

Unseen and Unheard: Lebanon's Children in the Crossfire of Crisis

Monitoring Report

01 January – 31 December 2024

Acknowledgement

ALEF is pleased to express its gratitude to all those who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the production of this report, including the ALEF team, board members, partners and friends.

Disclaimer

While the team made all efforts possible to cross-check information and reproduce facts and events accurately, this does not overrule the possibility of inaccuracies or oversights, for which ALEF hereby expresses its regrets.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	6
To Civil Society Organizations and UN agencies	7
To Donors	7
To the Government of Lebanon (GoL)	8
General Overview on National and International Framework for Child Protection	10
Context Analysis	13
Prison Conditions	15
Trends and Patterns Identified	18
Minors in Conflict with the Law	18
Children in Contact with the Judicial System	19
Sexual Violence and Exploitation	19
TikTok Paedophilia Ring	20
Repatriation Risks for Syrian Refugees, Including Minors, and Increasing Restrictions	21
Effects of War on Children	22
Child Civilian Casualties and Displaced Children	22
The School Year	22
Child Protection in Shelters	23
Conclusion	25

Executive Summary

As part of the MENA Child Rights Initiative, led by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), ALEF has been monitoring and documenting instances of institutional violence against children. The findings of ALEF's monitoring efforts are consolidated into monitoring reports. This report is the first of the series and covers the year between January 1 to December 31, 2024.

Lebanon has ratified key international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and adopted relevant national frameworks, such as Law 422/2002. Nevertheless, children in Lebanon continue to face significant threats of institutional violence.

This annual monitoring report provides an analysis of the evolving context and systemic gaps affecting institutional violence against children in Lebanon. It highlights the impact of Lebanon's persistent political deadlock, economic crisis, and escalating security challenges on the vulnerabilities of children. Key findings include:

- **Systemic weaknesses in juvenile justice:** Despite legal provisions prioritizing alternatives to imprisonment for minors, juvenile detention remains over-relied upon, with minors subjected to disproportionate sentences, prolonged pretrial detention, and inhumane conditions in overcrowded facilities.
- **Effects of war on children:** The armed conflict in Lebanon has led to over 200 child casualties and has displaced nearly 900,000 individuals, including 400,000 school-aged children, disrupting their education and exposing them to heightened risks of violence, family separation, illnesses, and exploitation.
- **Exploitation and abuse:** Cases of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and online exploitation have surged, revealing critical gaps in preventative and protective mechanisms. High-profile incidents, such as the dismantling of a TikTok paedophilia ring and sexual abuse scandals in schools, highlight the urgency of addressing child exploitation and abuse in both physical and digital spaces.
- **Impact on refugee minors:** Syrian refugee children face growing risks of forced deportation, restricted access to education, and discriminatory policies, compounding their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

These findings demonstrate that Lebanon's child protection frameworks, while legally robust on paper, lack the necessary enforcement and resources to address the acute and chronic challenges children face. The report calls for urgent systemic reforms, emphasizing a holistic, rights-based approach that prioritizes the best interests of children. The report proposes the following **recommendations**:

To Civil Society Organizations and UN agencies

- Advocate for the full and effective implementation of Law 422/2002 with a focus on training judicial and law enforcement personnel on child-friendly procedures.
- Advocate for the Lebanese authorities to ensure the effective activation of the National Human Rights Institute (NHRI), inclusive of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), by addressing both structural and operational barriers, including the lack of resources and regulatory decrees. Additionally, call on the NHRI to adopt a proactive approach within its current capacities, ensuring transparency, regular reporting, and meaningful engagement with civil society to fulfil its mandate under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) and improve oversight of places of deprivation of liberty.
- Launch awareness campaigns targeting children, parents, and educators on child rights, especially those in contact and conflict with the law or at risk of repatriation and on the importance of rehabilitating child offenders.
- Collaborate with the ISF's Cybercrime Bureau to develop and implement robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms to detect and prevent online child exploitation. This includes capacity-building support for the Bureau, strengthening partnerships with local and international stakeholders, and ensuring the integration of child protection principles in all cybercrime prevention efforts.
- Strengthen mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services in collective shelters and schools.
- Establish mobile child protection teams in displacement-affected areas during displacement periods and conduct and publish regular assessments on the protection situation of displaced children.

To Donors

- Prioritize funding for programs addressing the needs of vulnerable children, including psychosocial support, education, and alternatives to detention for minors in conflict with the law.
- Dedicate sufficient resources to support the Lebanese government with the provision of rehabilitative services for children.
- Support the strengthening and operationalization of Lebanon's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) under the National Human Rights Institute (NHRI), mandated by the OPCAT, to improve oversight of detention facilities. This includes targeted investments

to ensure adequate resources, capacity-building, and the enforcement of regulatory frameworks, while also fostering transparency and accountability in the NPM's operations to prevent the misuse of support and ensure impact.

- Establish flexible funding mechanisms to address urgent needs arising from conflicts, such as displacement, educational disruptions, and increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation among children.
- Fund targeted initiatives for reintegrating out-of-school and displaced children into the education system.
- Support digital learning infrastructure and tools in public schools, especially in conflict-affected areas.

To the Government of Lebanon (GoL)

- Amend Law 422/2002 to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility and introduce proportionality in sentencing based on age and circumstances.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure under the CRC.
- Ensure the full activation and operationalization of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) established under Law 62/2016, in compliance with Lebanon's obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). This includes approving regulatory decrees, allocating adequate resources, and enabling the NPM to function independently and effectively. Additionally, facilitate access for civil society organizations (CSOs) to monitor places of deprivation of liberty, including juvenile detention facilities, as part of a collaborative approach to safeguarding human rights and preventing torture.
- Revise the situation of detainees held in pre-trial detention to reduce the problem of overcrowding, avoid detaining people arbitrarily, limit pretrial detention for minors to legal timeframes, and prioritize alternatives to detention, such as community service or counselling programs.
- Collaborate with local partners to develop and implement a comprehensive emergency response plan for education in the South and areas prone to conflict to minimize educational disruptions.
- Halt the nationwide crackdown on refugees by security and municipal authorities and plan for a comprehensive response strategy to the refugee crisis, in line with international standards and Lebanon's international commitments, instead of standalone discriminatory measures.
- Provide international organizations and Civil Society with a regular, public accounting of deportations, including reasons for removal to ensure accountability and the respect of rule of law.

- Adopt targeted regulations to enhance protections against online child exploitation and strengthen mechanisms for prosecuting offenders involved in cybercrimes targeting minors. Ensure that these regulations are specific to child protection and do not infringe on freedom of expression, while promoting transparency and accountability in enforcement processes.
- Develop a robust and comprehensive national contingency plan to ensure continuity of education during armed conflict or displacement.
- Ensure shelters meet minimum child protection and WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) standards during times of displacement and establish identification and age-assessment procedures to prevent children being tried as adults.

General Overview on National and International Framework for Child Protection

Lebanon became a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, thereby committing to uphold the rights of children as outlined in the treaty.¹ The CRC, recognized as the most widely ratified international human rights instrument, establishes civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights for children. Lebanon has also engaged with two of the CRC's three optional protocols: the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, signed in 2002, and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, ratified in 2004.² However, Lebanon has taken no action regarding the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure, which enables children to file complaints regarding violations of their rights.³

Lebanon's ratification of other key international human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1997), complements its commitment to child protection. CEDAW includes provisions aimed at protecting young girls from discrimination and harmful practices and bridges the protection gap between childhood under the CRC and adulthood under CEDAW.⁴ The ratification of the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and its Optional Protocol (OP-CAT) allows on the other hand for the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) that grants oversight over places of deprivation of liberty, including those holding minors.

Lebanon has also ratified 50 International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions, including fundamental conventions addressing child labour and reinforcing its international obligations to protect children from economic exploitation.

At the national level, the adoption of Law 422/2002 on the Protection of Children in Violation of the Law or Exposed to Danger marked a significant milestone as Lebanon's first self-contained child protection legislation, establishing the country's first secular state-led system for child protection. The law provided for civilian juvenile courts and judges, along with contracted social workers, with unprecedented authority to investigate child maltreatment cases and develop

1 Save the Children's Resource Centre. (2011, November). Child Rights Situation Analysis Lebanon. Report Commissioned by Save the Children Sweden. Retrieved from <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/5759.pdf/>

2 OHCHR

3 Ibid.

4 OHCHR. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>

care plans. The law also establishes three circumstances where a child is considered at risk: when a child finds themselves in situations that may expose them to exploitation or endanger their health, safety, morals, or upbringing; if a child is subjected to physical violence or sexual abuse; and if a child is found begging or homeless.⁵ Central to this law is the principle of the best interests of the child, which means that decisions and actions concerning the care or legal proceedings of children, specifically those who are in conflict with the law or in danger, should prioritize the child's well-being.⁶

However, procedural protections for juveniles in conflict with the law are inconsistently enforced. Challenges include resource constraints, insufficient training and capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement, judicial personnel, and social workers, and structural inefficiencies within the legal and judicial systems, such as case backlogs and administrative hurdles. Negative societal attitudes and stigma towards juvenile offenders further undermine procedural safeguards meant to protect their rights.⁷

Yet, there remains many gaps in Law 422/2002, most of them contradicting international law standards. The law stipulates that children under seven shall not be held criminally liable⁸, in violation of international standards, particularly the Beijing Rules that recommend of the age of criminal responsibility at no less than 12 years old. Furthermore, Law 422 did not stipulate nullity in case of the absence of a social worker during an interrogation, meaning that this results only in disciplinary sanctions, without rendering the interrogation null and void. This further undermines the protection of the minor's rights.⁹ More alarming is the fact that there lacks a guarantee of legal counsel during pre-trial interrogation. Moreover, Article 18 of Law 422 allows the deportation of non-Lebanese juveniles as a preventive measure without safeguards for their safety or appropriate reception, which undermines the principle of the best interest of the child and international protection standards.¹⁰ This is also coupled with Law 422 undermining the principles of a fair trial, particularly through the discretionary powers granted to juvenile judges in protection cases. These powers allow judges to deny all parties, including lawyers, access to psychological and social reports, and to issue decisions that are not subject to appeal. This lack of transparency can expose minors to subjective assessments without adequate safeguards for an effective defence.

In addition to Law 422/2002, other laws and policies strengthen child protection in Lebanon.¹¹ For instance, Law 293/2014 on the Protection of Women and Other Family Members from Family Violence also contributes to the broader legal framework for the judicial protection

5 Ministry of Social Affairs. (2015). Standard operating procedures for the protection of juveniles in Lebanon: Operational toolkit. Beirut: UNICEF Publication. Retrieved from <https://socialserviceworkforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/SOP-for-Juvenile-Protection-in-Lebanon.pdf>

6 European Commission. Retrieved from https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2017-04/c_2016_7280_lebanon_aap_2016_part_1_annex_1.pdf

7 European Commission. Retrieved from https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2017-04/c_2016_7280_lebanon_aap_2016_part_1_annex_1.pdf

8 Consortium for Street Children. (2020, November). Lebanon Status Offences. Retrieved from <https://www.streetchildren.org/legal-atlas/map/lebanon/status-offences/are-children-criminalised-for-vagrancy-loitering-truancy-or-similar-activities/>

9 According to CLDH

10 Ibid.

11 UNHCR. MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN LEBANON CHILD PROTECTION WORKING GROUP LEBANON 2018. Retrieved from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/74549>

of children in Lebanon, regardless of their community or nationality.¹² The adoption of Law 62/2016, establishing the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and its Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), was widely seen as a step forward. The CPT is mandated to access all places of detention and protect detainees, including minors, from torture and inhumane treatment. However, its operational inefficiency undermines its intended purpose. The Unified Child Protection Policy adopted by Civil Society Organizations and Associations working with children in Lebanon, established in 2016 by the Ministry of Social Affairs as part of a joint strategic vision with civil society organizations, aims to create a holistic system for safeguarding the rights and dignity of children.¹³

Despite these protection frameworks, Lebanon's ongoing socio-economic and political crises have taken a toll on marginalized communities, particularly children. Since 2019, there has been a dramatic increase in cases of violent discipline against children, gender-based violence, and child abandonment, reflecting the fragility of national child protection mechanisms. Struggling families have turned to harmful coping strategies like child labour and early marriages.¹⁴ These issues highlight the need for systemic reforms to ensure that existing frameworks effectively safeguard the rights and well-being of children in Lebanon.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ AbaadMena. (2016). Unified Child Protection Policy adopted by Civil Society Organizations and Associations working with children in Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://abaadmena.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/ebook.1486726371.pdf>

¹⁴ L'Orient Today. (2023, October 4). Protecting children from violence, abuse and neglect in Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1351371/protecting-children-from-violence-abuse-and-neglect-in-lebanon.html>

Context Analysis

Throughout 2024, Lebanon remained trapped in a deep political deadlock, having been without a president since October 2022.¹⁵ This undermined the country's ability to respond effectively to the armed conflict that escalated during the last quarter of the year.

Indeed, Southern Lebanon, especially border towns, had been facing heavy attacks all year long. By September 20, 2024, Israel had expanded its airstrikes, especially in Dahye (the southern suburbs of Beirut),¹⁶ Baalbak,¹⁷ Bekaa¹⁸, and other areas. Operations shifted from targeting Hezbollah commanders and personnel to broader attacks on cities and infrastructure, thereby increasing the threat to civilian and essential infrastructure. On October 1, 2024, Israel announced the beginning of a ground military operation in southern Lebanon, amid an ongoing exchange of hostilities between the two sides and relentless Israeli airstrikes. By November 25, 2024, there were at least 15,699 injuries and 3,768 conflict-related deaths.¹⁹ At least 240 were child casualties, reported since October 8, 2023.²⁰ According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), nearly 881,326 people had been displaced as of November 13, fleeing north to escape the intense artillery fire.²¹ Of these, 187,269 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were registered in 1,027 collective shelters.²² Furthermore, nearly 562,000 individuals (37% Lebanese nationals) had crossed into Syria, and 39,071 into Iraq, to escape Israeli shelling.²³

15 Now Lebanon. (2024, June 14). Lebanese Presidency Stalemate. Retrieved from <https://nowlebanon.com/lebanese-presidency-stalemate/>

16 L'Orient Today. (2024, January 3). First Israeli strike in southern suburbs, Hamas number two eliminated. Retrieved from <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1362883/premiere-frappe-israelienne-dans-la-banlieue-sud-le-numero-deux-du-hamas-elimine.html>

17 Arab News. (2024, February 26). Two dead in Israeli raids on Baalbek. Retrieved from <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2466741/middle-east>

18 The National News. (2024, February 27). Baalbek strike shows Israel willing to 'step up the heat' in war with Hezbollah. Retrieved from <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/palestine-israel/2024/02/27/baalbek-strike-shows-israels-will-to-risk-wider-war-with-hezbollah/>

19 ReliefWeb. (2024, November 25). Lebanon: Flash Update #47 - Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, as of 25 September 2024. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-flash-update-47-escalation-hostilities-lebanon-25-november-2024>

20 Ibid.

21 ReliefWeb. (2024, November 14). Lebanon: Displacement Tracking Matrix: Mobility Snapshot - Round 62. Retrieved <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-displacement-tracking-matrix-mobility-snapshot-round-62-14-november-2024>

22 Ibid.

23 OCHA. (2024, November 25). Lebanon: Flash Update #47 - Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, as of 25 November 2024 Retrieved from <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/lebanon/lebanon-flash-update-47-escalation-hostilities-lebanon-25-november-2024>

On November 27, 2024, a ceasefire agreement between Hezbollah and Israel entered into force.²⁴ Despite the ceasefire, violations began almost immediately,²⁵ including carrying airstrikes and shelling incidents, property destruction, and Israeli refusal to pull back its military as stated in the agreement. Israel also imposed a return ban on the residents of 62 villages in South Lebanon.²⁶

The volatile security situation in 2024 was impacted by internal elements as well. Indeed, crime rates surged significantly, particularly around Beirut's airport road, which became a hotspot for theft, robberies, and incidents involving bikers chasing civilians. While security officials have acknowledged their limitations, they have affirmed ongoing efforts to reinforce patrols in the area.²⁷ These rising safety concerns, compounded by the absence of presidential leadership and the chronic under-resourcing of security forces, eroded public confidence in the rule of law. This situation has not only impacted individual rights and access to justice but also exposed broader institutional weaknesses.

On December 8, 2024, the Assad regime in Syria fell, generating ripple effects on Lebanon.²⁸ Approximately 2,000 people crossed to Syria after Lebanon's General Security Office opened the Masnaa border on December 9 alone.²⁹

Still, Lebanon continues to host the highest number of refugees per capita globally, due in large part to the ongoing 13-year Syrian conflict.³⁰ This has fuelled controversy surrounding the deportation of Syrian refugees and detainees amidst severe overcrowding in detention facilities. The push to expedite the return of Syrian detainees has intensified due to both overcrowding and political pressures.³¹ Lebanese officials, including the former Prime Minister and Minister of Justice, have accelerated efforts to repatriate Syrian detainees, citing overcrowding as a primary justification. However, these measures have drawn criticism, with allegations that the government is leveraging the refugee crisis to secure international aid while engaging in potentially unlawful deportations, including of political opponents and individuals at risk of torture.³²

24 Reuters. (2024, November 26). Israel, Hezbollah agree to ceasefire brokered by US and France, to take effect Wednesday. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-poised-approve-ceasefire-with-hezbollah-israeli-official-says-2024-11-26/>

25 Middle East Monitor. (2024, December 5). Israel has violated Lebanon ceasefire on 129 occasions. Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20241205-israel-has-violated-lebanon-ceasefire-on-129-occasions/>

26 Arab Center Washington DC. (2024, December 10). Israel's Violations of the Ceasefire with Hezbollah Threaten to Undo It. Retrieved from <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/israels-violations-of-the-ceasefire-with-hezbollah-threaten-to-undo-it/>

27 L'Orient Today. (2024, April 27). Should we fear the road to Beirut International Airport? Retrieved from <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1411345/faut-il-craindre-la-route-de-l-aeroport-international-de-beyrouth-.html>

28 Al-Jazeera (2024, December 8). Opposition fighters declare Syria's Damascus 'liberated', al-Assad ousted. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/8/opposition-fighters-take-syrian-capital-damascus>

29 ReliefWeb. (2024, December 9). Regional Flash Update #1: Recent Syria Escalations, 9 December 2024. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/regional-flash-update-1-recent-syria-escalations-9-december-2024>

30 LCPS. (2024, April 17). Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Crisis of Return. Retrieved from <https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/en/articles/details/4875/syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-crisis-of-return>

31 Enab Baladi. (2024, May 9). Syrian prisoners in Lebanon face deportation risk. Retrieved from <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2024/05/syrian-prisoners-in-lebanon-face-deportation-risk/>

32 Ibid.

Prison Conditions

Within Lebanon's prison system, conditions remain dire, exacerbated by the ongoing economic and political crises. Chronic overcrowding, prolonged pretrial detention, crumbling infrastructure, and an underfunded health system contribute to the suffering of detainees. Many inmates endure degrading circumstances, including inadequate hygiene, poor health services, and insufficient food supplies, raising serious concerns about their dignity and living standards.³³ Of Lebanon's 25 official detention facilities³⁴, only Roumieh and Zahle prisons were purpose-built as penal facilities. The remaining sites, initially designed and formerly used as police stations or warehouses, are often located in the basements of military barracks, within office premises and centres belonging to different branches of Internal Security Forces (ISF), or in deteriorated Ottoman-era buildings, making them unfit for humane detention.³⁵

Juvenile detention reflects similar systemic failures. Limited facilities mean minors are frequently held in police stations for an average of 34 days (with a maximum recorded duration of 90 days), and often exceeding the legally permissible 48-hour detention limit renewable only once before being transferred to Roumieh or being released.³⁶ These police stations are neither equipped nor designed to accommodate minors for extended periods of time as they lack basic infrastructure and services, exposing them to significant risks.³⁷

The Roumieh Juvenile Centre in Lebanon is one of the five main blocks of the Central Prison in Roumieh and is the only block dedicated to male juveniles. The block spans across two floors and is separated from the main complex.³⁸ Other juvenile detention facilities in the country include Dahr El Bachek.³⁹

The infrastructure of these juvenile detention facilities often lacks essential features necessary for humane and safe confinement, posing significant challenges to inmates.⁴⁰ Basic amenities like proper ventilation, sufficient natural light, and adequate heating or cooling systems are often missing, exposing minors to unsanitary and unsafe conditions.⁴¹ For example, the Dahr El Bachek juvenile detention centre suffers from poor maintenance and inadequate amenities.⁴² The economic crisis has left juvenile facilities critically under-resourced and amplified the challenges faced by these institutions to an unprecedented level.⁴³

33 Human Rights Watch. (2024, January 11). Lebanon: Rights Under Threat Amid Crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/11/lebanon-rights-under-threat-amid-crisis>

34 According to the Directorate of Prisons

35 Now Lebanon. (2024, February 16). Starving Prisons. Retrieved from <https://nowlebanon.com/starving-prisons/>

36 Interview conducted by ALEF with Restart Centre

37 Interview conducted by ALEF with Restart Centre

38 Khatib. (2022, November). BASIC NEEDS IN ROUMIEH, BEK AND TRIPOLI PRISONS LEBANON. Retrieved from https://www.ldn-lb.org/upload/Prisons%20in%20Lebanon_ARCS%20Needs%20Assessment%202022.pdf

39 CLDH. (2023). Prison and Detention Centers Monitoring Report. Retrieved from http://www.cldh-lebanon.org/HumanRightsBrie/ac568e46-9d07-43da-89a8-4f06cca51c65_Prison%20and%20Detention%20Centers%20Monitoring%20Report%202021%20-%202022.pdf

40 Ibid.

41 Now Lebanon. (2024, February 16). Starving Prisons. Retrieved from <https://nowlebanon.com/starving-prisons/>

42 CLDH. (2023). Prison and Detention Centers Monitoring Report. Retrieved from http://www.cldh-lebanon.org/HumanRightsBrie/ac568e46-9d07-43da-89a8-4f06cca51c65_Prison%20and%20Detention%20Centers%20Monitoring%20Report%202021%20-%202022.pdf

43 Now Lebanon. (2024, February 16). Starving Prisons. Retrieved from <https://nowlebanon.com/starving-prisons/>

The current situation of juveniles in detention facilities, including police stations and military posts, constitutes a violation of the law, especially when detention occurs in centres not designated for juveniles. Recently, there has been an increase in the detention of juveniles in military facilities during the armed conflict, leading to the mixing of juvenile and adult detainees.⁴⁴ This issue poses a significant risk as juveniles are more prone to fall victims of intimidation or coercion into silence by an adult, as has been reported by at least one juvenile detainee⁴⁵.

The deteriorating conditions in detention facilities have led to unrest. In June 2024, a prison dispute escalated into a mutiny, leading to a fire and the hostage-taking of a security guard.⁴⁶ Such incidents reflect the cumulative impact of malnutrition, limited healthcare access, and declining living conditions within detention facilities. As government support remains minimal, detention facilities increasingly rely on civil society organizations to provide essential infrastructure and services.⁴⁷

In September alone, Lebanon witnessed a surge in jailbreak attempts. On September 3, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) thwarted an escape from Batroun Prison⁴⁸, followed by similar failed attempts in Baalbek and Roumieh Prisons.⁴⁹ Days later, Roumieh Prison witnessed a jailbreak⁵⁰, though the escapee was arrested a week later.⁵¹ At Zahle Prison, another inmate managed to flee during a medical examination.⁵² Another 130 prisoners escaped from Jezzine Prison but were all recaptured by the ISF.⁵³ Towards the end of the month, Islamist detainees in Roumieh had entered their second week of a hunger strike, protesting poor conditions, inadequate medical care, and insufficient nutrition, which they claim have led to multiple deaths.⁵⁴ These were not isolated incidents, but rather symptoms of poor management, weak infrastructure, and neglect.

Just as the war in the South prompted many residents to flee to safer areas like Beirut, it also forced the relocation of prisoners from official prisons and detention centers in conflict-affected regions. Even before the armed conflict intensified in September, some prisons in the south, like Tyre, were already closed, while others, such as those in Nabatieh and Marjeyoun, continued to

44 According to CLDH

45 Ibid.

46 L'Orient Today. (2024, June 10). Brief mutiny at Roumieh prison, hostage policeman freed. Retrieved from <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1416820/mutinerie-a-la-prison-de-roumieh-un-policier-pris-en-otage.html>

47 Interview conducted by ALEF with Restart Centre

48 This is Lebanon. (2024, September 3). Thwarting an escape attempt from Batroun prison! Retrieved from <https://www.thisislebanon.com/lebanon/373911/>

49 This is Lebanon. (2024, September 28). Thwarting escape attempts in Baalbek and Roumieh prisons. Retrieved from <https://www.thisislebanon.com/lebanon/389895/>

50 This is Lebanon, (2024, September 8). "A rope made of sheets". This is how a prisoner escaped from Roumieh! Retrieved from <https://www.thisislebanon.com/lebanon/376371/>

51 This is Lebanon. (2024, September 17). Arrest of a prisoner who managed to escape from Roumieh prison a few weeks ago. Retrieved from <https://www.thisislebanon.com/lebanon/380246/>

52 IM Lebanon. (2024, September 17). Escaped from prison during medical examination. Retrieved from <https://www.imlebanon.org/2024/09/17/jail-7/>

53 This is Beirut. (2024, September 28). 130 Prisoners Apprehended Out of 133 Who Escaped from Jezzine Prison. Retrieved from <https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/lebanon/295704>

54 IM Lebanon. (2024, September 17). Prisoners warn: Save the situation before it explodes. Retrieved from <https://www.imlebanon.org/2024/09/17/roumieh-jail/>

operate with a reduced number of detainees.⁵⁵ Following the escalation, the Marjeyoun prison was shut down, with detainees transferred to facilities in Nabatieh and Jezzine. Additionally, the armed conflict significantly disrupted the functioning of courts in the South and Bekaa region, as the Nabatieh Court and the Baalbek Court both shut down entirely.⁵⁶ An additional sixty-seven detainees from Nabatieh were relocated to prisons in Zahle, Batroun, Roumieh, Aley⁵⁷, and Tripoli⁵⁸.

These intersecting crises, including political paralysis, escalating security threats, and deteriorating economic and institutional conditions, paint a picture of a country grappling with profound challenges. Marginalized populations, including detainees and refugees, face compromised rights and dignity, while public trust in state institutions and the rule of law continues to erode.

55 Lebanon On. (2024, August 17). The threat of war accelerates the migration of southerners... even prisoners have been displaced. Retrieved from <https://www.lebanonon.com/news/269716>

56 According to CLDH

57 NHRC. (2024, September 27). NHRC-CPT monitoring the conditions of detention centers affected by Israeli aggression and providing recommendations. Retrieved from <https://en.nhrclb.org/archives/625>

58 According to Restart Center.

Trends and Patterns Identified

Throughout 2024, Lebanon witnessed a troubling surge in violations to the rights of vulnerable populations, particularly minors. Patterns have emerged before and during times of conflict, in legal practices, educational disruptions, and broader social dynamics, revealing the compounded risks faced by children. These trends highlight the urgency for systemic reforms to address the root causes of these violations and mitigate their impact on affected populations.

Minors in Conflict with the Law

In March 2024, two Syrian minors were arrested and interrogated by the Lebanese army intelligence after being handed over by Palestinian factions. They were suspected of involvement in the assassination of Palestinian military leader, Hadi Mustafa, and were reportedly acting under the direction of a third individual who orchestrated the attack.⁵⁹ Another minor was detained by army intelligence in Taalabaya, Bekaa, on accusations of throwing a firebomb at an office of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.⁶⁰

Minors in Lebanon are frequently coerced into criminal activities, exploited by adults who manipulate their vulnerability. By the end of 2024, 93 minors of various nationalities – mainly Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian - were detained across the country. The most common offenses are robbery and the transportation of weapons and military ammunition. Alarming, only three of these minors have been brought to trial, highlighting the extensive reliance on pre-trial detention and the significant delays in judicial proceedings.⁶¹

The Union for the Protection of Children in Lebanon (UPEL) reported that, in 2024, there were at least 930 cases of violence suffered by minors and 780 crimes committed by children. Out of these offenses, 45% involved theft, 14.1% involved burglary, 7.69% involved drugs, 6.41% were public order offenses, and the remainder included kidnapping, damage property, and espionage.⁶²

59 Asharq Al-Awsat. (2024, March 23). Lebanon: Syrian Minors Arrested in Assassination Case of Key 'Qassam' Figure. Retrieved from <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/4927401-lebanon-syrian-minors-arrested-assassination-case-key-%E2%80%98qassam%E2%80%99-figure>

60 Naharnet. (2024, April 12). Army arrests minor who hurled firebomb at SSNP office in Jdita. Retrieved from <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/304537-army-arrests-minor-who-hurled-firebomb-at-ssnp-office-in-jdita>

61 According to the Directorate of Prisons

62 L'Orient Today. (2025, May 5). In Lebanon, minors are both victims and perpetrators of alarming crime. Retrieved from <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1458167/au-liban-des-mineurs-a-la-fois-victimes-et-auteurs-dune-criminalite-alarmante.html>

This reflected a notable rise in incidents involving juveniles committing theft-related offenses, particularly burglaries of homes that had been abandoned, as well as thefts from commercial shops in areas severely affected by the armed conflict.⁶³

Children in Contact with the Judicial System

Juvenile judges in Lebanon have been failing to prioritize alternatives to imprisonment for minors over deprivation of liberty, as mandated by Law 422. Instead, detention is frequently applied as a primary measure. Moreover, since most detained juveniles are of Syrian nationality and are primarily charged with illegal entry into Lebanon, it is more difficult to persuade judges to apply alternative non-custodial measures instead of detention.

Moreover, juveniles involved in criminal offenses alongside adults are often tried before regular criminal courts, which deprives them of the protections afforded under juvenile proceedings, delays case resolution, and disregards the rehabilitative purpose central to juvenile law. In fact, there has been documented instances where minors were treated as adults due to the absence of identification documents. For example, in one case, a girl was interrogated without the presence of a social worker, despite the offense having been committed while she was still a minor, thereby violating the principle of the continued application of juvenile law to individuals who were minors at the time of the offense.⁶⁴

Furthermore, sentences imposed on minors are often disproportionate to the severity of their offences. These rulings fail to account for the fact that minors involved in criminal activity are often manipulated or coerced by adults, further compounding the injustice of their treatment.⁶⁵

Sexual Violence and Exploitation

During 2024, there were several cases of paedophilia and sexual violence against minors. UPEL reported that 608 children in Lebanon fell victim to violence in 2024, with at least 270 cases of sexual violence in comparison to 305 cases in 2023.⁶⁶ This is followed by 200 cases of physical violence, 180 cases of domestic violence, 45 kidnapping cases, 45 cases of abandonment, 40 road accidents, 20 cases of marriage and exploitation, 15 suicide and/or self-harm attempts, and 45 miscellaneous crimes.⁶⁷

In June 2024, four suspects were detained in connection with an ongoing investigation into allegations of sexual abuse at a school in Kfarchima, Baabda. Arrest warrants were issued for a school guard, a sports teacher, a mathematics teacher, and the school principal. The investigation indicated that the abuse had been occurring over the course of three years and was uncovered when a victim's father discovered an explicit voice message from one of the teachers to his daughter.⁶⁸

⁶³ According to CLDH

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Interview conducted by ALEF with Restart Centre

⁶⁶ L'Orient Today. (2025, May 5). In Lebanon, minors are both victims and perpetrators of alarming crime. Retrieved from <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1458167/au-liban-des-mineurs-a-la-fois-victimes-et-auteurs-dune-criminalite-alarmante.html>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ L'Orient Today. (2024, May 24). Sexual abuse in a high school in Kfarchima, several arrests. Retrieved from <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1414963/abus-sexuels-dans-un-lycee-de-kfarchima-plusieurs-arrestations.html>

In a separate case in the Nabatiyeh district, authorities arrested four individuals for sexually assaulting two minors, aged 13 and 14. It was later revealed that the perpetrators were also minors, complicating the case further. This raises concerns regarding the perpetrators' backgrounds, including their upbringing, environment, and potential exposure to violence.⁶⁹

In July and August alone, Lebanese media outlets reported 3 additional cases of sexual assault against minors:

- In fact, in July, the ISF announced the arrest of a 48-year-old man for molesting a 13-year-old girl in South Lebanon.⁷⁰
- Authorities also arrested a man for molesting an 8-year-old child. During questioning, he confessed to inviting the child to his home under the guise of playing and then harassing him.⁷¹
- A Lebanese court sentenced a 51-year-old man to 68 years in prison for raping and abusing his three children, aged 12, 11, and 9. The court denied any mitigating factors to prevent a reduced sentence. Although the mother withdrew the complaint against the father, the court proceeded with the case, emphasizing the need to protect the children and ensure justice for the crimes committed against them.⁷²
- In August, the ISF arrested a man for sexually assaulting a minor in a Syrian refugee camp in Northern Lebanon. Concerns have repeatedly been raised about sexual violence in refugee camps resulting from harsh living conditions.⁷³

TikTok Paedophilia Ring

In April 2024, Lebanese security authorities dismantled a paedophilia ring that targeted children via TikTok and the dark web. The group coerced the victims into producing explicit photos and videos, which were then used for blackmail and exploitation.⁷⁴

By early May, eight suspects were arrested for alleged sexual assault⁷⁵ and a total of 12 individuals were charged by the Deputy Public Prosecutor. Those charged included five adults, several minors, and a woman believed to be residing abroad.⁷⁶ The charges ranged from luring, rape, and threats, to robbery, human trafficking, money laundering, and attempted murder.⁷⁷

69 Lebanon Today. (2024, June 10). They are all minors... 4 young men were arrested for sexually assaulting two minor children in the south! Retrieved from <https://en.961today.com/9948/>

70 L'Orient Today. (2024, July 10). Man arrested after confessing to sexually assaulting minor. Retrieved from <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1419907/man-arrested-after-confessing-to-sexually-assaulting-minor.html>

71 An Nahar. (2024, July 14). An 8-year-old boy was molested... and the security forces moved quickly. Retrieved from <https://www.annahar.com/arabic/section/77-مجتمع/328853-تحرش-بابن-8-السنوات-وتحرك-سريع-للقوى-الأمنية>

72 Asharq Al-Awsat. (2024, July 15). 68 years hard labor for Lebanese who raped his three children. Retrieved from <https://aawsat.com/العالم-العربي/المشرق-العربي/-/5040390-الأشغال-الشاقة-68-عاماً-للبناني-اغتصب-أطفاله-الثلاثة>

73 L'Orient Today. (2024, August 5). Man arrested for sexually assaulting a minor in a refugee camp. Retrieved from <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1422795/man-arrested-for-sexually-assaulting-a-minor-in-a-refugee-camp.html>

74 L'Orient Today. (2024, May 8). What is the 'dark web,' allegedly used by a TikTok pedophile gang arrested in Lebanon? Retrieved from <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1412910/what-is-the-dark-web-allegedly-used-by-a-tiktok-pedophile-gang-arrested-in-lebanon.html>

75 Ibid.

76 LBCi. (2024, May 9). Prosecution Intensifies Against Assault Gang: Charges and Investigations Unfold. Retrieved from <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/news-bulletin-reports/771197/prosecution-intensifies-against-assault-gang-charges-and-investigation/en>

77 Ibid.

According to the Internal Security Forces, the investigation was prompted by complaints from children who reported being sexually assaulted, photographed, and coerced into drug use in hotels. The perpetrators used TikTok and other social media accounts, including those associated with legitimate businesses—such as a hair salon and a clothing shop—to lure their victims.⁷⁸ The network included individuals from various professions, such as a lawyer, a dentist, a photographer, and a taxi driver.⁷⁹ Tragically, one minor victim of the ring died by suicide.⁸⁰

This case highlights the impact of online exploitation and emphasizes the need for enhanced protections to prevent child abuse on digital platforms.

Repatriation Risks for Syrian Refugees, Including Minors, and Increasing Restrictions

In the first quarter of 2024, ahead of the 8th Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) intensified their repatriation of Syrian refugees, including minors, to Syria, where some could be at risk of persecution. The LAF has conducted house raids in various areas of Lebanon, detaining and repatriating Syrians—many of whom are registered as refugees with UNHCR. Children under 18 were among those forcibly returned.⁸¹

In January 2024, Access Center for Human Rights published an investigative report documenting 13 testimonies of Syrians repatriated in 2023, including two minors.⁸² Municipalities across Lebanon have also implemented discriminatory measures, such as restrictive curfews targeting Syrian families and children that limit their freedom of movement.⁸³

Further restrictions have impacted access to education, with Syrian students required to hold valid residency permits to enrol in public and private schools. This policy has excluded many Syrian children from education,⁸⁴ raising significant concerns among Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and international donors regarding the legality and motives of these actions.

78 Naharnet. (2024, May 22). Minor arrested in TikTok rape case as drugged chocolate seized. Retrieved from <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/305388-minor-arrested-in-tiktok-rape-case-as-drugged-chocolate-seized>

79 L'Orient Today. (2024, June 11). Pedophilia on TikTok: a suspect raped a minor who then committed suicide, according to the ISF. Retrieved from <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1416977/pedophilie-sur-tiktok-un-suspect-a-viole-un-mineur-qui-sest-ensuite-suicide-selon-les-fsi.html>

80 Ibid.

81 Human Rights Watch. (2023, May 11). Joint Statement- Lebanon: Halt Summary Deportations of Syrian Refugees. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/11/joint-statement-lebanon-halt-summary-deportations-syrian-refugees>

82 ACHR. (2024, January). What happens after the deportation of refugees from Lebanon? Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/what-happens-after-deportation-refugees-lebanon-exposing-forced-deportations-syrian-refugees-and-their-handover-syrian-authorities-enar>

83 Ibid.

84 Levant24. (2024, June 9). LFP Targets Children in Calls for Ban on Syrian Students. Retrieved from <https://levant24.com/news/2024/06/lfp-targets-children-in-calls-for-ban-on-syrian-students/>

Effects of War on Children

Child Civilian Casualties and Displaced Children

Children were a primary victim of the armed conflict in Lebanon. Before the escalation in September 2024, at least 25 children were killed by Israeli airstrikes.⁸⁵ By the end of November 2024, the number of child casualties reached 248, with 1,436 injured children.⁸⁶ The most common injuries recorded among children included concussions and traumatic brain injuries, shrapnel wounds, and limb injuries.⁸⁷ Lebanon's only burn unit, Geitaoui Hospital, reported the admittance of eight children with third-degree burns as well.⁸⁸

The war had also displaced over 400,000 children by the beginning of October 2024, including about 40,700 of them who are housed in collective shelters across all of Lebanon.⁸⁹ INGOs were alarmed by the growing risk of scabies, cholera, and waterborne diseases, with the first cases of the former two being reported within the IDPs.⁹⁰

The School Year

The armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah disrupted the education of nearly 400,000 children, forcing them out of their school year,⁹¹ and raised serious concerns about violence, family separation, and limited access to basic services, such as education and employment. These challenges have contributed to a rise in harsh disciplinary practices and in reported cases of domestic violence against children, as some individuals resorted to violence to cope with their frustration.⁹² Indeed, the Lebanese Ministry of Education reported that the armed conflict displaced approximately 40% of the country's 1.5 million students from their homes.⁹³

85 Anadalo Agency. (2024, September 21). UNICEF head 'horrified' by killing of children in recent attacks in Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/unicef-head-horrified-by-killing-of-children-in-recent-attacks-in-lebanon-/3336965>

86 ReliefWeb. (2024, November 30). UNICEF Lebanon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 09, 23 September – 28 November 2024. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unicef-lebanon-humanitarian-situation-report-no-09-23-september-28-november-2024>

87 UNICEF. (2024, October 4). "Bloodied, bruised and broken" – more than 690 children reportedly injured in Lebanon in last six weeks. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/bloodied-bruised-and-broken-more-690-children-reportedly-injured-lebanon-last-six>

88 Arab News. (2024, October 20). Lebanon's only burn unit treats toddlers after Israeli strikes. Retrieved from <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2577446/middle-east>

89 ReliefWeb. (2024, November 30). UNICEF Lebanon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 09, 23 September – 28 November 2024. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unicef-lebanon-humanitarian-situation-report-no-09-23-september-28-november-2024>.

90 ReliefWeb. (2024, October 22). Lebanon: Over 400,000 forcibly displaced children at growing risk of scabies, cholera and waterborne diseases. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-over-400000-forcibly-displaced-children-growing-risk-scabies-cholera-and-waterborne-diseases>

91 Ibid.

92 UNOCHA. (2024, May 8). Lebanon: Flash Update #17 - Escalation of hostilities in south Lebanon, as of 2 May 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/lebanon/lebanon-flash-update-17-escalation-hostilities-south-lebanon-2-may-2024>

93 Save the Children. (2024, October 9). Education disrupted for sixth year for 1.5 million children in Lebanon, with half of public schools used as shelters. Retrieved from <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/education-disrupted-sixth-year-15-million-children-lebanon-half-public-schools-used-shelters%3A%7E%3Atext%3DZimbabwe-%2CEducation%20disrupted%20for%20sixth%20year%20for%201.5%20million%20children%20in%2Cpublic%20schools%20used%20as%20shelters>

Following the escalation, then-Caretaker Minister of Education Abbas Halabi announced the closure of public and private schools and universities across the country.⁹⁴ Caretaker Health Minister, Firas Abiad, also shut down all childcare centers across Lebanon.⁹⁵ Halabi later announced that private schools would re-open on October 7, 2024, while public schools did not do so until November 4, 2024, as some public institutions were either inaccessible or repurposed as shelters. This effectively delayed the beginning of the school year for over 41% of school students.⁹⁶ Although Halabi later announced the suspension of in-person classes in Beirut until the end of December 2024,⁹⁷ many schools resumed online, though this modality proved to be inadequate due to lack of tools, electronic devices and internet connection.⁹⁸ Even as classes resumed, many IDP children remained out of school, either due to them being trapped in the South or due to their inability to transfer to schools in their area of displacement. This increased challenges related to equipment and rehabilitation for children with special needs, support to children with learning disabilities, and dropout rates and child labor.

Child Protection in Shelters

Amid the escalating violence and consequent displacement, only a few shelters across the country were adequately equipped with showers, sanitation, and heating systems. With problems of overcrowding and constant shelling, many children faced severe psychological distress.⁹⁹ Concern for children's mental health thus increased, as many show signs of severe distress due to displacement and constant shelling.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, such trauma can lead to long-term psychological issues. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) revealed that many children who have been displaced or have experienced airstrikes have severe anxiety and are more prone to fall victims of harassment and exploitation.¹⁰¹ Additionally, UNICEF has reported that some of its team members have encountered children overwhelmed by intense fear and anxiety, including separation anxiety, fear of loss, social withdrawal, aggressive behavior, and trouble focusing. Sleep disturbances, nightmares, headaches, and loss of appetite were also common.¹⁰²

94 LBCI. (2024, September 23). Education Minister Halabi expands school closures to include Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and more. Retrieved from <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/lebanon-news/797904/education-minister-halabi-expands-school-closures-to-include-beirut-mo/en>

95 Middle East Monitor. (2024, September 24). Lebanon extends school closures; opens facilities to shelter displaced families. Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240924-lebanon-extends-school-closures-opens-facilities-to-shelter-displaced-families/>

96 Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2024). Fact Sheet on Education Emergency Response. Retrieved from <https://www.mehe.gov.lb/ar/SiteAssets/Lists/News/AllItems/MEHE%20Fact%20Sheet%20on%20Education%20Emergency%20Response-Final-ENG.pdf>

97 Arab News. (2024, November 25). War-hit Lebanon suspends in-person classes in Beirut area till end of December. Retrieved from <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2580619/middle-east>

98 L'Orient Today. (2024, November 18). It's a complicated return for public schools in war-torn Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1436038/its-a-complicated-return-for-public-schools-in-war-torn-lebanon.html>

99 Save the Children. (2024, September 26). About 140,000 children displaced by Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon, many arriving in shelters severely distressed. Retrieved from <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/about-140000-children-displaced-israeli-airstrikes-lebanon-many-arriving-shelters-severely>

100 Save the Children. (2024, September 26). About 140,000 children displaced by Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon, many arriving in shelters severely distressed. Retrieved from <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/about-140000-children-displaced-israeli-airstrikes-lebanon-many-arriving-shelters-severely>

101 IRC. (2024, November 20). Unaccompanied and separated children face severe anxiety, harassment and exploitation in Lebanon, warns the IRC. Retrieved from <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/unaccompanied-and-separated-children-face-severe-anxiety-harassment-and-exploitation>

102 UNICEF. (2024, October 31). War in Lebanon inflicting devastating physical and emotional impacts on children. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/war-lebanon-inflicting-devastating-physical-and-emotional-impacts-children>

Shelter overcrowding also created serious concern about the occurrence of GBV cases, especially when coupled with high levels of stress within the IDP population. Specifically, this environment of tensions and stress increases the risk of violence, notably materializing in child-abuse, thus raising the need for domestic protection. Indeed, occurrence of sexual abuse and gender-based violence is often one of the results of proximity. Women, girls, and boys are vulnerable to attacks and enough care should be given to ensure adequate separation from potential threats to their personal safety.

By September 30, 2024, as the escalation of the war began, more than 700 shelters, in addition to five UNRWA sites were accommodating over 52,000 internally displaced children. By mid-November 2024, there were over 1,170 shelters accommodating 188,000 IDPs, over half of them women and children, with an additional six new UNRWA sites hosting 3,500 displaced people, 45% of them children.¹⁰³ Following the ceasefire though, national authorities gradually started closing collective shelters, dropping from 1,100 shelters to around 40 shelters by the end of December 2024, as over 867,000 IDPs began returning to their homes.¹⁰⁴

103 UNICEF. (2024, November 19). Lebanon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 8. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/media/165366/file/Lebanon-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.8-19-November-2024.pdf>

104 UNICEF. (2024, December 31). Lebanon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 11 • Year-End Report. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/media/167096/file/Lebanon-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.11-31-December-2024.pdf>

Conclusion

The situation of children in Lebanon, as highlighted in this report, is emblematic of broader systemic failures within the country's political, economic, and social frameworks. Despite Lebanon's commitment to international child protection standards and the existence of national legal frameworks, such as Law 422/2002, the rights and well-being of children remain severely compromised. The escalation of security threats, political stagnation, and socio-economic crises have exacerbated vulnerabilities, leading to alarming trends, including the disproportionate detention of minors, sexual violence and exploitation of children, and the victimisation of children during war.

This multifaceted crisis underscores the urgency for a paradigm shift in addressing the situation of children. Existing legal and institutional frameworks must be reinforced, not only to protect children in conflict with the law but also to uphold their rights to education, safety, and dignity amidst Lebanon's overlapping crises. The current challenges call for a holistic, rights-based approach that prioritizes the best interests of children and integrates preventative, protective, and restorative mechanisms into national policies.

