

Health programme

2019

Context

Lebanon is host to almost **1 million** registered Syrian refugees, as well as some 18,000 refugees and asylum-seekers of other nationalities.

This is the largest per capita refugee population in the world, and is **straining Lebanon's health care system** and other essential services.

Vulnerability assessments from 2018 show that **69%** of Syrian refugee families live below the poverty line. Nearly **9 out of 10 households have acquired debt** – averaging US\$1,016 per household – to cover essential needs.

Although there is a wide network of health care providers in Lebanon, services are largely privatized and based on user fees. **Unaffordability** is significant and the cost of treatment is the most commonly-cited barrier for accessing care.

Funding requirements

UNHCR Lebanon requires **USD 62 million** to sustain access to basic and lifesaving health care for refugees and other persons of concern in 2019.



Primary & Hospital Care Needs

- Refugees in Lebanon seek **primary health care** for acute health conditions (infections and communicable diseases), chronic conditions, and reproductive health care (antenatal care, postnatal care, and family planning). Childhood vaccination and antenatal care are the most frequently accessed preventive services.
- **UNHCR estimates that up to 100,000 hospital admissions for refugees are needed each year.**
- The most common referrals to higher levels of care are pregnancy and childbirth, respiratory diseases, infectious and parasitic diseases, neonatal and congenital diseases, injury, gastrointestinal diseases, and cardiovascular conditions.
- Without adequate access to health care, refugees are at increasing risk of deteriorating health status and distress.
- Inadequate shelter, lack of appropriate waste disposal and poor hygienic facilities are additional contributing factors to health problems among refugees.

UNHCR Response

- UNHCR helps refugees to access primary health care services by subsidizing the cost of consultations and medication through **10 primary health care centres** (additional centres are supported by partners).
- Recognizing the lack of mental health care, UNHCR is also supporting provision of **mental health services (including specialized psychiatric care)** in two specialized centres.
- UNHCR is the main humanitarian agency working to increase access to secondary and tertiary health care for refugees in Lebanon. **Child birth, life-saving and emergency interventions are prioritised** to reduce preventable deaths.
- UNHCR subsidizes hospital care costs exceeding USD 100. The **proportion of support increases with cost of care** to reach above 95% for very large bills. Treatment as a consequence of sexual and gender-based violence, torture and acute malnutrition is fully covered.
- Services are provided through a **network of hospitals** (currently 40).

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Results

- UNHCR supports primary health care services such as free childhood vaccinations, subsidized consultations for acute illnesses, reproductive health, non-communicable diseases and mental health, as well as subsidized diagnostic tests for the most vulnerable groups.
- Vaccines and essential acute medicines are provided **free of charge**, with a small handling fee for chronic disease medicines.
- In 2018, some **77,580** primary health care consultations were supported by UNHCR, including **4,700** antenatal care consultations, **2,700** consultations for non-communicable diseases and **21,700** mental health consultations. Some **44,000** consultations were for women and **17,000 (23%)** were for children under 5 years old.
- In 2018, UNHCR subsidised **79,400** secondary and tertiary health care interventions for refugees in Lebanon.

Remaining gaps

- Refugees with conditions requiring long term, specialized and high cost treatment (such as cancers, chronic haematological, endocrine, immunological and neurological conditions) are not covered by UNHCR and very few other actors assist refugees with such conditions.
- Preparations carried out at out-patient level for severe but non-urgent health conditions are not covered. This can include expensive radiological procedures (MRI, CT and PET-scans) as well as laboratory examinations.

Map:
UNHCR's health programme provides care to refugees throughout Lebanon through our network of primary health care outlets and contracted hospitals.

