

# FORCED DISPLACEMENT ORDERS: DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF “HUMANE” ATTACKS





# INTRODUCTION

Between October 8, 2023, and November 27, 2024, Israeli attacks led to widespread devastation across Lebanon, resulting in over 4,000 deaths and more than 16,000 injuries.<sup>1</sup> On September 23, 2024, the Israeli forces significantly escalated the scope and intensity of their offensive, launching sustained and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure across the country. The attacks displaced more than 1.3 million people,<sup>2</sup> including an estimated half a million who were forced to flee the country, mostly to Syria, Jordan and Iraq.<sup>3</sup> In a country already grappling with a humanitarian crisis, the displacement campaign added extreme pressure to an already critical humanitarian situation, creating widespread chaos, instability and trauma in affected communities.

Since September 23, 2024, the Israeli forces have issued so-called “evacuation” warnings – referred to here as forced displacement orders – to residents in densely populated areas, leaving them little time for safe evacuation. Our analysis, which covers orders issued until October 31, found that these warnings, disseminated primarily by the Israeli forces’ Arabic spokesperson on social media, often gave only **15 to 45 minutes** notice before strikes commenced. Typically issued between **10 pm and 4 am**, these orders forced civilians to make life-or-death decisions in the dead of night, leading to widespread psychological distress.

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1 OCHA | Lebanon: Flash Update #49 - Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, as of 5 December 2024

2 OCHA | Lebanon: Flash Update #41 - Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, as of 4 November 2024

3 Mixed Migration | Lebanon’s escalating conflict: What are the displacement and migration consequences?

While Israeli forces' directives drove civilians from their homes in South Lebanon, the Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburbs, the towns where displaced families sought refuge, such as Aito,<sup>4</sup> Barja,<sup>5</sup> and Wardanieh,<sup>6</sup> were targeted with subsequent heavy bombardments. These attacks caused deaths, injuries and the further displacement of communities who had already been internally displaced, violating fundamental protections under International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Although forced displacement orders ceased following the implementation of the ceasefire agreement on November 27, curfews and restrictions imposed by Israeli forces continue to prevent internally displaced persons (IDPs) from returning to villages along the border, further prolonging their displacement.

Israel's actions in Lebanon mirror tactics previously used in Gaza. A recent Human Right Watch report<sup>7</sup> highlighted that Israel's actions in Gaza since October 2023 – which have displaced 1.9 million Palestinians – amount to forced displacement, with evidence suggesting intent that constitutes war crimes. The report further states that the widespread and systematic nature of these acts in Gaza appears to meet the definition of ethnic cleansing.

The impunity with which violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) are occurring in Gaza raises concerns that similar disregard for accountability may extend to violations in Lebanon. This risks perpetuating cycles of violence, violations, displacement and suffering, reflecting the need for greater accountability to break the pattern of impunity.

This report examines the types and adequacy of forced displacement orders, including their legality within the framework of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). It highlights the severe humanitarian and psychological impacts of these orders on Lebanese civilians, refugees and migrant workers, underscoring the need for an unconditional ceasefire – and to ensure the agreement is maintained – and to secure accountability where violations of IHL have taken place. Recommendations are provided to address these critical issues and mitigate the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

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4 [Le Monde | 24 people killed by Israeli bombing on northern town of Aitou | 16 October 2024](#)

5 [BBC | Israeli strikes kill at least 40 in east Lebanon - health ministry | 6 November 2024](#)

6 [MadaMasr | Four killed in Israeli airstrike on Wardaniyeh hotel sheltering displaced people | Hezbollah repels incursion toward Labouneh | 9 October 2024](#)

7 [Human Rights Watch | "Hopeless, Starving, and Besieged": Israel's Forced Displacement of Palestinians in Gaza](#)

# METHODOLOGY

This report examines the evacuation warnings – which we term forced displacement orders – issued by the Israeli forces to civilian populations in Lebanon within the context of International Humanitarian Law. The methodology combines data tracking, qualitative content analysis and evaluation to assess the nature, accuracy and impacts of these warnings on affected communities, as well as their compliance with IHL standards.

## 1. Data collection and tracking

A tracker was developed which monitored and logged each order posted on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) by the Israeli forces' Arabic spokesperson. Tracking began on September 23, 2024, when the orders were first issued, and continued until October 31, 2024. In cases where a single post included multiple maps for different areas, each map was counted as a unique order. Occasionally, an order would be posted with one or several maps, followed by a subsequent post – often in video format – reinforcing the warning for the same locations. These follow-up posts were not counted as separate orders in our analysis. For each order, the following data points were recorded:

- **Date and time:** The exact time each order was issued.
- **Targeted area:** The specific geographical scope targeted by the orders, categorised into three types:
  1. *Area-specific orders:* Directed at a specific, clearly defined location on the map, such as a street, building or neighbourhood.
  2. *Mass displacement orders:* Issued for entire towns, villages, cities or extensive neighbourhoods within a city.
  3. *General, nonspecific orders:* Vague directives that lack specific guidance regarding the area to be evacuated.
- **Content description:** A summary of the orders' content, noting any associated maps, landmarks or visual aids provided in the original post.
- **Type classification:** Categorisation into one of the three types of orders for further analysis.

To evaluate the accuracy and reliability of any maps or visual aids associated with the orders, we relied on our own knowledge of the targeted areas, supplemented by information from local residents, including direct testimonies and online reports. This assessment was further triangulated with existing online maps, allowing us to identify any inconsistencies between the geographical markers indicated in the maps and the actual physical characteristics of the locations.

## 2. Temporal analysis of warnings and attacks

The timing of these orders was analysed to better understand the practices surrounding their issuance. Given the high volume and proximity of attacks, calculating all precise intervals between warnings and specific attacks was challenging, particularly in cases of area-specific orders where numerous strikes occurred near the warned locations without prior notification. Due to these limitations, we decided to rely on external

reports and local testimonies indicating that the time between a warning and subsequent strike was typically between 15 and 45 minutes – a pattern consistent with past tactics observed in Gaza, as documented by the media and human rights organisations.

### 3. Qualitative analysis of civilian impact

The study explores the humanitarian and psychological impacts of forced displacement orders on civilians, including Lebanese citizens, Palestinian and Syrian refugees and migrants from low and lower-middle-income countries, who were affected by these displacement orders. Testimonies from affected individuals provide qualitative insights into the following areas:

- **Immediate humanitarian needs:** Challenges related to transportation, shelter and access to basic necessities during evacuations.
- **Psychological distress:** The emotional and psychological impact of the abrupt, and often vague, warnings.

These testimonies were gathered through unstructured interviews with individuals directly impacted by the forced displacement orders, which contributed valuable perspectives to our analysis.

### 4. Assessment of compliance with International Humanitarian Law

The study includes an analysis of the forced displacement orders within the framework of IHL, assessing whether they fulfil the criteria of lawful evacuation warnings. Key aspects of this assessment include:

- Compliance with IHL requirements for evacuation orders, which mandate clear, targeted and sufficiently timed warnings to ensure civilian safety.
- Evaluation of the proportionality and distinction principles as applied to the attacks giving rise to the forced displacement, given the widespread and often imprecise nature of these attacks.



# CLASSIFICATION OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT ORDERS

On October 15, 2024, The United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR, said 25% of Lebanese territory was under Israeli military evacuation orders.<sup>8</sup> The Israeli forces issued three main types of orders:

- 1. Area-specific forced displacement orders:** These orders targeted specific buildings or locations, often presented as maps indicating the area to be struck. Between September 23, 2024, and October 31, 2024, Israeli forces issued a total of 117 area-specific forced displacement orders across Lebanon, affecting neighborhoods in Beirut's southern suburb as well as in Nabatiye, Baalbek, Tyre, Wardaniyeh, among others. In some cases, multiple maps were included within a single post, each marking a separate target area.



8 UNHCR | Lebanon crisis deepens as Israeli airstrikes intensify [EN/AR]

2. **Mass forced displacement orders:** Entire towns or regions, including large residential and densely populated cities like Baalbeck and Tyre, were instructed to evacuate, typically without sufficient time or logistical support for residents to leave safely. In total, Israeli forces issued 19 mass forced displacement orders targeting 223 towns during the reporting period.



*This image is an example of a mass forced displacement order issued by Israeli forces. Unlike area-specific orders that may include maps, this order is text-based and addresses residents across 23 towns and villages in southern Lebanon. The message lists specific towns, including Yaroun, Ain Ebel, Maroun al-Ras, Aytaroun, Bint Jbeil, and several other towns, instructing all residents within these areas to immediately evacuate north of the Awali River. The text warns that those remaining in the listed areas are at high risk due to nearby Hezbollah activity and threatens civilians to leave their homes without delay. The message also explicitly prohibits civilian movement southward until further notice.*

This type of mass order, lacking maps or clear directions, created an overwhelming sense of urgency and fear. The broad scope of these orders – which covered entire towns and multiple communities – made it difficult for civilians to find safe and adequate shelter. Additionally, the vague nature of the threats and the absence of designated evacuation routes led to widespread chaos, causing severe traffic congestion along critical routes, such as the road between South Lebanon and Beirut or from Baalbek to Zahle. Civilians, including children and the elderly, were forced to spend up to 16 hours travelling distances that would usually take one hour. Many were stranded without food, water or adequate shelter. Rather than providing concrete safety measures, these mass forced displacement orders heightened confusion and panic, putting people at further risk.

Ostensibly intended to protect civilians, these orders failed to meet International Humanitarian Law standards for effective advance warnings, and instead escalated the hardship, psychological burden and danger for those affected.

3. **General nonspecific orders:** These were vague directives that lacked specific guidance regarding the areas to be evacuated. Examples included broad warnings to southern Lebanon residents not to move southward or go to their olive fields, or to civilians in targeted areas not to return to their homes. Other orders included threats to target Qard al-Hassan branches, a financial institution associated with Hezbollah, or buildings containing Hezbollah weaponry, but did not specify exact locations – leaving civilians with little information about where potential danger might lie.



*This post on X, issued by the Israeli forces' Arabic spokesperson on October 1, 2024, serves as a general and nonspecific order to residents of southern Lebanon. The message warns civilians against vehicle movement south of the Litani River. However, the directive provides no specific guidance on safe routes, shelters or alternative options for securing essential supplies. It also lacks clarity on the duration of the restriction, stating only that the warning remains in effect until further notice. This type of vague, general order left residents uncertain about how to safely comply, further isolating vulnerable communities and restricting their access to critical resources like food, medicine, and fuel. As a result, warnings like this added to the climate of fear and uncertainty rather than offering practical protection, falling short of International Humanitarian Law standards for civilian safety and protection.*

Although the Israeli forces framed these directives as “evacuations,” they were, in reality, inadequate, unrealistic and nearly impossible to comply with. These orders not only triggered waves of displacement but also led to excessive civilian harm. Furthermore, they failed to provide any timeline or assurances for when people might safely return to their homes. In the following section, we will explore in more detail how these directives fell short of the standards required to protect civilian lives.





# WARNINGS WITHOUT REFUGE

Although the Israeli forces framed these forced displacement orders as measures to protect civilians, they were largely inadequate and impossible to comply with for several reasons:

## 1. Insufficient warnings for attacks

Between October 8, 2023, and October 31, 2024, Israeli forces conducted a total of 11,647<sup>9</sup> attacks on Lebanon. However, the first forced displacement order was not issued until nearly a year after the first attacks, on September 23, 2024. During the initial period, from October 8, 2023, to September 20, 2024, Israeli forces conducted 8,313 attacks<sup>10</sup> with no advance warnings, leaving civilians entirely unprepared and without guidance for almost a year. From September 23 to October 31, 2024, an additional 3,334 airstrikes were conducted, with only 117 area-specific forced displacement orders issued. **This means that only 3.5% of attacks in this period were accompanied by a direct warning, or roughly one in every 28 attacks.** The vast majority of attacks occurred without prior warning, exposing civilians to significant risk without sufficient time or guidance to seek safety.

*“We didn’t get any warning. Suddenly, the shelling started hitting several neighbourhoods in our town...”*

*“It felt like I had to sacrifice everything. I took only a few things, and with my son, who has special needs, my only concern was getting him to safety.”*

**DISPLACED PERSON FROM YATIR**

<sup>9</sup> Disaster Risk Management Unit | Israeli Hostilities on Lebanon Daily Situation Reports

<sup>10</sup> Al Jazeera | Israeli attacks on Lebanon in maps and charts: Live tracker

Mass forced displacement orders were excluded from this calculation, as they provided only broad evacuation directives that applied to entire towns or villages without specific timings or locations, leaving civilians uncertain about when danger would actually materialise. General, nonspecific warnings were also excluded, as they lacked actionable information about where immediate threats existed and offered no clear direction about when or where to evacuate for safety. Including these broader and nonspecific warnings would paint an inaccurate picture of civilian vulnerability, as these orders did not provide residents with the targeted, actionable information necessary to make informed and timely decisions to seek safety.

According to Diakonia's IHL Center,<sup>11</sup> attacking a "military target" should adhere to the principle of precaution, ensuring that each attack against an identified military objective reflects this core requirement. However, Israel's widespread "evacuation orders" appear to fall short of meeting IHL requirements for effective advance warning tied to the precise targeting of identified military objectives, and may instead be reflective of "displacement orders."

## 2. Limited reach and accessibility of posts

Israeli forces issued forced displacement orders via posts by their spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), which has limited reach within Lebanon. Numbers published in X's advertising resources indicate that X had 499,300 users in Lebanon as of early 2024 – only 9.5% of the country's total population.<sup>12</sup> Access to X may be further constrained in poorer areas, such as parts of Beirut's southern suburbs, where residents often face unreliable electricity and internet access. This means the majority of people in Lebanon may not have received the orders in time, if at all.

## 3. Impossibility of compliance

Between September 23 and October 31, 2023, Israeli forces issued 94 area-specific forced displacement orders targeting Beirut's southern suburbs. These orders were challenging for residents to comply with for several reasons:

- **Insufficient time:** Many forced displacement orders were issued only minutes<sup>13 14 15 16 17</sup> before strikes were carried out, giving residents very little time to evacuate safely. Additionally, these orders often lacked a specific timeframe for evacuation or an indication of when the strike would occur, leaving civilians in a state of constant fear and uncertainty.
- **Nighttime alerts:** 62% of forced displacement orders issued between September 23, 2024, and October 31, 2024, were issued between 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m., with 29% issued between midnight and 4:00 a.m. This forced many residents to stay awake all night, anxiously waiting for potential alerts, disrupting sleep and heightening psychological stress.

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11 [Diakonia International Humanitarian Law Centre | Israel's military actions in Lebanon: Concerns over IHL compliance | 29 November 2024](#)

12 [DataReportal – Global Digital Insights | Digital 2024: Lebanon](#)

13 [Amnesty International | Lebanon: Israel's evacuation 'warnings' for civilians misleading | 10 October 2024](#)

14 [CNN | Israel strikes Lebanon as region braces for response to Iran: Live updates](#)

15 [The Times of Israel | Moments of IDF airstrike in Beirut caught in photos and video | 23 October 2024](#)

16 [Al Jazeera | In Lebanon, 'misleading' and sporadic Israeli evacuation orders instill fear | 10 November 2024](#)

17 [Middle East Eye | No Hezbollah assets found in Lebanon hospital facing Israeli bombing | 23 October 2024](#)

## 4. Misleading and inaccurate maps

Area-specific forced displacement orders were typically accompanied by maps indicating strike locations. However, these maps were unclear, difficult to interpret and contained inaccuracies regarding distances. Many maps also referenced landmarks that did not exist in the specified area or included names that were outdated or unfamiliar to local residents, adding to the confusion and hindering safe evacuation.

Below is an area-specific forced displacement order that highlights a building in the densely populated area of Choueifat, in southeast Beirut, instructing residents to move away from it. The map description is completely inaccurate, mistakenly identifying the location as Grand Cinemas ABC Verdun, a shopping mall situated in central Beirut's Verdun neighbourhood – a completely different region of Beirut. This error caused widespread panic and confusion, particularly as the order was issued at 9:36 pm, when many people were still present in the busy Verdun area near the mall.



Posts on X highlighting the incorrect locations of maps used in area-specific forced displacement orders issued by Israeli forces.

## 5. Mass forced displacement orders are never adequate

In addition to area-specific orders, Israeli forces issued mass forced displacement orders to 223 towns in South Lebanon, instructing residents to evacuate north of the Awali River, about 58 kilometres from the border with Israel. This is far beyond the 30-kilometre area south of the Litani River which has been designated in UNSC Resolution 1701 to be “free of any armed personnel, assets, and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL.”

Mass orders also prohibited residents from returning to their homes until further notice. For instance, on October 13 and 15, 2024, orders specifically barred residents of Southern Lebanon from returning to their olive fields during the critical olive harvest season, which had a huge detrimental impact on local livelihoods. A mass forced displacement order was also issued to all residents living on the coast south of the Awali River, affecting fishermen and boat owners, and covering one-third of Lebanon’s coastline. These broad directives lack specificity and there is concern that they are intended to provoke mass displacement rather than ensure civilian safety. At the time of writing, two weeks after the ceasefire agreement came into effect, Israeli forces were still preventing residents from returning to their homes in 62 villages bordering Israel.<sup>18</sup> Reports indicate that residents attempting to return to these areas have been met with gunfire, as Israeli forces continue to ensure that they remain uninhabited.



18 Avichay Adraee [X] | 11 December 2024 | Available at: <https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1866745805077442686>



# UNCHECKED VIOLENCE: DISREGARD OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

## **Evacuation without protections: Breaching IHL standards**

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) mandates the protection of civilians in conflict zones, requiring all parties to do everything feasible to avoid or minimise harm to civilians and safeguard essential services. Customary IHL prohibits forced displacement by parties to the conflict and permits evacuation only under circumstances that provide robust protections for civilian welfare, including access to proper accommodation, hygiene, health services, nutrition and family unity.

Israel's forced displacement orders in Lebanon lacked these essential provisions. They failed to provide displaced populations with access to basic services or secure accommodation. Consequently, these actions amount not to lawful evacuation orders but rather to forced displacement – a grave breach of IHL.

The responsibility of meeting the basic needs of displaced families has fallen solely on host communities and humanitarian organisations in Lebanon. These groups struggled to cope with the increased demand for services as repeated displacements drove an unrelenting surge in humanitarian needs. The support available through these channels was insufficient given the vast numbers of affected civilians, highlighting the broader inadequacies in Israel's displacement directives and the burden placed on Lebanon's already strained resources.

## Trapped and defenceless: Those unable to flee left in harm's way

IHL protections still apply to individuals who choose not to evacuate or who are unable to leave due to disability, illness, age or other vulnerabilities. People who stay in their homes, whether by choice or circumstance, retain full protection under international law. Israel's orders and attacks on densely populated civilian areas, including healthcare facilities, roads and essential infrastructure, restricted civilians' mobility and undermined their access to life-sustaining services. For those who were unable to flee, these constraints placed them at heightened risk without adequate protection.

## Direct attacks on essential services: Health workers and infrastructure attacked<sup>19</sup>

Direct attacks on essential services and health workers highlight not only Israel's failure to meet the IHL protections required for lawful evacuations, but also its apparent practice of indiscriminate targeting that has clearly hindered civilian access to essential services. Israel has systematically struck critical healthcare facilities,<sup>20</sup> transit routes and emergency personnel<sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> such as paramedics. These actions are a violation of IHL, which prohibits intentional attacks against civilians, medical facilities and other essential infrastructure critical to survival. By striking<sup>24</sup> healthcare workers and restricting vehicle movement, Israel has severely limited civilians' access to life-sustaining services, effectively trapping them in conflict zones with few, if any, safe alternatives.

## Relocation blocked: No safe evacuation routes available

During the conflict, there were few safe places to go in Lebanon. Nearly every governorate in Lebanon came under Israeli attack, leaving no place truly secure. As well as 25% of the country being under forced displacement orders,<sup>25</sup> Israel also targeted critical border crossings and transportation routes, which severely limited options for civilians to safely relocate. Of the six main border crossings with Syria, at least three were targeted,<sup>26</sup> including the Masnaa,<sup>27</sup> Matraba<sup>28</sup> and Joussieh crossings,<sup>29</sup> which forced people to try and cross the 7-kilometre distance to Syria on foot. Even unofficial crossings – often the only route for Syrian refugees without legal status – were targeted, cutting off essential escape routes for the most vulnerable populations. As of November 6, Israeli forces had struck these crossings a total of 32 times,<sup>30</sup> further restricting safe passage for civilians. In addition, areas around the Beirut–Rafic Hariri International Airport came under attack, causing minor damage to the airport's infrastructure.<sup>31</sup>

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19 [United Nations Lebanon | Statement of United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert | 25 October 2024](#)

20 [UN News | Lebanon crisis: Health workers and facilities 'targeted or hit' | 10 October 2024](#)

21 [World Health Organisation | Attacks on hospitals and health workers jeopardize provision of health in Lebanon | 16 October 2024](#)

22 [Reuters | Over 100 medics and emergency workers killed in Lebanon conflict, UN rights office says | 11 October 2024](#)

23 [BBC | Lebanon's emergency workers pay a deadly price amid Israeli bombing | 15 October 2024](#)

24 [Human Rights Watch | Lebanon: Israeli Attacks on Medics Apparent War Crimes | 30 October 2024](#)

25 [UN News | Lebanon crisis: UN human rights office calls for probe into Israeli strike | 15 October 2024](#)

26 [Associated Press | Lebanon-Syria border crossings face difficulties after Israeli airstrikes | 27 October 2024](#)

27 [Human Rights Watch | Lebanon: Israeli Strikes Impede Fleeing Civilians, Aid | 7 October 2024](#)

28 [Associated Press | Israel-Hamas war latest: Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon have killed nearly 700 this week | 27 September 2024](#)

29 [Anadolu Ajansı | Israel's airstrike shuts 2nd Lebanon-Syria border crossing out of 6: Official | 25 October 2024](#)

30 [The Syrian Observatory For Human Rights | New attack: Israeli fighter jets execute airstrike on position near illegal crossings near Syria-Lebanon border | 6 November 2024](#)

31 [The New Arab | Israeli strikes kill scores in eastern Lebanon, target airport | 7 November 2024](#)

*“The day we were forced to leave is etched in my mind. It felt like the Day of Judgment. The planes roared above us, bombs exploded around us, and the children were screaming. We kept bumping into each other in confusion and fear, not knowing if we would survive.”*

**MOTHER OF A DISPLACED FAMILY FROM TYRE’S AL-HAWSH AREA**

The targeting of evacuation routes highlights a blatant disregard for civilian safety. It made relocation exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, and left civilians stranded in active conflict zones. Such actions represent a clear violation of international humanitarian law by failing to apply the principle of distinction and to provide safe evacuation routes, thereby escalating the risk to civilian lives.

## **Shifting responsibility: Risk of war crimes**

Labelling these actions as “evacuations” diverts attention from Israel’s obligations under IHL and places the burden of responsibility on residents who fail to leave – rather than on the warring party which must prove that the displacement is both justified and necessary.<sup>32 33 34</sup> The sweeping orders issued since September 2024 have not protected civilians; rather, they have induced widespread fear and coerced displacement under duress.

Customary IHL holds that forced relocations be conducted in a manner that prioritises civilian welfare and preserves the right to safe return, which has not been guaranteed in Lebanon. This approach mirrors practices observed in Gaza, where Israel has issued similar forced displacement orders that forced residents to flee under threat, only for their homes and neighbourhoods to be destroyed shortly after.

In southern Lebanon, where mass forced displacement orders were issued for entire areas, the directives explicitly prohibited residents from returning until further notice – even after the ceasefire agreement took effect. Subsequent attacks levelled entire villages – many of which have been booby-trapped and detonated. This practice potentially constitutes forcible transfer – a severe breach of IHL recognised as a war crime under Article 8(2) (viii) of the Rome Statute.

Without the foundational principles of military necessity or safety for civilians, these forced displacement orders are not legitimate evacuations. Rather, they could amount to a campaign of forcible transfer. Forcibly relocating civilians without providing guarantees of safety or the means to return safely constitutes a grave breach of IHL. In this context, forced displacement appears to have been systematic and widespread, raising questions about whether it meets the criteria that could elevate these actions to the level of crimes against humanity. By displacing civilians without safe refuge, Israel’s actions exacerbated instability and insecurity, effectively leaving families without the safety and shelter that IHL is meant to guarantee.

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32 [Civilians in Conflict | Displacement in armed conflict and the protection of civilians | August 2023](#)

33 [International Committee of the Red Cross | IHL Databases | Rule 129. The Act of Displacement](#)

34 [International Committee of the Red Cross | IHL Databases | Customary IHL - Rule 132. Return of Displaced Persons](#)

# FORCED TO FLEE: THE HUMANITARIAN TOLL ON THE MOST VULNERABLE

The forced displacement orders issued by Israeli forces had profound and far-reaching humanitarian consequences for Lebanon's most vulnerable populations. Entire communities, including Lebanese civilians, migrant workers and Palestinian, Syrian and other refugees were uprooted from their homes and thrust into precarious, often life-threatening, conditions with limited options for safety and stability. For those already experiencing hardship, these orders have amplified existing vulnerabilities, pushing individuals and families to the brink.

The escalation of Israeli attacks forced many humanitarian organisations to suspend their services in parts of the country, such as the southern suburbs of Beirut, south of the Litani River and areas of the Baalbek district, leaving residents, including refugees, without essential support. Oxfam, for example, was forced to suspend its Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) operations in Baalbek, including lifesaving water trucking and desludging services, due to bombing in the areas where it works. This left already vulnerable populations, including Syrian refugees living in informal tented settlements, without access to critical water and sanitation services. Similarly, ActionAid's partner, the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL), which provides critical protection services for Palestinian and Syrian refugees and host communities, was forced to halt its activities in the Bekaa Valley.

Oxfam's partner, FEMALE, also suffered devastating losses. Their community centre in southern Lebanon was completely destroyed, and their centre in the Bekaa Valley sustained partial damage. The southern centre, which supports at least 600 women and girls every year, had provided a safe space for more than 30 young volunteers and community members to gather, learn and support one another. The centre housed a feminist library and regularly organised awareness-raising and capacity-building sessions on topics such as feminism, gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). FEMALE also offered essential services like self-defence sessions for girls and psychosocial support for survivors of online GBV. The loss of this space is a blow not only to the individuals who relied on it for support and empowerment but also to the broader community efforts to foster resilience and protect the most vulnerable.





## Survival settings: Shelters, streets, host families and crowded rentals

The displacement crisis in Lebanon forced people into a range of poor living conditions. Many sought refuge in around 1,100 overcrowded formal shelters – most of them repurposed public schools – where privacy, sanitation and safety measures were severely lacking. This put vulnerable groups such as women and children at increased risk. Others had no choice but to live on the streets, exposed to harsh weather and exploitation, or to squat in abandoned buildings, only to face eviction through military raids. Some found temporary sanctuary with host families, many of whom were already struggling to meet their basic needs due to financial hardship. A few families managed to rent apartments, but they faced overcrowding, social tensions and discrimination, particularly in areas where landlords were reluctant to rent to Muslim tenants.

While a conditional ceasefire was agreed to on November 27, 2024, not all displaced populations were able to return to their homes. Some are prohibited from returning by Israeli forces, while others have lost their homes entirely due to the destruction caused by extensive Israeli bombing and have no place to go.

Oxfam’s Emergency Response WASH Officer was displaced five times in six weeks as a result of Israel’s attacks. The first time was following the heavy bombardment of the area she lived in around Beirut. She rented an apartment with her husband in a safer area of the city.

*“The neighbours saw my sister-in-law who came to visit wearing a veil and told the landlord. He came into the house, and told my husband to hand over the keys and leave. We left, but the new place was not any better. People kept looking at us like we were different. What kind of vibe do I give?”*

## Bearing the brunt: Impact on women, children and the elderly

Women, especially those heading households alone, bore the brunt of survival responsibilities, such as securing food and managing family safety. Forced displacement exacerbated these challenges, especially for women and girls living in overcrowded shelters and insecure public spaces, where they were at greater risk of gender-based violence (GBV).

Women who were displaced from their homes were often unable to meet their basic needs. Women and girls living in shelters lacked access to menstrual products, clean water and adequate sanitation, for example. According to Oxfam’s protection monitoring, women were specifically requesting items like panties, pads and towels, as these were not prioritised in the first phase of the humanitarian response. ActionAid’s partners reported that women in shelters were resorting to using black plastic bags in place of menstrual products.

*“People have been given mattresses and blankets, but there are basic needs left unnoticed, particularly women’s needs. Women on their period are wrapping black bags around their waist”*

**SAYS ROULA ZEAITER, PROGRAM MANAGER AT RDFL**

Displacement also took a heavy psychological and physical toll on children. Many children witnessed the destruction of their homes, experienced multiple displacements and now live with continued uncertainty about where they will find safety.

Displacement also disrupted schooling for many children. With many public schools repurposed as shelters, access to education was severely impacted, which has created disparities among children. While children in private schools, where classes had resumed, were able to continue their education – sometimes even through online learning – those relying on public schools were deprived of such opportunities. This stark contrast deepened existing inequalities and further widened the divide between public and private schooling. When Lebanon’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) announced the start of the school year on November 4, many displaced children were unable to go back to school. This disruption – a direct result of forced displacement – not only undermined children’s education but also deepened inequalities, depriving them of stability and their basic right to education.

Elderly people also faced unique challenges, often lacking the physical and financial resources needed to cope with displacement. Displaced elderly women, for example, reported being dependent on younger family members and struggling to access medication or healthcare in overcrowded shelters that lacked the necessary support services to take care of older people. Collective shelters prioritised families, so many older people found themselves effectively homeless – forced to live on the streets or in informal spaces.

## Refugees and migrant workers: Multiple displacements and marginalisation

Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon face complex, layered displacement crises that are often marked by cycles of forced relocation and insecurity. The displacement of Palestinians from their homes and lands has unfolded across decades, with several distinct ‘waves’ of displacement identified by Palestinian rights groups. These include the British Mandate (1922-1947); what Palestinians refer to as the Nakba (“catastrophe”) (1947-1949) – a phenomenon that the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) argues is still unfolding; and the beginning of Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip (ongoing since 1967). During the Nakba, which took place immediately before and after the establishment of the State of Israel, an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their homes.<sup>35</sup>

Syrian refugees fled what is now more than a decade-long war. More than 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in precarious conditions, many of them in informal settlements, makeshift shelters or overcrowded apartments. Many lack access to essentials like clean water, sanitation and healthcare. Legal barriers and restrictions on employment mean Syrian refugees are often forced to resort to survival strategies such as child labour or early marriage. Rising social tensions between refugees and host communities have also added to their insecurity, leaving many Syrian families trapped in cycles of poverty and instability.

Palestinian and Syrian refugees have sought safety in Lebanon, but Israel’s war on Lebanon has threatened what little security they had. Lebanese citizens and refugees alike are now finding themselves displaced for various reasons, including Israeli military actions, dwindling resources and rising social tensions.

Despite the severity of the crisis, the Lebanese government excluded refugees and migrant workers from accessing government-run shelters, leaving them to fend for themselves under increasingly precarious

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35 [ActionAid, Al Mezan, Oxfam | Compelled to Flee: Cycles of Israeli forced displacement of Palestinians | April 2024](#)

conditions. Humanitarian responses have largely prioritised Lebanese citizens, with Syrian and Palestinian refugees and migrant workers often excluded from aid distribution. Migrant workers, many of whom lack the means to return to their home countries, faced acute vulnerabilities and remained excluded from most assistance programs.

As a result, refugees and migrant workers were forced to move repeatedly from one place to another, driven by violence, lack of resources and social tensions. This “multiple displacement” phenomenon became a defining feature of the crisis, compounding the instability and trauma faced by these already vulnerable populations.

*“The first time we were displaced was on September 23, when Israeli airstrikes intensified and hit the town of Anqoun, in the Sidon district of South Lebanon, where we had been renting and residing for five years. On the road, we were surrounded by Israeli airstrikes. It took us over four hours to reach the suburbs of Beirut.*

*“After two weeks, we returned to Anqoun, but it was under heavy Israeli airstrikes again. An evacuation order was issued by the Israeli forces for residents of Anqoun, circulated via WhatsApp on October 12. We left with only the clothes we had on us, three families crammed into one car. Soon after, our building in Anqoun was hit by an Israeli airstrike, and the house we had rented is now gone. We have nowhere to return to, no clothes left, and winter is approaching.*

*“Currently, we are in a collective shelter at the Nablus school in Sidon, with 16 people living in one room. My husband used to work occasionally, and my children worked in a plastic bag factory and an olive oil press, but now there’s nothing. No one in my family is working now. I hope to find a way to the airport – I wish for a chance to leave Lebanon. We have no one and nowhere to go, no home, no belongings, no one in this life.”*

**RADIA, A 47-YEAR-OLD DISPLACED SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMAN WHO FLED WITH HER HUSBAND, HER FOUR CHILDREN AND HER GRANDDAUGHTER**

*“We are human too, and we fear for our lives.”*

**JAYLAN, A SYRIAN REFUGEE LIVING IN A MAKESHIFT TENT AT THE SEA OF RAMLET EL BAYDA**

*“We fled the fighting in southern Lebanon, but now we are stuck here in a tent made of tarps and old blankets. We were turned away from several shelters because they were full. We are just waiting for someone to help us.”*

**AHMED, A YOUNG SYRIAN MAN**

Migrant workers, particularly those from African and Southeast Asian countries, were also severely affected, often excluded from humanitarian assistance due to their precarious legal status and systemic discrimination. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that 180,000 migrants from nearly 100 countries,

primarily female domestic workers, were living in Lebanon before the crisis, with nearly one in ten now displaced.<sup>36</sup> Many migrant workers were left to live on the streets or in makeshift shelters, as they were not permitted access to public shelters or host family support.

## Enduring trauma: The psychological impact of displacement

The psychological toll of forced displacement has led to a mental health crisis, particularly among children, women, and the elderly.<sup>37 38</sup> The violent and abrupt nature of displacement has left many struggling with stress, anxiety and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Children, who are highly sensitive to changes in routine, stability, and security, are exhibiting signs of trauma, including nightmares, mood disorders and behavioural problems. The loss of loved ones and exposure to violence has compounded their need for urgent psychological support.

After the airstrike that hit their house in South Lebanon, Siham's youngest daughter did not speak for five hours due to the shock. Siham is doing her best to protect her daughters by providing them with love and attention. However, her youngest daughter is now filled with anger, has trouble sleeping and is frightened by loud noises, such as fireworks, which remind her of the bombings

*"I could never forget those moments. Whenever I put my head on the pillow, I keep seeing flashes of those moments."*

**SIHAM, AN INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMAN FROM SOUTH LEBANON**



36 [International Organization for Migration | IOM Calls for Humanitarian Access and Increased Donor Support for Lebanon at Paris Conference | 24 October 2024](#)

37 [OCHA | Lebanon: Flash Update #34 - Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, as of 10 October 2024](#)

38 [Researching Internal Displacement | Ignored, Displaced and Powerless: Lebanon's IDPs Caught Between Escalating Hostilities and Government Neglect | 10 October 2024](#)

For women, the psychological impact was intensified by the logistical challenges of displacement. Many who have lost husbands or family members faced the dual burden of processing psychological distress while caring for children or elderly relatives. Social isolation further deprived them of essential support networks needed to cope.

Elderly people, too, face heightened mental health difficulties. Losing their homes and familiar environments triggered depression and severe anxiety for many elderly people. Yet, access to psychological support was limited, as few trained professionals were available in overcrowded shelters and displacement camps.

*“My needs are immense. My mental health is not good. Nor is my wife and daughter’s. But we are grateful that we are under a safer roof in this shelter.”*

*“I’m 52 years old, and I’ve spent my life witnessing wars in our country. I was born in a war. It seems I will die in a war too. I have not had the chance to witness a beautiful day. I’m really sad. I don’t know how we still stand up and breathe. I don’t know where the unknown is taking us. We’re tired of bad news. We’re always hanging by a thread.”*

**SIHAM, AN INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMAN FROM SOUTH LEBANON**



# URGENT RECOMMENDATIONS

## *To third states and the international community*

### **1. Securing and upholding an unconditional ceasefire**

While the intensity of Israeli forces' attacks has decreased, they have not ceased entirely. UNIFIL has recorded<sup>39</sup> over 100 violations of the agreement by Israel and at least one by Hezbollah since it came into effect, highlighting the agreement's fragility. All attacks, including those currently being carried out by Israeli forces, must be strictly prevented and unequivocally condemned. Parties to the ceasefire monitoring mechanism must ensure the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon holds, with all violations promptly addressed to prevent further destabilisation.

This isolated, conditional ceasefire agreement, which excludes Gaza, fails to address the broader drivers of tension, leaving them unresolved. Such selective action perpetuates cycles of violence and collective punishment, increasing the risk of spillover effects and the potential for renewed hostilities.

The fragility of the current situation demands immediate action to end Israel's military onslaught in Gaza and halt the killing and injuring of Palestinians. Third states must fulfil their obligations to ensure Israel complies with protective measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while also reinforcing the terms of the ceasefire in Lebanon to protect civilian lives and foster stability.

### **2. Halt the transfer of weapons and military equipment**

Immediately suspend the transfer of all weapons, parts and ammunition where there is a risk that they might be used to commit further serious violations of international humanitarian law in Lebanon and Gaza.

### **3. Hold all parties accountable for their IHL obligations**

Pressure all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law, including taking all feasible precautions to protect civilians and avoid harm, including in areas still under evacuation orders, ensuring that evacuations serve a lawful purpose and comply with fundamental guarantees of civilian protection, and upholding the protected status of civilians who remain in their homes or are unable to leave due to age, disability, or other mobility challenges. Civilians, regardless of their location or circumstances, as well as civilian infrastructure and objects, must never be treated as legitimate targets or be victims of indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks.

### **4. Commit to the sustainable and just political resolution of this conflict by addressing its deep-seated root causes, including decades of occupation and disregard of IHL.**

The persistent failure to address these underlying issues has not only prolonged the suffering of those affected but has also allowed Israel to continue acting with impunity. A meaningful resolution requires dismantling structures of inequality, ensuring accountability for violations, and fostering conditions for lasting peace grounded in justice and equality for all.

### **5. Ensure protection of humanitarian personnel and unfettered access**

Protect humanitarian workers and grant them unfettered access to operate, including in areas still under forced displacement orders. Israeli strikes have killed 97 health workers, forced the closure of over 96 primary healthcare centres (PHCCs) and dispensaries, and repeatedly targeted health crews. Even in

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39 [International Crisis Group | Can the Hizbollah-Israel Ceasefire Hold? | 3 December 2024](#)

areas that are still subject to forced displacement, health and humanitarian workers must be permitted to operate safely, freely, and at full capacity to address critical needs.

## **6. Facilitate immediate and safe returns for displaced civilians in South Lebanon**

Pressure Israel to immediately allow the safe and unconditional return of displaced populations to their homes in South Lebanon. Ensure that all restrictions, including enforced curfews and prohibitions on return, are lifted without delay. Demand that all parties to the conflict protect civilian infrastructure – such as hospitals, medical facilities, ambulances, water, and sanitation services – against further targeting or destruction, as such actions violate international law and exacerbate the suffering of affected populations. Immediate returns must be prioritised to uphold the rights, security, and dignity of displaced civilians.

## **To donors**

### **1. Scale up humanitarian aid to address widespread needs**

In response to the enormous humanitarian needs caused by widespread displacement and destruction across Lebanon, donors must significantly scale up humanitarian aid. This aid should prioritise:

- Meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of Lebanese citizens, as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugees and migrant workers. This should meet needs for protection, shelter, WASH, food, health, livelihoods and education needs, so that civilians can live in safety and dignity.
- Strengthening community resilience and enhancing livelihoods to mitigate the long-term effects of the crisis.
- Supporting conflict resolution efforts to foster stability.
- Providing significant international support for Lebanon's reconstruction, focusing on grants rather than loans, to rehabilitate critical infrastructure and assist those who have lost their homes, businesses, and sources of income.

### **2. Prioritise funding and resource support for local NGOs**

Local organisations are at the forefront of responding to the crisis but often lack sufficient resources to meet growing needs. International donors and agencies must:

- Increase financial and logistical support to local NGOs, enabling them to scale up their services.
- Strengthen the operational capacity of these organisations, particularly those providing essential services such as food, legal assistance, and shelter.
- Foster equitable partnerships with local actors, ensuring they have access to sustainable funding and the tools necessary to implement long-term solutions for displaced populations.

### **3. Ensure humanitarian aid remains impartial and non-politicised**

Humanitarian aid must be allocated solely based on need, ensuring that no restrictions or conditions hinder access to essential services for affected populations. Assistance should be delivered in full adherence to humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence, avoiding any entanglement in political agendas. This approach is critical to maintaining the trust of communities and ensuring the equitable distribution of aid to all who need it.

### **4. Promote gender-transformative humanitarian interventions**

Humanitarian organisations must adopt gender-transformative approaches that address the unequal burden of care work placed on women in conflict settings. This includes designing programs that actively challenge traditional gender roles by engaging men and boys in caregiving responsibilities and promoting equitable division of care work within households and communities. Such interventions should integrate support systems for women, including access to childcare, mental health services and opportunities for economic empowerment, to reduce their workload and foster gender equality in both the immediate response and long-term recovery efforts.

