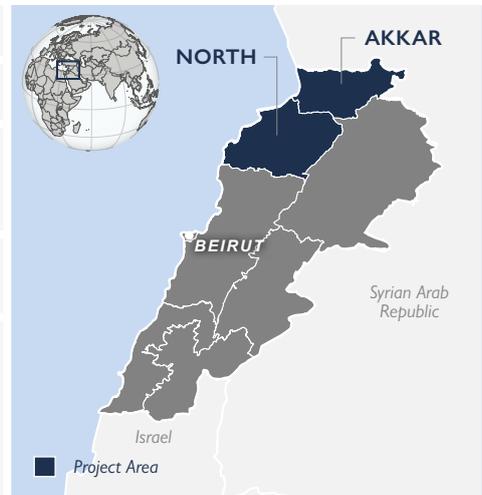


CASE STUDY

LEBANON 2018–2021 / SYRIAN CRISIS

KEYWORDS: Disability Inclusion, Health, Protection, Shelter rehabilitation, Security of Tenure

CRISIS	Syrian Crisis, 2011 onwards
PEOPLE DISPLACED	Approx. 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon*
PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS	870,000 (58%) of Syrian refugee HHs in Lebanon live in overcrowded, substandard or dangerous conditions**
PROJECT LOCATION	North Lebanon – T5 (Tripoli, Zgharta, Koura, Batroun, Bcharre, Minieh-Dennieh) and Akkar
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	Phase 1: 194 HHs (865 individuals) Phase 2: 385 HHs (1,810 Individuals) Phase 3: 320 HHs (1,600 Individuals) <hr/> Total: 899 HHs (4,275 individuals)
PROJECT OUTPUTS	538 HHs supported by rehabilitation of Sub-Standard buildings 111 HHs supported by rehabilitation of Collective Shelters 93 HHs supported by accessibility interventions in Informal Tented Settlements 79 HHs received Shelter Kits
SHELTER DENSITY	Minimum of 3.5m² per person
DIRECT COST	USD 250 per shelter kit USD 740 on average per accessibility intervention USD 1,500 per HH on average per rehabilitation
PROJECT COST	Average of approx. USD 2,250 per HH
* Source: UNHCR Operations Reports Lebanon Dashboard (July 2021)	
** Source: Vulnerability Assessments of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) 2020	



PROJECT SUMMARY

The “Shelter and WASH for Protection” project was designed around protection-related risks as identified and analyzed in collaboration with Protection actors. The project responded to specific needs identified among highly vulnerable refugees living in sub-standard shelter in North Lebanon. The organization aimed to reduce protection risks for specific target groups (women-headed households, single women, children and elderly at risk, Persons with Disabilities, and GBV survivors) through a two-pronged shelter intervention: tailor-made shelter rehabilitation to reduce protection and health-related vulnerabilities, accompanied by rent negotiation aimed at increasing tenure security. This case study refers to three phases of the project undertaken between 2018-2021.



- * **Mar 2011:** Eruption of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria).
- 1** **Mar - May 2018:** Development of the “Shelter and WASH for Protection” approach and connecting with Protection actors.
- 11 Mar 2020:** WHO declared the novel COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.
- 2** **Mar 2020:** Introduction of COVID-19 related activities.
- 3** **Mar 2020:** MoU signed with Protection partners to improve the referrals between the organizations.
- 4** **Jul - Aug 2020:** Internal evaluation.
- 5** **Oct - Dec 2020:** External evaluation.
- 6** **Apr - May 2021:** Pilot of the rehabilitation of safe shelters for GBV survivors, in coordination with Protection partners.



The project approached housing rehabilitations in an integrated way, considering how interventions would positively impact protection and health.

CONTEXT

Ten years into the Syrian crisis, Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world. Lebanon's economy was crippled in 2020 by economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Beirut blast. Prior to the economic crisis, a functional economy and the availability of Syrian workforce for agricultural and industrial work facilitated a palliation of social tensions. Communal and political tensions are on the rise, with Syrian refugees often being blamed for contributing to the economic collapse of the country and seen as competitors for jobs and resources.

LIVING CONDITIONS

The majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in rented accommodations, whether it's in Informal Tented Settlements, Collective Shelters or Sub-Standard Building units. Collective Shelters are residential or non-residential structures where more than six households reside, sharing common areas and facilities. These can be, for example, residential buildings, unfinished buildings, farms, warehouses, factories, or schools. Sub-Standard Building units refer to individual shelters, residential or non-residential, located inside existing structures, that are below humanitarian standards. These set-ups expose refugees, especially those in at-risk groups, to significant protection and health risks.

Collective evictions of multiple refugee families living in Informal Tented Settlements or Collective Shelters are on the rise. At the same time, risks of individual evictions have been on the rise due to the socio-economic situation: 48% of refugees report rent as the main reason for borrowing money. Negative coping strategies appear on the rise: 15.2% of families moved accommodations in the past year, mainly looking for cheaper shelter options. In addition, 2% moved from residential to non-residential and non-permanent housing, thus reducing living standards and potentially increasing health and protection-related vulnerabilities.

Inability to pay rent has especially affected refugees living in Collective Shelters and Sub-Standard Buildings (81% and 76% respectively), which represent more than 70% of the Syrian refugees in the country. In the North and in Akkar, 90% of refugee households living in residential buildings below standards are living below the Survival and Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB), meaning that they are unable to meet their essential needs.



Many houses had previous makeshift repairs carried out, such as this improvised roof.

NATIONAL SHELTER RESPONSE

In the first years of the crisis, the Government of Lebanon and its international partners strongly focused on shelter support in Informal Tented Settlements. Following a stabilization of the overall refugee population, the focus shifted more to the shelter situation of refugees residing in Collective Shelters and Sub-Standard Buildings. This appeared in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 and acquired progressively more prominence, together with the notion of protection risks for vulnerable groups as entry points for shelter rehabilitations in residential and non-residential buildings such as unfinished buildings, farms and factories. Despite the progressive integration of this component in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, funding of rehabilitations in Collective Shelters and Sub-Standard Buildings has been poor, with funding gaps in 2020 above 90% compared to the needs.

PROJECT APPROACH

The project was initially designed in 2017 to fill the gap in shelter support within Collective Shelters and Sub-Standard Buildings from a protection angle. Assessments from that time, combined with the secondary analysis provided by Protection actors, pointed clearly at high risks and vulnerabilities for specific groups (women-headed households, single women, children and elderly at risk, Persons with Disabilities, and GBV survivors) being either caused by or exacerbated by shelter-related weaknesses.

Protection actors emphasized how a number of vulnerabilities could be sensitively reduced by introducing minor shelter rehabilitations to enhance the protection from violence (including GBV) and hazards as well as improving accessibility for Persons with Disabilities.

The analysis from the protection angle also indicated vulnerability in relation to tenure security, whereby poor access to livelihoods and resources increased the risk of vulnerable households being unable to pay rent, exposing households to negative or harmful coping strategies including heavy borrowing, downgrading of living situations, or child labor, as well as vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse by landlords.

In light of this analysis, the organization developed a "Shelter and WASH for Protection" strategy aimed at:



Accessibility interventions in Informal Tented Settlements included improving wheelchair access.

- Reducing critical protection risks and vulnerabilities for at-risk groups through minor shelter rehabilitations conducted through local contractors from the areas where the organization was intervening.
- Enhancing tenure security by using shelter upgrades as a negotiation “tool” with landowners in order to achieve rent-free agreements, rent reduction or – at least – rent freeze.

Analysis was undertaken to determine the best modalities for assistance. The choice of implementing rehabilitations through contractors under the organization’s supervision was determined by two factors: 1) ensuring the highest possible quality of works and integrity, and 2) ensuring the maximum effectiveness of the disbursement in terms of timeliness and completion of rehabilitations.

Lessons learned workshops took place on a yearly basis when designing a new phase of the project. These workshops tackled the challenges faced during the year and mitigation measures to avoid further obstacles were put in place as the approach evolved.

SHELTER REHABILITATION

Shelter rehabilitation aimed to improve the living conditions of households through:

- Improving privacy (e.g. by installing doors and partitions, separating the bathroom from the kitchen);
- Improving safety (e.g. by installing lockable doors and windows, lights outside the shelter, fixing the electrical wires, and installing handrails on balconies);
- Improving accessibility (e.g. by installing ramps and handrails for people with reduced mobility); and
- Reducing health risks (e.g. through the provision of water tanks, water connections and safe and functional bathrooms).

Depending on the type of shelter, the type of risk, the feasibility, and the profile of the household, tailored shelter interventions were implemented. These included:

- Rehabilitation or upgrading of Sub-Standard Buildings;
- Rehabilitation or upgrading of Collective Shelters and common spaces;
- Accessibility interventions in Informal Tented Settlements; and
- Distribution of shelter kits.

Detailed assessments of the needs and priorities of each household were carried out by integrated teams that included Field Officers and Construction Supervisors. Households were consulted on the type of interventions to be included. These consultations fed into an MoU signed with the landlord that listed the intervention details.

PROTECTION MAINSTREAMING

Based on the organization’s experience and consultations with targeted communities and protection agencies, the profiles of the most vulnerable and most at-risk people for whom protection risks are aggravated by the inadequate living conditions were defined: women-headed households, single women, children and elderly at risk, Persons with Disabilities, and GBV survivors.

To ensure integrated interventions and to target the most vulnerable households, the approach envisaged receiving referrals of protection cases needing shelter rehabilitation from Protection actors. The collaboration was not formalized in the form of a contractual agreement in the first two rounds of the project. The initial lack of contractual agreements with Protection partners proved an obstacle for receiving significant numbers of referrals for shelter rehabilitations, despite the organization’s efforts in disseminating its approach and capacity. Starting from 2020, MoUs were signed with Protection actors in order to formalize the relationship and referral/counter-referral agreements. The change positively impacted the number of households referred for shelter assistance.

Protection mainstreaming was further enhanced by integrating staff with protection expertise within the organization setup and in reinforcing the protection know-how of the shelter team, particularly with regard to safe identification, selection and referrals, and appropriate technical design. The organization also developed a “Shelter and WASH for Protection” Standard Operating Procedure, as well as guidance outlining best practices and an interventions catalogue to support field staff. This allowed the organization to implement the project with a protection lens and progressively develop a more integrated Protection+Shelter approach.



Accessibility of latrines in informal tented settlement was improved.

MAIN CHALLENGES

A low number of households were identified initially, due to the full reliance on referrals from protection actors. This was addressed by formalizing the relationship with protection actors in the form of MoUs, providing for minimum numbers of referrals and counter-referrals to be provided from both organizations and detailing the relationship and responsibilities of both actors.

Increased economic vulnerability due to the financial crisis may need a more “muscular” approach to guarantee tenure security. Piloting of conditional cash-for-rent schemes is envisaged in order to address this, along with continued efforts to encourage contracted service providers to hire people from within the target communities.

Increasing social tensions were perceived on the ground between refugees and host communities and the Lebanese municipal authorities due to the explicit targeting of refugees with assistance. If not addressed appropriately, the increasing tensions between both communities could lead to community and individual level evictions exacerbating further pre-existing protection risks. For the 4th phase of the project, to be launched mid-2021, it is foreseen that at least 20% of the target households will be vulnerable Lebanese households.

COVID-19 pandemic. After the surge of COVID-19 and its spread in Lebanon, COVID-19 awareness and prevention sessions were introduced alongside the normal activities of the project.

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

Satisfaction rates appeared to be high, with 87% of households reporting an improvement in living conditions in a 2020 evaluation exercise. Reported outcomes included:

- **70% of households reported that the risk of falling ill was reduced** after the intervention, mainly due to an improvement in the access to clean water, living in hygienic space and better protection from the weather.
- Improvements in terms of safety and protection, especially for women and Persons with Disabilities, were reported, with **65% of households reporting that their privacy had improved and 20% stated that their protection from sexual abuse had improved.**
- Around **87% of the interviewed households declared that this intervention improved their life, minimizing the risks associated with worrying about daily life needs** and most respondents reported that there was a **noticeable positive psychological effect** on the members of the household, who felt more at ease since their shelter needs were addressed by the project.
- **Half of the households reported feeling safer in their shelters and believed that their relationship with their neighbors improved.** However, some incidents were reported with Syrian or Lebanese neighbors who were not part of the project, especially since the

economic situation in the country is worsening and families are becoming more vulnerable.

- Relative success was registered also with regards to tenure security, with **more than 80% of landlords having respected the agreements entailed in the pre-rehabilitation MoUs.** However, the incumbent economic crisis has enhanced the risk for households of being unable to pay for rent.

Communication on the approach taken in this project at the Shelter Sector level contributed to strengthening the attention of the Sector on Protection issues outside of Informal Tented Settlements, an area of action that has now become an integral part of the Sector strategy.



Video phones were installed for people with limited or no mobility, allowing them to monitor their visitors and control the entrance door remotely.



Partitions were installed to separate the kitchen from the living/sleeping space. This improved hygiene and allowed more privacy.

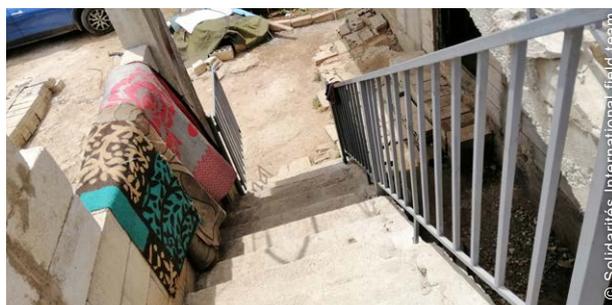
STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- √ **The tailor-made “Shelter and WASH for Protection” approach** – focusing on privacy, safety, accessibility and health – improved living conditions by addressing shelter inadequacies and the risks they generate, reaching protection outcomes for the most at-risk individuals with pre-existing protection issues.
- √ **Strong links with Protection actors supported targeting and enabled rehabilitation interventions to be tailored to households’ specific vulnerabilities**, thanks to the referral channel from Protection actors and to the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) guiding the implementation.
- √ **Satisfaction with the quality of rehabilitations has been high.** Complete technical assessments and the continuous follow up on rehabilitation works implemented by the contractors have been a strong contributing factor.
- √ **The wider impacts of rehabilitation interventions were measured and emphasized.** For example, positive psychological effects were reported by more than 50% of the respondents in a 2020 survey. Rehabilitations at a relatively modest cost (an average of USD 1,200 per household) had positive direct and indirect effects on reducing protection and health risks, reinforcing the economic environment in the area of intervention, and contributed to the reduction of negative coping mechanisms.
- √ **The project had a strong focus on tenure security**, and largely positive outcomes were measured, with 80% of the landlords sticking to the MoUs.

WEAKNESSES

- × **Vulnerable host communities have so far been targeted only indirectly**, as the focus of the intervention has been systematically on refugees. This targeting could contribute to the rising tensions between refugee and host communities over aid services in light of the economic crisis. For the 4th phase of the project, to be launched mid-2021, it is foreseen that at least 20% of the target households of the intervention will be vulnerable Lebanese households.
- × **Rent negotiation as a standalone tenure security measure has limitations in an environment characterized by a severe financial crisis and loss of purchasing power.** Rent agreements do not exceed a term of 12 months and are highly depend of the ability of the tenant to pay rent.
- × **Further outreach and relationship building with Protection actors needed.** Despite improvements in the relationship with Protection actors, a lot of Protection actors in the area are still only marginally aware of the project and of the possibility of referrals for shelter-related vulnerabilities.



Handrails were installed along staircases and gates put in place for additional child safety.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Creating and institutionalizing a relationship with Protection actors** is key in order to guarantee the success of a shelter-for-protection approach. Relationships should be formalized, in the form of MoUs with clear agreements for referrals and counter-referrals.
- **Further action needed to improve tenure security.** In the context of increased economic vulnerability due to the financial crisis, additional interventions are needed beyond only negotiation of rent reduction. An external evaluation of the project has highlighted the need to intervene with more direct support for rent payment, notably in the form of conditional cash-for-rent schemes.
- **Reinforcing protection awareness within the Shelter teams is fundamental** in order to guarantee protection-sensitiveness within implementation. Within future phases of the project it is intended that trainings and briefings for shelter teams will be reinforced, possibly by integrating Protection actors in the professional training of shelter staff.
- **Rehabilitation works and repairs at community level contribute to the reinforcement of social cohesion between refugees and the host community.** The targeting of refugees solely with individual shelters rehabilitation could generate tensions between both communities, particularly for Lebanese nationals whose vulnerability was significantly impacted by the financial crisis.
- The approach has a direct impact on the increase of resilience, yet a **longer-term funding strategy is paramount to increase sustainability.**