of this:

- The storm in the Bekka region caused partial damage to fifteen camps in each of Saadnayil, Ta'albaya, Al-Omariya, Baralias, Hosh Al-Hrima, and Al-Marg. Rain water entered some tents and damaged the roofs or completely sank the furniture and mattresses of tents.
- In camp 011 in the Al-Omariya area in central Bekka, in addition to damage to the tents, sewage overflow accompanied the rainwater, which led to a complete flooding of the camp, and its population of 300 people (mostly women and children) was left without shelter.
- The 142 camps in Arsal suffered the same fate. Heavy rains flooded the camps located in Arsal valley with about 1,500 families (9,000 people) affected of whom more than two thirds of them are women and children.
- Winter threatens Syrians refugees with freezing cold, due to the lack of good shelter.
- Syrians also face threats of infection as a result of their dependence on burning waste for heating, which was monitored as increasing the spread of asthma among them.
- The influx of sewage into the camps has poor health effects on refugees, such as cancer, scabies, skin diseases, and blood infections, according to doctors working with refugees.

*"The campaign lead by security forces last summer [to pressure refugees to return to Syria], removed the stone walls of the camps," said Sarah, who lives in the Arsal camps. "They directly affected the tents. A few bricks blocked a small part of the cold, and helped support the tent from falling on its residents." Now, the "tent" does not protect from cold or snow and does not protect us from rain. It adds to our fears, which are focused on the death of our children as a result of severe cold; or the fall of tents on us as a result of snow accumulation; or from the snow melting and flooding our tents and drowning our children."*

#### Second: the humanitarian response:

- One of the organizations working in Camp 011 in Al-Omariya area in central Bekka carried out an emergency response and moved the camp residents to rented rooms and provided urgent shelter.
- The Municipality of Saadnayil, in cooperation with the Norwegian Refugee Council, sought to collect water from the camp when Storm Lulu passed, and the two entities, in cooperation with the Sawa Organization, are seeking permission from the governor to begin to bulldoze and rebuild the camp.
- A number of local organizations and bodies such as Sawa Organization, the Municipality of Saadnayil and the Norwegian Refugee Council have provided an emergency response to some of the camps, as the people of Camp 011 were moved to another place.

Activist Ahmed from the Bekka camps says: *"Some local associations such as Sawa, Dima, and Iym, are trying to do their best to provide emergency aid to rescue the refugees, but the deterioration of the general situation and the lack of support and the scale of the need are too much for these associations, and other initiatives cannot absorb the full disaster that will befall all the camps."*

- The economic crisis that Lebanon is going through directly affects the refugee situation. The associations that are funded from abroad have decreased their support rate significantly, and the material resources it receives are not sufficient due to the exchange rate of the dollar against the Lebanese pound, which remains constant in the central bank while changing on the free market.

#### **The more urgent needs:**

- The damage is almost universal in most areas. The most common issues are the fall of tents' roofs, the damage of wood, the erosion of shelters, the flooding of tents' furniture and all its contents.
- There is a general need for blankets, wood, and fuel and blanket support for all refugees, including those who rent garages and homes, as these people are not in much better conditions from the people of the tents, especially as the deteriorating economic situation affects them greatly.
- The most damaged camps are in Akkar, O14 and O22, and are approximately twenty tents. But all camps need blankets, wood, blankets, sponges and carpets due to the overflow of sewage over them, and the entire camps need maintenance. There is an urgent need for direct intervention by the Ministry of Social Affairs, UNHCR / international organizations, by providing equipment and materials to withdraw the water that flooded the tents, especially since this water is contaminated with sewage waste.
- As for the situation in the Wadi Hamid camps in the town of Aarsal, these camps are among the most deprived in terms of aid. There are about 226 families in need of help, representing about 1,100 people, including 800 women and children. According to the residents, the area there needs tents and wood to support housing, as well as water tanks, as currently the water being used is not suitable for drinking. They need fuel and food aid, as it is one of the coldest places in Aarsal. Also, children do not go to schools because the parents are unable to pay transportation for their children and there are no job opportunities.

Mrs. Hana from Akkar Camps says, *"The UNHCR did not answer the phone numbers that it previously distributed to us as emergency response numbers. Our tents were flooded with rain water and sewage water, and we left the camp for two days to try to move to our nearest neighbour. UNHCR staff arrived two days after the tents sank, and their answer was that your tents do not need any help. Many ad hoc homes collapsed on their residents due to the strong winds but their inhabitants miraculously escaped."*

The Syrian Civic Platform calls on those concerned with refugee affairs in Lebanon from international and local bodies, municipalities, and civil society activists, to unite and intensify efforts to save the camps and refugees there, and to provide them with an immediate response in cooperation with the security services. Surviving one of the first storms of the year 2020 with limited damage does not diminish the disasters left by the storms in the previous years from the displacement of hundreds of families at once, and the death stories that afflicted the refugees as a result of a lack of heating or the collapse of tents or the need for nutrition and medicine.