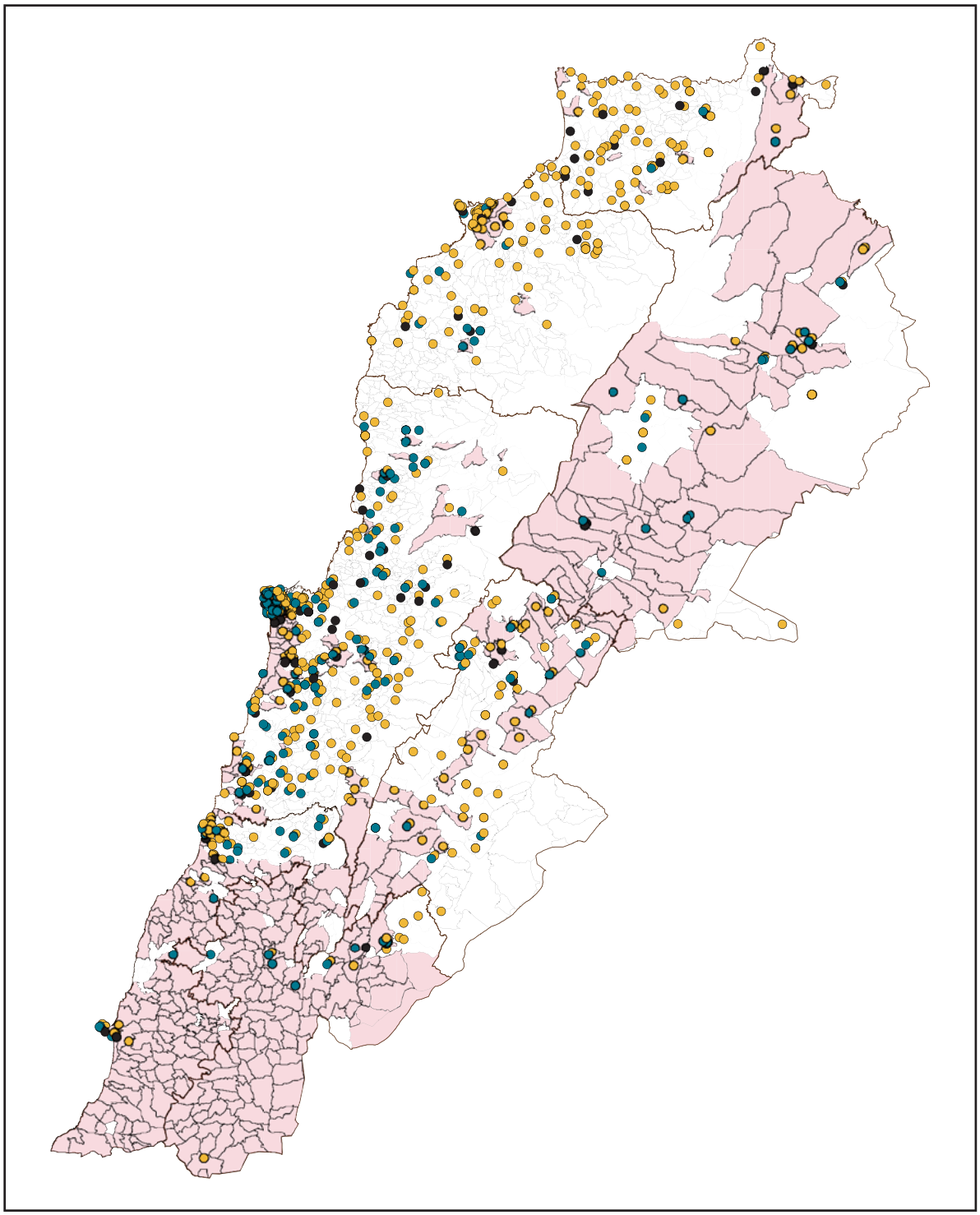
beirut urban lab

مختبر المدن بيروت



Government-Designated Shelters in Lebanon's 2024 Displacement Crisis

DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS, EMERGENCY RESPONSE, AND HYBRID GOVERNANCE

04.2026

Howayda Al-Harithy and Wiaam Haddad
Urban Recovery Team

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

1. Abstract

This report examines internal displacement in Lebanon during the 2024 war, looking at modalities of accommodation and focusing on the role and governance of government-designated shelters. During the conflict, the Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) developed a platform mapping designated shelters, their capacities, availability, and official hotlines to assist displaced people. Drawing on data from the BUL platform, IOM Mobility Snapshots, and DRM Situation Reports, the report shows that shelters functioned as temporary emergency overflow infrastructure: rapidly activated during peak displacement but closed immediately after the ceasefire.

Displacement governance operated through a hybrid model, where the state provided legal authority while local actors, religious endowments, and informal networks managed day-to-day operations and resource distribution. These dynamics are illustrated through a detailed case study of the Orthodox Charitable Association (OCA) shelter in Baskinta, Metn, highlighting its operations, management, population turnover, and aid networks. The case demonstrates how shelter governance in Lebanon emerges from negotiated arrangements among public authorities, municipalities, private property owners, political actors, and local volunteers. In the absence of state preparedness, local actors assumed responsibility for infrastructure rehabilitation and social protection through an improvised, "fix-as-you-go" operational model. Overall, the findings reveal the limits of centralized crisis governance and underscore the need for pre-emptive planning, clear management protocols, and post-closure support in future displacement responses.

2. Introduction and Background

Starting in 2023, the most recent and ongoing Israeli aggression resulted in significant damage and displacement in Lebanon. This culminated in an Israeli war on Lebanon on the 23rd of September 2024, a devastating campaign of bombing, destruction, and forced displacement lasting until the 27th of November of the same year. Internally displaced people (IDPs) were received in designated shelters, hosted by friends and relatives, or rented apartments, among other accommodation modalities.

The Beirut Urban Lab responded through multiple initiatives, including documenting and mapping strikes, facilitating grassroots aid, and reflecting on the effects of the war, emergency governance, the deliberate targeting of heritage sites, and possible paths to recovery. Responses included mapping strikes and evacuation orders in Dahieh[1], expanding critical mapping of the escalation in the South[2], and developing a platform of government-designated shelters[3].

The Beirut Urban Lab's work builds on its directors' long-term engagement with forced and protracted displacement, beginning in 2006 when they responded to the Israeli assault on Lebanon, addressing both immediate impacts and long-term implications (Al-Harithy, 2010; Fawaz et al., 2007). Starting in 2011, research teams working with the Lab directors addressed the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, focusing on accommodation modalities in villages and towns and publishing extensively on the subject (Fawaz et al., 2018; Harb et al., 2019). In 2019, Al-Harithy organized the City Debates Conference Urban Recovery: At the Intersection of Displacement and Recovery, resulting in an edited volume advancing scholarship on displacement and

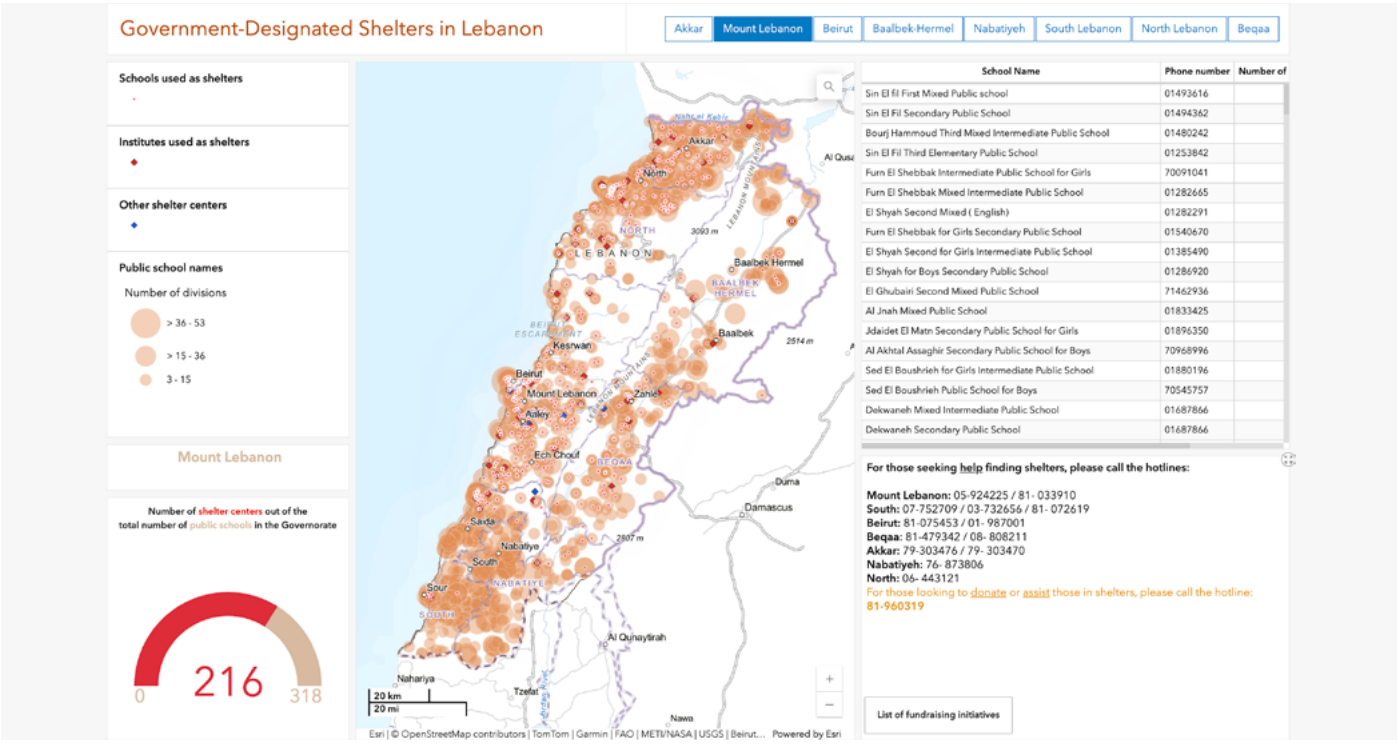


Figure 1. A Vacant Building in Beirut, Source: Beirut Urban Lab Vacancy Survey, 2023

[1] *https://beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/2017/strikes-and-vital-sites*
[2] *https://beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/1958/escalation-along-lebanon%E2%80%99s-southern-border-since-october-7*
[3] *https://beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/2005/sheltering-centers-in-public-schools-and-technical-institutes-in-lebanon*

recovery (Al-Harithy, 2022). As of 2020, the Beirut Urban Lab mobilized to respond to Lebanon's unfolding crises by using its research base and technical expertise to critically map conditions and develop recovery strategies (Beirut Urban Lab, 2022; Al-Harithy & Yassine, 2023).

In response to the Israeli escalation and war on Lebanon starting in September 2024, the Beirut Urban Lab leveraged its GIS, Esri software, and data visualization expertise, along with existing Lebanon-wide datasets, to develop a dedicated public platform mapping government-designated shelters. The open-access dashboard identified public schools and technical institutes operating as shelters, indicating their capacities and providing official government hotline numbers by governorate.

Titled Government-Designated Shelters in Lebanon: Sheltering Centers in Public Schools and Technical Institutes, the platform made public the locations, capacity, and contact information of education facilities designated by the Ministerial Emergency Committee as collective shelters. It aimed to help displaced families find shelter and to support coordination by enabling organizations and donors to identify areas of need. Beyond the immediate response, the platform provides a basis for tracking displacement patterns, shelter turnover, and the geographic distribution of displaced populations, which informs the analysis in this report.

3. Methods and Sources of Data

The report analyzes displacement patterns in Lebanon from October 2023 to October 2025, with particular attention to government-designated shelters active during the war from September 23 to November 27, 2024. "Designated shelters" in this report refer to government-designated collective shelters activated at the onset of the war. A small number of collective shelters operated prior to the war without government designation.

To contextualize shelters within broader displacement trends, the analysis draws on multiple sources. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) issued 88 public Mobility Snapshots from October 15, 2023, to October 3, 2025. These snapshots monitored population movements to support preparedness and response. This data was triangulated with 51 publicly available Situation Reports from the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Operations Room, technically supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), covering September 13 to December 6, 2024. It was also combined with Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) platform data. This allowed for the examination of displacement patterns, shelter utilization, and the geographic distribution of affected populations.

Data Sources

1.Government-Scale Displacement Data
The IOM dataset provides an overview of displacement patterns across Lebanon at the governorate level. It includes accommodation modalities (designated shelters, rented housing, living with relatives, or homelessness), displacement spatial tracking (governorates of origin and destination), and total numbers of IDPs at the time of reporting.

2.Designated Shelter Data (Multi-Date Records)
This dataset forms the basis of the Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) platform and includes geolocated records of all government-designated shelters, primarily public schools, collected on multiple dates during the war. The data were sourced from the Government Emergency Committee and supplemented with publically available school location and capacity records from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD). The data include the number of displaced persons per shelter, shelter capacity, and limited information on aid received. DRM situation reports supplement the dataset with shelter distribution by governorate, and finer time tracking of the number of total number IDPs, number of designated shelters and their operational status.

3.Case Study Shelter Data (In-Depth Shelter-Level Data)
Field research, shelter records, and interviews with the designated shelter manager (Mr. Haddad) produced detailed data on a single designated shelter in Baskinta. This dataset includes shelter operations, aid delivery, population inflows and outflows, demographics, and governance relationships with national and local actors.

4. Framework

This report is positioned at the intersection of displacement and governance, examining how responses to displacement emerge under conditions of war, institutional constraints, and hybrid governance. Lebanon has experienced multiple waves of displacement throughout its recent history; however, the persistent absence of comprehensive governance frameworks and resource constraints repeatedly shifted responsibility for displacement response onto international and local non-governmental organizations, host communities, municipalities, religious institutions, and local political actors.

Scholars define internal displacement as the involuntary movement of individuals or groups within national borders as a result of armed conflict, generalized violence, disasters, or human rights violations. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement define internally displaced persons (IDPs) as:

"Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence… and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border."

While this definition establishes the legal and conceptual boundaries of internal displacement, it does not fully capture how displacement is governed in practice. To understand the dynamics of shelter management during the 2024 war, this report moves beyond humanitarian assessments of capacity and service provision to examine geographies of displacement and how governance is enacted on the ground. This report adopts a spatial lens to examine these patterns, including shelter locations and the role of security in influencing the movement of displaced populations.

Lebanon's displacement governance and decision-making frameworks have not shifted in any meaningful way since the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war. the 2024 conflict surpasses 2006 in scale, duration, and destruction, it mimics displacement patterns, accommodation modalities, and governance structures and limitations observed in 2024 (Khawaja et al. 2011; Carpi 2023).

Lebanon operates under a hybrid governance system, in which sovereignty and authority are negotiated among government institutions and other actors (Fregonese, 2012; Hazbun, 2016). In crisis contexts, the government often provides legal designation and symbolic authority, while non-governmental actors supply operational capacity, infrastructure, and social mediation. Government-designated shelters exemplify this arrangement: formally embedded within national emergency frameworks yet functionally dependent on other actors.

Different modalities of accommodation include staying in private host homes, renting, residing in designated shelters, or moving to secondary residences. Access to these options is uneven and reflects disparities in income, social capital, and political connections. Moreover, these arrangements place pressures on host communities, including strains on infrastructure and services, as well as social tensions.

Crisis response in Lebanon is further characterized by bricolage, understood as improvised, "fix-as-you-go" practices that substitute for systematic preparedness and planning (Fawaz, 2007; 2009; Carpi, 2017). Shelters are activated rapidly through the repurposing of existing assets, most notably public schools. These designated shelters function primarily as emergency overflow infrastructure, absorbing displaced populations when other modalities of accommodation are exhausted.

By situating designated shelters within broader displacement patterns and governance structures, this report conceptualizes designated shelters not merely as humanitarian spaces but as contested sites where displacement, hosting, education, security, and political authority intersect. This framework allows the analysis to foreground the limitations inherent in displacement accommodation responses, between centralization and local action, legality and informality, emergency response and long-term recovery.

5. Analysis of Patterns of Displacement and Displacement Governance Nationally, with a Focus on Designated Shelters

This section analyzes patterns of internal displacement and modalities of accommodation in Lebanon between October 2023 and October 2025, with a particular focus on the period of full-scale war from September 23 to November 27, 2024. The analysis demonstrates that designated shelters functioned primarily as emergency overflow infrastructure activated during active hostilities. Their rapid expansion, near-immediate saturation, and rapid deactivation following the ceasefire reveal both the limits of state preparedness and the central operational role of local actors in absorbing displacement.

Displacement Figures

Before the escalation of September 23, 2024, earlier hostilities that began on October 8, 2023, had already displaced approximately 120,000 people, mainly from villages along Lebanon's southern border. A rapid increase in IDPs occurred after September 23, 2024, when Israel launched a large-scale aerial bombardment campaign of more than 1,600 airstrikes. This triggered mass displacement from the governorates of South Lebanon and Nabatieh, and later from Baalbek-Hermel and the southern suburbs of Beirut. During the war, displacement was nationwide, affecting all 26 Cazas and all eight governorates, with IDPs seeking refuge in 918 municipalities out of 1,065 in Lebanon.

As of November 24, 2024, three days before the ceasefire, Lebanon had recorded 899,725 IDPs. This figure had stabilized above 800,000 after October 21, approximately one month after the beginning of the war. Many of those displaced during the war returned within one month of the ceasefire; however, severe destruction and continued Israeli aggression, especially in border villages, left a significant share unable to return to their homes.

Modalities of Accommodating IDPs

IDPs resorted to different accommodation strategies. The three main modalities of accommodating IDPs were hosting in private homes, renting, and collective shelter. Differences in accommodation arrangements reflect disparities in displaced individuals' income and social networks, further complicating the equitable distribution of aid and resources. The timeline of displacement can be divided into three periods:

1. Pre-War Phase (October 8, 2023–September 22, 2024) Dominance of Host Homes

Before the full-scale war began, displacement was characterized by social solidarity expressed through accommodation through private hosting rather than collective sheltering or renting. This period reflects the border hostilities phase, during which the displacement volume rose from around 30,000 in late October 2023 to 111,000 in September 2024.

Throughout the first nine months of 2024, approximately 80% of IDPs were residing in private host households (living with family, friends, or in borrowed spaces provided at no cost). Collective shelters housed only 1-2% of the displaced population and preceded government intervention and designation, while renting accounted for roughly 15-20%.

2.War Phase (September 23, 2024–November 27, 2024): Surge in Shelter Accommodation

The use of collective shelters became prominent during the period of full-scale war. The shelter system

functioned as an emergency "overflow" mechanism once host communities were overwhelmed.

Within three days of the war's onset, shelter usage surged from 1% to 32%. By September 30, as the total number of IDPs tripled, shelter occupancy peaked at 42% during the first month of the war. Total displacement peaked at nearly 900,000 in November, with close to a quarter of a million people forced into designated shelters during active warfare.

At the end of the war, the dominant accommodating modality was host homes settings, accounting for 48% of IDPs. Renting was the second most common arrangement at 29%. Designated shelters housed 21% of IDPs, distributed across 1,015 designated shelters. The remaining small percentages were accounted for by secondary houses, which include highly vulnerable settings such as tents, parks, and self-settled sites.

3.Post-Ceasefire Phase (November 28, 2024–October 2025): Long-Term Renting

Following the ceasefire on November 27, 2024, the displacement landscape shifted to renting. While designated shelters closed, renting emerged as the persistent modality for those unable to return. In the week following the ceasefire, the percentage of IDPs in designated shelters plummeted from 21% to 4%. While the total number of IDPs dropped significantly, the share of IDPs renting surged from 29% in November to 56% in December, eventually climbing to 85% by October 2025.

High rental rates among this group suggest that these were families whose primary homes were destroyed or remained in zones facing continued security threats. Unlike the pre-war phase, during which host homes served as the primary buffer, the long-term displaced population became reliant on the private rental market.

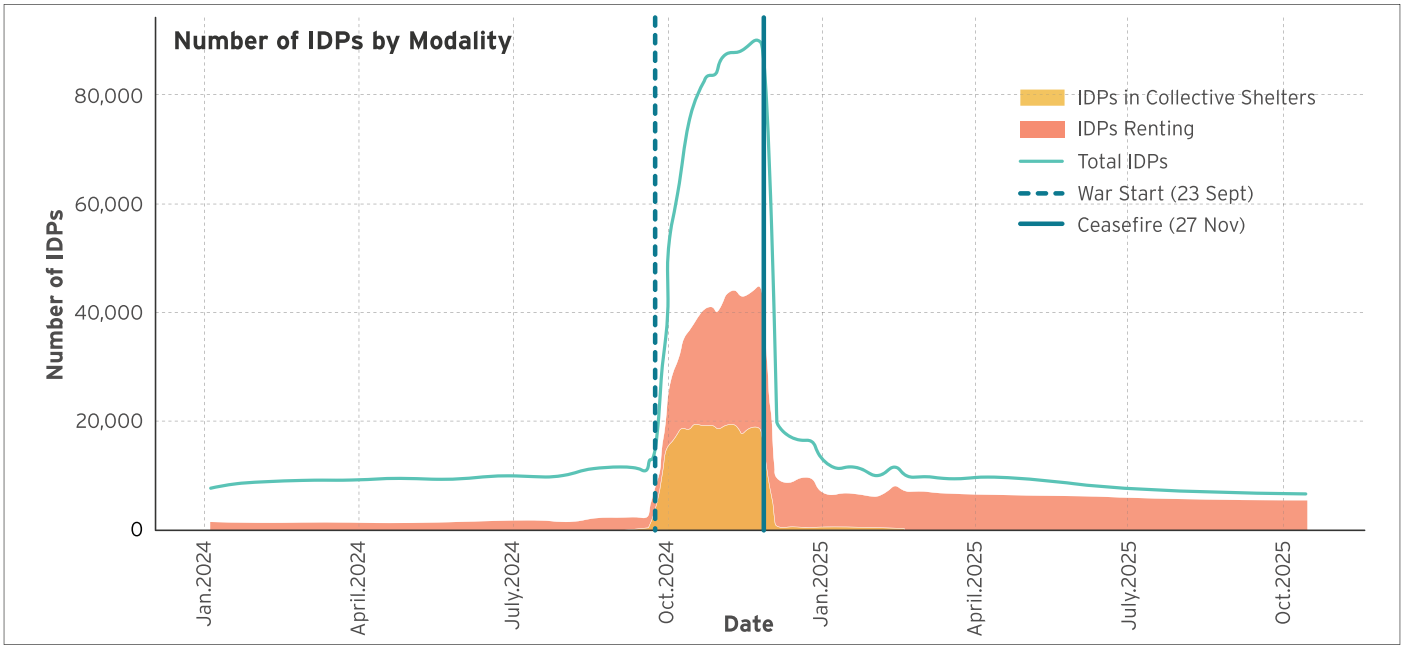


Figure 2. Number of IDPs in Lebanon (based on IOM Mobility Snapshots)

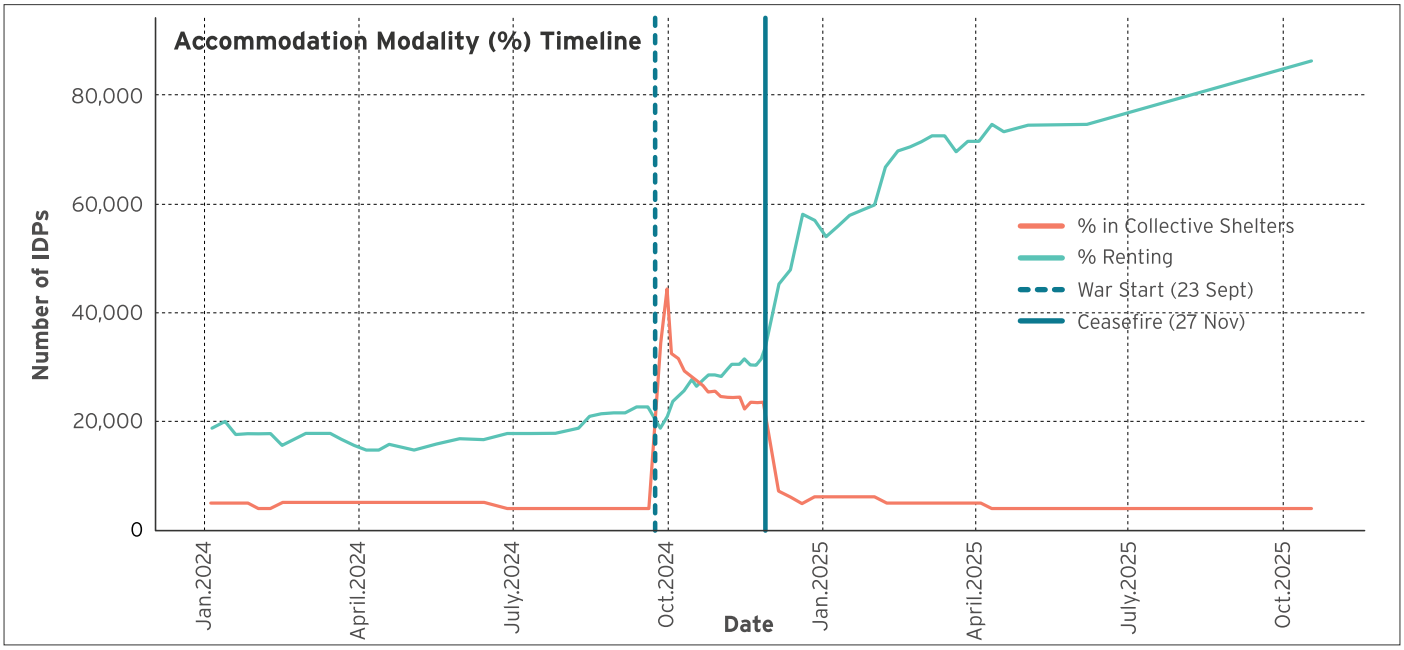


Figure 3. Percentage of IDPs renting and residing in shelters in Lebanon (based on IOM Mobility Snapshots)

Geographic Patterns and Affected Areas

Displacement during the war was marked by extensive cross-governorate movement: 77% of IDPs relocated outside their governorate of origin. The largest shares of departures originated from the South and El Nabatieh governorates, particularly from the Cazas of Sour (21%), El Nabatieh (17%), and Bint Jbeil (12%), which were most affected by Israeli bombardment. Conversely, the influx of IDPs was highly concentrated in certain Cazas: 62% of the displaced population sought refuge in just five Cazas: Chouf (18%), Beirut (15%), Aley (13%), Saida (8%), and Akkar (8%).

Accommodation modalities varied by region. Renting was the dominant arrangement in Mount Lebanon, the North, and El Nabatieh, whereas hosting by families and communities was more common in the Bekaa, Baalbek–El Hermel, Beirut, the South, and Akkar. Importantly, designated shelters played a major role in key receiving governorates, absorbing a substantial share of IDPs in Beirut (39%), the Bekaa (26%), and Baalbek–El Hermel (23%).

A more detailed breakdown illustrates the scale of cross-governorate movement. The geographic distribution of IDPs reflects movement toward perceived safe areas such as Mount Lebanon and Beirut. Although 41% of all IDPs originated from El Nabatieh, 99% of them fled to locations outside the governorate. In the South governorate, which accounted for 28% of IDPs' origin, 80% moved outside its boundaries. By contrast, in Mount Lebanon, which was the origin of 12% of IDPs, 78% remained within the governorate, primarily relocating out of the southern suburbs of Beirut.

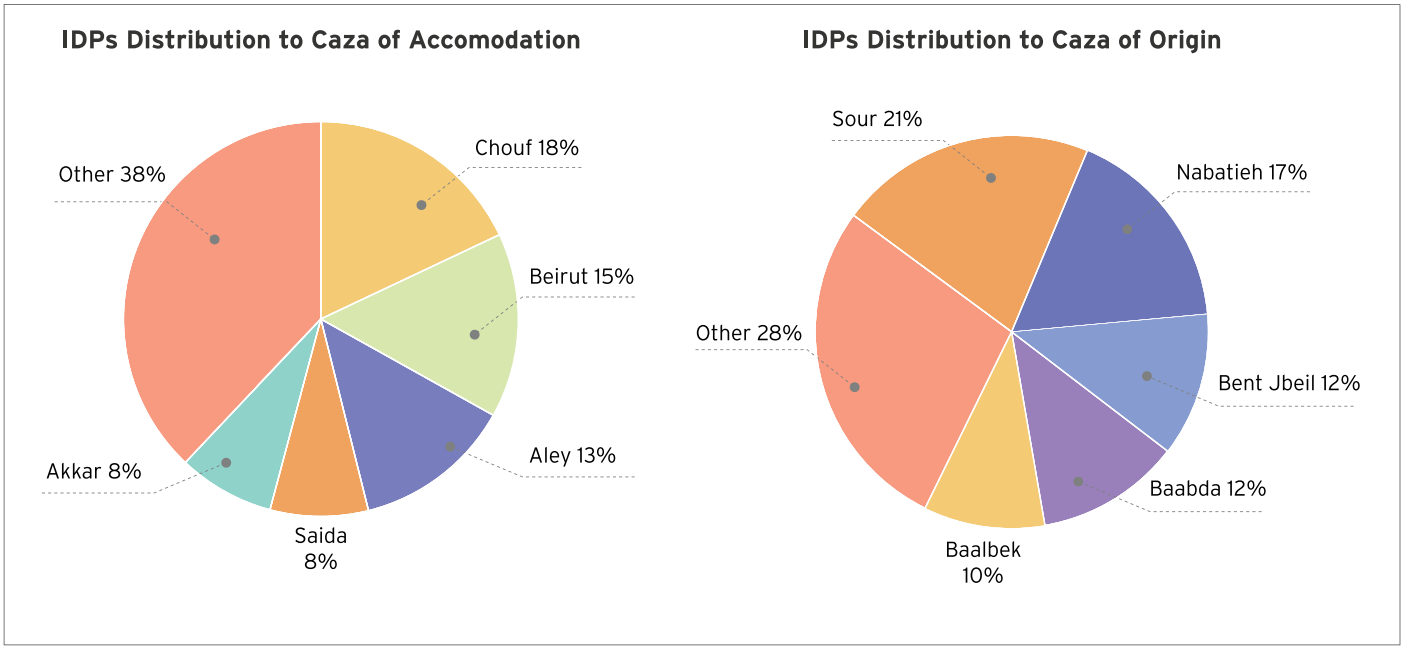


Figure 4. Caza of origin and destination of IDPs in Lebanon (based on IOM Snapshot 65, November 25)

Shelters

The rapid escalation of hostilities in late September 2024 exposed the absence of a pre-established sheltering strategy in Lebanon other than a reliance on the use of public assets, most notably public schools, to serve as collective shelters. Rather than reflecting a planned policy choice, the shelter system emerged as a reactive response to the sudden collapse of host-community capacity under mass displacement conditions.

On October 8, the network of designated shelters included 913 operating facilities. A breakdown of this capacity reveals the central role of the state in the response: 626 (68.6%) of these shelters were public establishments.

When considering shelter types on the same date, schools, both public and private, constituted the overwhelming majority, totaling 622 shelters (68.1%). The tertiary education sector also contributed significantly, with technical institutes (83, 9.1%) and universities (21, 2.3%) being repurposed. Non-educational structures represented a smaller yet significant portion of capacity (165 shelters, 18.1%), primarily religious endowments or municipal buildings.

In the first week alone, the number of shelters more than doubled, and the designated shelter system reached near-total saturation almost immediately. Social composition within these crowded shelters was characterized by family units rather than isolated individual with the average family size averaging 4.29 persons. For the duration of the conflict, the majority of these shelters remained at full capacity, operating at a critical threshold to accommodate surging displacement.

The large-scale repurposing of public schools as shelters coincided with the start of the academic year, creating a direct conflict between emergency sheltering and educational continuity . Because public schools disproportionately serve lower-income populations, their closure had uneven social consequences, placing the humanitarian need to sheltering in direct tension

[4] *By October 12, approximately 60% of public schools were operating as shelters. In response, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education issued a decision on November 1 extending student registration deadlines.*

with the right to education. Some municipality-level adaptations, such as online instruction or the use of private school facilities for public school afternoon shifts, emerged only by November.

The ceasefire announcement on November 27 precipitated an immediate contraction of the shelter system. Within 48 hours, the total number of IDPs in designated shelters dropped from approximately 188,000 to 33,600, a departure of more than 80% of the shelter population. This mass departure was mirrored by the rapid closure of facilities: operating shelters fell from a wartime peak of more than 1,000 to just 117 by December 9. This sharp decline confirms that, for the vast majority of displaced families, designated shelters were a measure of absolute necessity, prompting rapid return to places of origin despite potential damage to homes.

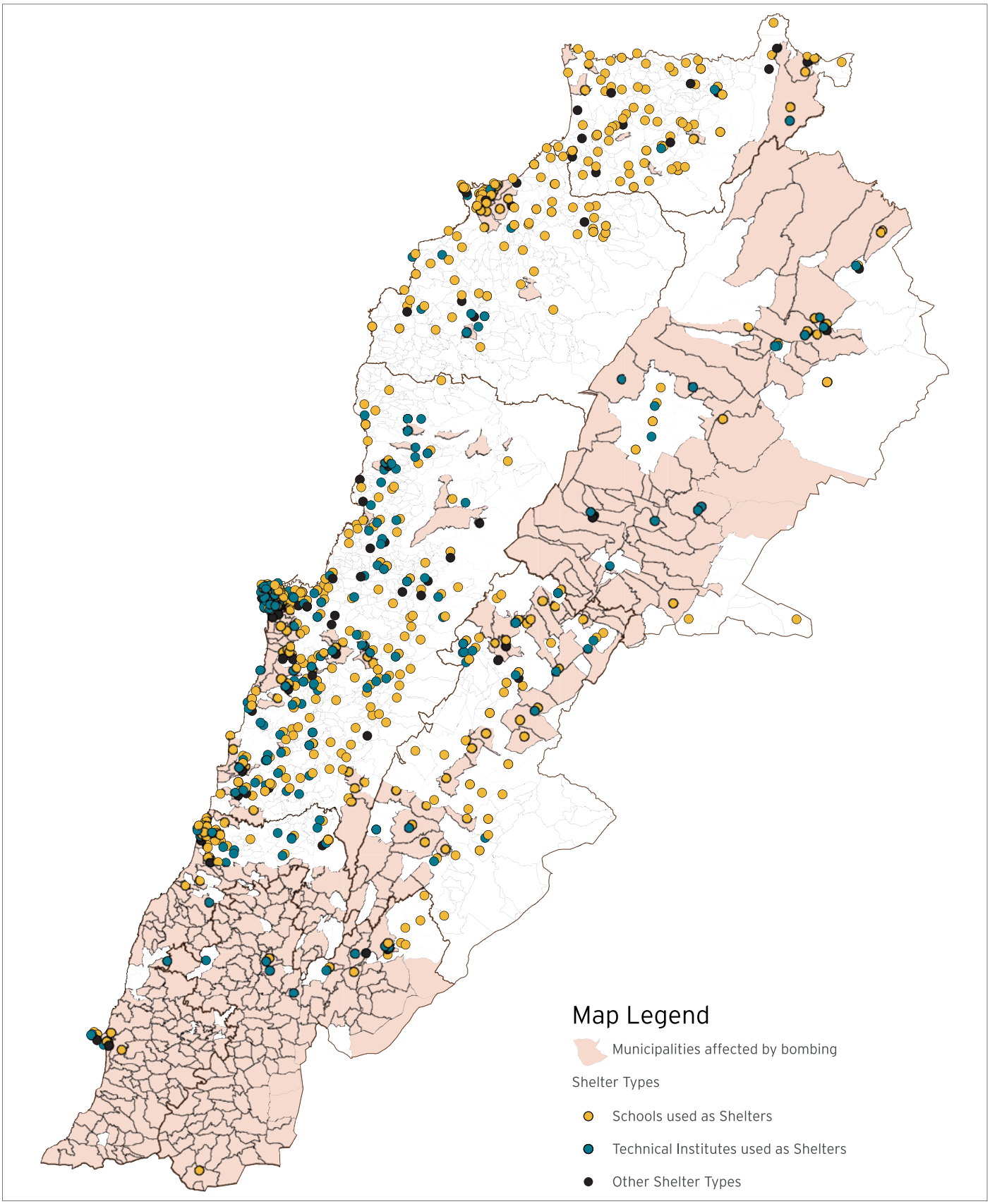


Figure 5. Municipalities affected by bombing during the war (Public Works) overlaid with shelter distribution (DRM dataset, mid-October, published on the Urban Lab platform)

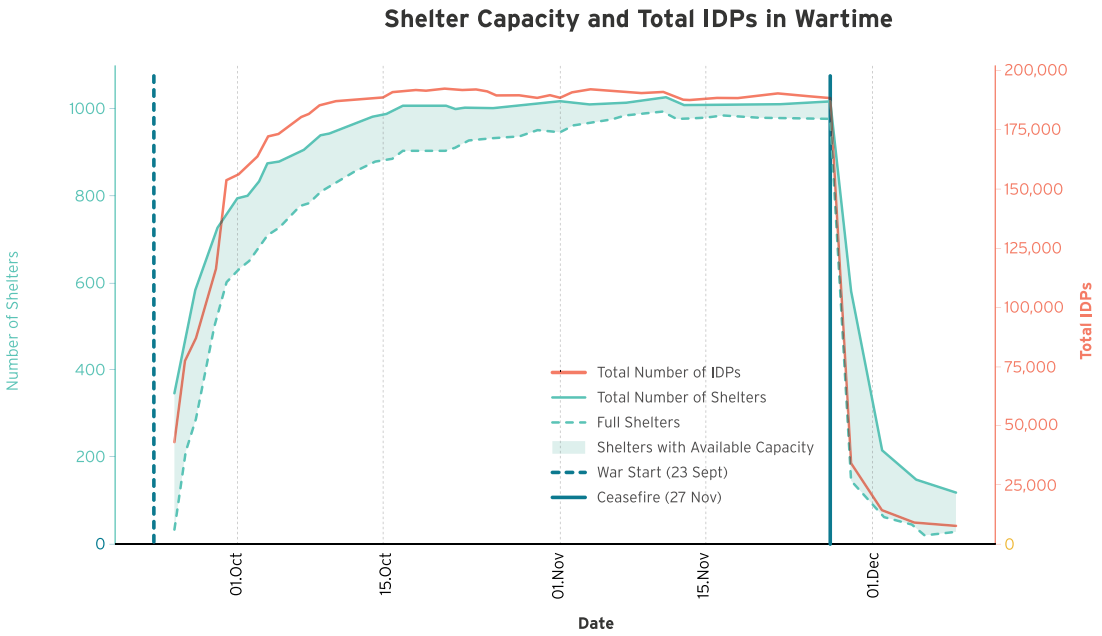


Figure 6. Designated shelters in Lebanon during the war: total number of IDPs in shelters, number of open shelters, and number of full shelters (based on DRM reports)

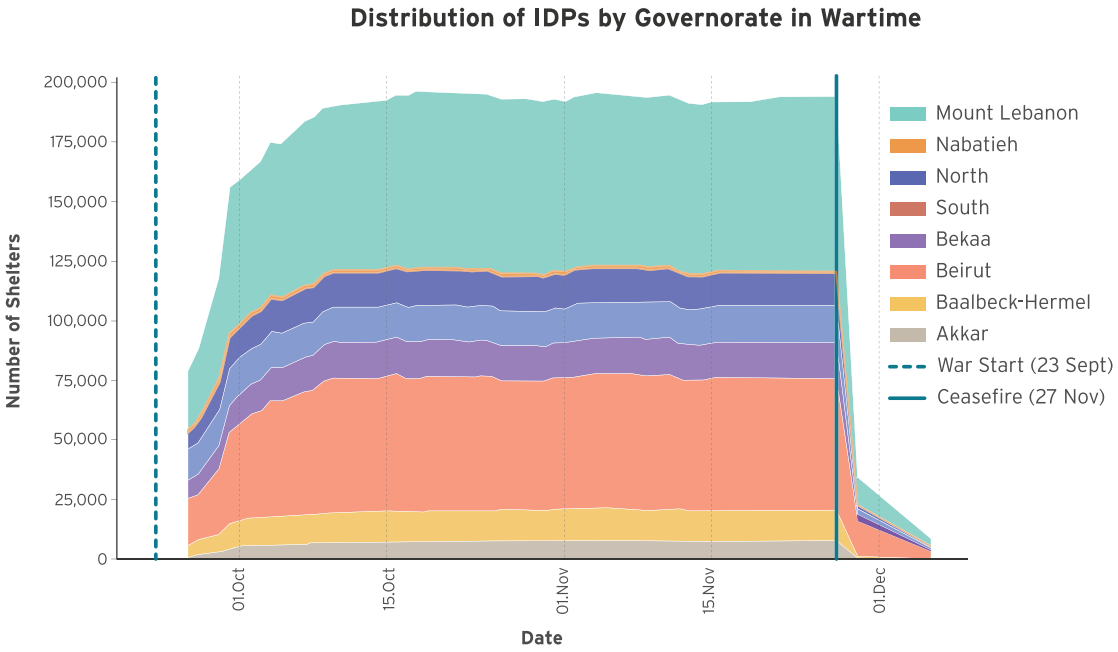


Figure 7. Distribution of IDPs by governorate location of designated shelters throughout the war (based on DRM reports)

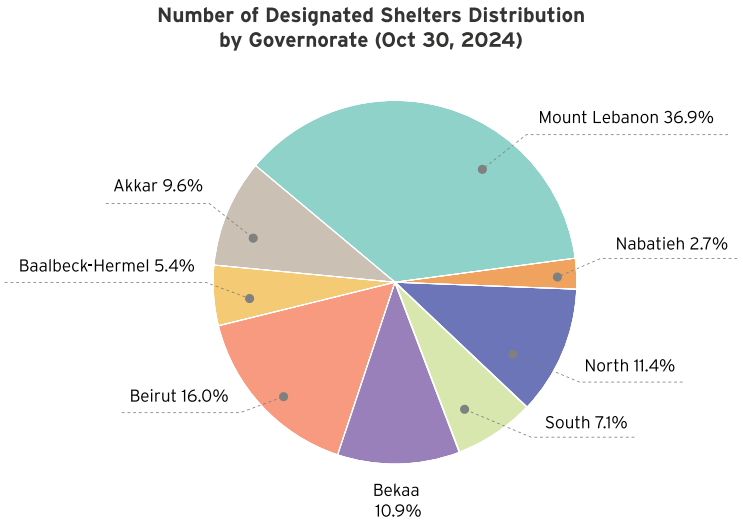


Figure 8. Distribution of number of designated shelters per governorate mid-war (based on DRM reports)

Management and Operations of Designated Shelters

The operation of government-designated shelters is embedded within Lebanon's national crisis management framework, which is characterized by centralized decision-making and reliance on international and local public and private actors for resources and implementation at multiple scales.

The highest authority for crisis management is the Disaster Risk Management Unit (DRM) which operates under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and is fully funded by UNDP. The DRM prepares national disaster risk reduction strategies, develops and updates emergency plans, strengthens early warning systems, manages disaster data, coordinates risk assessments, operate the National Operations Room, and promotes local awareness through capacity-building. During the escalation and war, two other bodies were activated: the Ministerial Emergency Committee[5] and the National Committee for the Coordination of Disaster and Crisis Response which was responsible for designating shelters. At the subnational level, Governorate Operations Rooms were activated to ensure regional implementation and local coordination.

The government's primary shelter management decision centered on the immediate, large-scale repurposing of public educational institutions. Within designated shelters, school principals typically became the primary de facto authorities responsible for managing facilities while they functioned as shelters. On September 25, the National Operations Room was activated, and the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities coordinated with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to designate 347 public institutions (schools and vocational institutes) as initial shelters. This number rapidly increased to 565 by September 26 and expanded further with the addition of approximately 120 new schools by September 29.

On September 26, the Minister of Interior and Municipalities instructed governors to establish sub-security councils to maintain security around shelters, suppress violations, and protect private property. This directive was reinforced on October 21, with orders to intensify patrols and prevent armed presence near displacement areas. Security agencies, particularly the Internal Security Forces, were assigned broad managerial roles beyond security, including assisting displaced populations, distributing basic aid (food and fuel), controlling prices, and preventing monopolies. Managing the IDP crisis required continuous, multi-sectoral coordination among government agencies and international partners. The Ministry of Public Health played a direct role in shelter support, linking 763 shelters to health facilities. The Ministry of Social Affairs led financial assistance efforts, announcing fund transfers in late September and reporting cumulative aid reaching $21.5 million by October 30.

Level / Attribute	Body	Arabic Title	Role	Embedded & External Support
Presidency of the Council of Ministers' (PM) Office/Central - National	DRM Unit (Disaster Risk Management Unit)	وحدة إدارة مخاطر الكوارث	Technical body responsible for disaster risk reduction, preparedness, planning, coordination, data management, and supporting national response mechanisms.	Established in 2010 under the PM. Technically and financially supported by UNDP. Partners with the National Council for Scientific Research Lebanon (CNRS) and relevant ministries.
	National Operations Room	غرفة العمليات الوطنية	Central operational command center; manages real-time coordination, reporting, communication between national, subnational levels, and international donors.	Operated by the DRM Unit; connects with governorate operations rooms and line ministries.
	National Committee for the Coordination of Disaster and Crisis Response	اللجنة الوطنية لتنسيق مواجهة والكوارث والأزمات	National inter-ministerial coordination body responsible for aligning ministries and agencies during crises; sets response priorities and ensures sectoral coordination. Includes representatives for 46 governmental agencies (e.g., shelter designation, aid oversight).	Activated by Council of Ministers decision (e.g., Decision 43/2023 during last escalation). Operates under the authority of the PM; supported technically by the DRM Unit.
	Ministerial Emergency Committee[6]	لجنة الطوارئ الوزارية	High-level political committee formed during major crises to oversee emergency response, relief planning, and policy decisions.	Activated during escalation and war, formed by decision of the PM. Coordinates with the National Committee and DRM Unit for implementation.
	Higher Relief Council (HRC)	الهيئة العليا للإغاثة	Government body responsible for relief funding, compensation mechanisms, reconstruction payments, and emergency assistance distribution.	Formed in 1976. Operates under PM authority; funded through the state budget and external donor contributions. Coordinates with ministries and security agencies.
Ministerial	Ministry Operations Rooms	غرف العمليات في الوزارات	Sector-specific crisis management (Military/security, health, education, social affairs, public works, etc.); implement response within their mandates.	Operate under respective ministries; coordinate with the National Operations Room and DRM Unit.
Subnational	Governorate Operations Rooms (8)	غرف عمليات المحافظات	Implement decisions regionally and reports back data to National Operations Room; coordinate municipalities, security forces, and service and aid delivery at governorate level.	Supported technically by the DRM Unit and linked to the National Operations Room.
	Caza Operations Rooms (Qaimaqam office)	غرف عمليات الأقضية (مكتب القائمقام)	Operations rooms at the level of Cazas, one level below Governorates. Report back to Governorate Rooms.	Supported technically by the Red Cross, and linked to the Governorate Operations Rooms.
	Council for the South	مجلس الجنوب	Manages reconstruction, compensation, and development projects in southern Lebanon, especially after conflict.	Public institution funded by the Lebanese state; works with HRC and line ministries.
Partners & Agencies	Civil Defense	الدفاع المدني اللبناني	Emergency rescue, fire response, and disaster intervention.	Operates under Ministry of Interior; coordinates with operations rooms.
	Lebanese Red Cross	الصليب الأحمر اللبناني	Emergency medical response, ambulance services, humanitarian relief. Helped running Caza Operations Rooms.	Independent humanitarian organization; coordinates with government structures.
	UN Agencies, NGOs, Embassies	وكالات الأمم المتحدة والمنظمات غير الحكومية والسفارات	technical support, funding, shelter assistance, and protection services.	External support actors; coordinate through DRM Unit, National Operations Room, and relevant ministries.

[5] *Environment Minister Nasser Yassin served as Coordinator of the Ministerial Emergency Committee and as the committee's spokesperson in media outlets*

[6] *Also referred to in the media as the Governmental Emergency Committee* (لجنة الطوارئ الحكومية).

However, national-scale efforts were often slow and insufficiently prepared. Overlapping mandates across institutions limited their role largely to legal authorization, security oversight, coordination, and the facilitation of external aid delivery.

Moreover, national-scale data and governance structures analyzed in this section do not capture the full complexity of shelter operations on the ground. The following case study reveals intricate local dynamics, including partnerships and informal networks operating independently of government structures, and highlights the fluid and dynamic nature of IDPs, whose numbers and locations shifted continuously throughout the war. This complexity underscores the importance of localized analysis to fully understand designated shelters' dynamics and management during the war.

6. Case Study: The "OCA" Designated Shelter in Baskinta

This case study focuses on a government-designated shelter in Baskinta, Metn, Mount Lebanon. The Lab had access to detailed data on the building's history, ownership, and the shelter's demographics, records, and operational management. The team was able to conduct fieldwork during the war and follow-up interviews afterward. The case was therefore selected to illustrate shelter dynamics and its position within national crisis governance. Although this designated shelter is not a school, its dynamics closely mirror those of the public school in Baskinta, which also served as a designated shelter.

Shelter Context and History

Baskinta, a predominantly Christian town, sits at an altitude of 1,200 meters above sea level, a geography that brings relatively cold winters. The designated shelter occupies a four-story building originally constructed in 2003 that used to serve as a public high school. It features three floors of classrooms and administration offices, with a library on the fourth floor. The building is owned by the Orthodox Charitable Association (OCA). The building was rented by the Municipality of Baskinta for use by the Ministry of Education until 2011, when a new educational complex was completed.

Figure 9. Aerial photo showing the OCA designated shelter building and plot (annotated from Google Earth).

Following the high school's relocation in 2011, the building remained unused until it was reactivated as a shelter during the war in late September 2024.

During the 2006 war, while the building still functioned as a high school, it was also opened as a collective shelter. Typically, the school principal becomes the de facto manager of the site when it is converted into a displacement center. Mr. Haddad, who volunteered to be the shelter manager in 2024, was the principal of the public high school in 2006.

Figure 10. OCA designated shelter building in Baskinta (own photo)

Mobilization and Governance

Despite the building being vacant, the National Committee for the Coordination of Disaster and Crisis Response designated it as a shelter center in 2024. The Municipality of Baskinta formed a crisis committee representing various local political parties to manage the town's two designated shelters (the new public school and the OCA building), as well as the needs of IDPs in rented or freely hosted accommodations.

The opening of the OCA building followed an informal approval process. The OCA did not convene a general assembly to authorize the use of the property. Instead, Mr. Haddad - now retired and serving as the OCA's vice president - secured an agreement with OCA cabinet members whereby he personally volunteered to manage the center.

Mr. Haddad was supported by Mr. Abou Haidar, a physical education teacher and year-round resident of Baskinta, along with several local volunteers. All tasks, including opening and cleaning the building, receiving donations, and managing arrivals, were carried out by Mr. Haddad or, in his absence, by Mr. Abou Haidar. The center operated an independent treasury jointly managed by the two and received both cash and in-kind donations. Mr. Haddad coordinated closely with the

municipal crisis committee and military intelligence, reported numbers and needs to the Metn Qaimaqam's office, and maintained a detailed log of each displaced person's profile, family composition, needs, place of origin, profession, medical condition, and length of stay.

Displaced families were assigned to classrooms and the administration room on September 27. Families and relatives were organized and placed together in the same rooms. Some displaced persons also assisted with management, particularly during nighttime hours. Each room had a representative who reported directly to shelter management. The center's management operated from the second floor, in what had been the supervisor's office, which was repurposed for storage and aid sorting.

Because the building had been vacant for over a decade, significant effort was required to make it habitable. The rooms were completely unfurnished. Displaced families slept on mattresses and blankets provided by UNHCR, while private individuals donated clothing. The team coordinated with private actors and political parties to rehabilitate the building, including repairing plumbing, securing domestic and drinking water, installing showers, providing a private generator for electricity, and eventually installing solar panels. Domestic water was sourced from the public network and supplemented by the Civil Defense during shortages.

Figure 11. OCA designated shelter corridor and typical room (own photos)

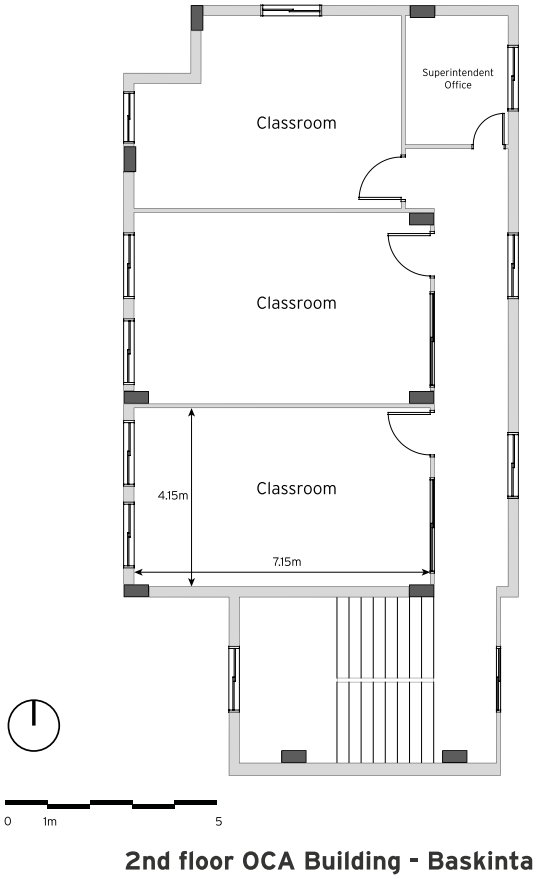


Figure 12. Typical plan of designated OCA building (OCA archives)

Aid Network and Operations

The shelter operated within a dense and improvised web of local, national, and political aid networks. Aid coordination followed multiple channels. Mr. Haddad regularly submitted reports to the Metn Qaimaqam's office, where operations were coordinated by the Lebanese Red Cross. Through this channel, the shelter received medication, hygiene supplies, and other basic necessities from donations of local and national NGOs.

A wide range of services - including food, cooking equipment, medical visits, medication, hospitalization, and cash donations - was coordinated through a patchwork of actors. Aid distribution involved collaboration between the shelter, the municipality's crisis room, Red Cross volunteers from the Qaimaqam's office, and numerous private individuals who contributed financially. In-kind support was also provided by national and local NGOs such as the 'Amel Foundation, the Makhzoumi Foundation, and the League Culturelle Sportive de Baskinta.

Food provision was multilayered. Caritas distributed the main daily meal, cooked in a central volunteer kitchen at the Metn Caza level and distributed to designated shelter within the Caza. Occasionally, private restaurants prepared meals and distributed them at the caza level. The second shelter in the town (the public school) had a cook among the displaced who prepared additional meals that were shared across shelters. No major meals were cooked on-site at the OCA building, though smaller meals were occasionally donated or prepared in the school center's kitchen. Fresh fruit was donated by local farmers, while political parties supplied essential staples such as bread and gas cylinders.

During the critical first days - before official aid streams were established - individuals provided essential "start-up" items such as toilet paper, cutlery, clothing, foodstuffs, and small gas stoves, enabling the shelter to function. Cash assistance was more uneven. Some families had more disposable income than others, and a few displaced persons attempted to secure temporary work. Early in the crisis, NGOs affiliated with Grand Ayatollah Sistani distributed USD 100 per family, while additional cash contributions came from other Shi'a charitable networks.

Local doctors, including dental clinics, provided free consultations either in their clinics or through visits to the center. The Islamic Health Society also visited the shelter. In one instance, a displaced woman went into labor and was transferred to Karantina Public Hospital with the help of the Red Cross, where she safely delivered.

Demographics

The Baskinta OCA shelter hosted up to 88 people at its peak, though the population fluctuated throughout the war as some families left and others arrived. When the center first opened, the majority of IDPs came from Hayy al-Sellom (54.5%) in Beirut's southern suburbs, with other families arriving from Nabatieh and Sour.

A major shift occurred during the first week of November: many residents originally from Hayy al-Sellom left, citing relocation to stay with relatives elsewhere and the onset of cold weather in Baskinta. On November 4, an additional 25 Syrian nationals arriving from Hayy al-Sellom and Sour were expelled from the OCA shelter following a Lebanese General Security directive, under which Syrian nationals were escorted out of all designated shelters.

This sharp outflow was quickly followed by a new influx, primarily from Baalbek, raising the population from a low of 33 back to 68. By mid-November, the IDPs from Hayy al-Sellom had dropped to roughly 19% of the population, replaced by a new majority (41%) from the Baalbek-Hermel governorate. The shelter maintained this reshuffled population until the ceasefire announcement on November 27, after which the building was fully vacated by November 28.

Compared to national figures, the OCA shelter operated on the smaller end of the spectrum. The national average was approximately 188 IDPs per shelter, while the OCA building had a functional capacity of about 90[7].

Family size and room occupancy also shifted over time. The OCA shelter averaged 1.9 families per room at the beginning and 2.2 by the final weeks. The average family size in Lebanese shelters nationally was 4.28 persons; in the OCA center, families averaged 4.3 persons at the outset, falling to 3.3 by the final week as late arrivals tended to be smaller households.

Daily Life

Daily life was shaped by internal dynamics and informal support networks. Mr. Abou Haidar recruited a few displaced individuals to assist him with paid work, reinforcing community cooperation within the shelter. Children played on the paved basketball court on the

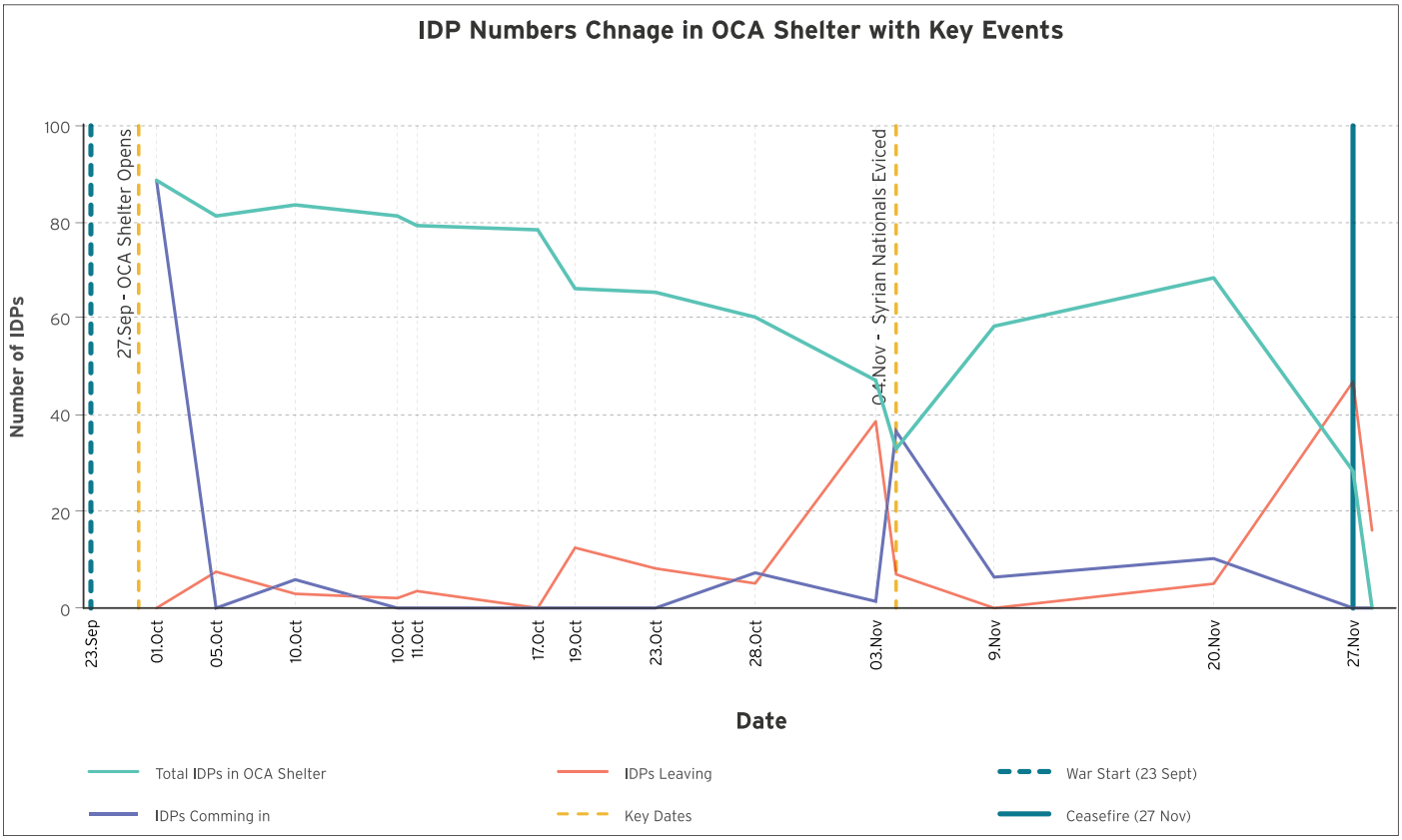


Figure 13. IPD total population throughout the war in the OCA designated shelter in Baskinta (based on data from Mr. Haddad)

[7]At the extreme end, the largest designated shelter reached 4,700 IDPs in a converted residential complex in Wardanieh, Chouf, while some rural shelters - especially near bombardment sites or in parts of rural Akkar - hosted as few as five people.

OCA plot, which occasionally triggered conflicts that escalated into disputes among adults. Tensions did arise among families, including interpersonal disputes and occasional physical altercations. The center also hosted activities for children, including a World Vision puppet show and six drawing classes led by a local volunteer painter and sculptor. Books for children were temporarily borrowed from the OCA library.

Security

Security was tightly maintained. The building was locked at night, with keys held only by Mr. Haddad, Mr. Abou Haidar, and a designated representative from among the displaced residents. Mr. Haddad coordinated closely with military intelligence and the municipal police to ensure the safety of everyone in the center. Regular police patrols were conducted to prevent friction between displaced persons and local residents. Movement outside the shelter was limited to essential errands such as purchasing food from nearby shops; only a few displaced persons with ongoing employment in Beirut occasionally continued commuting using the informal bus system.

On October 14, 2024, an Israeli airstrike struck a residential building in the village of Aitou near Zgharta in North Lebanon, killing families displaced from southern Lebanon. The attack marked a significant geographic expansion of the conflict into the predominantly Christian Zgharta region, which until then had largely been spared from bombardment concentrated in the South, the Bekaa Valley, and the southern suburbs of Beirut - areas with predominantly Shi'a populations and from which most of the displaced originated.

Following the strike in Zgharta, local concerns about the presence of the shelter intensified. Anxieties emerged around security, political affiliation, and the potential spillover of conflict dynamics into a region that had previously remained relatively insulated from direct attacks. Coordination with the Lebanese Army ensured these concerns were addressed. The Zgharta incident also complicated internal dynamics within the municipality and the OCA, creating political sensitivities that may make the reception of displaced people in future crises much more challenging.

Closure

Following the ceasefire announcement on November 27, the shelter emptied rapidly within two days. There was no structured return plan or follow-up coordinated by the government or NGOs.

The operation of the shelter in 2024 differed qualitatively from that of 2006. In 2006, the displaced population was a relatively homogeneous group from a single town, led by their own Mukhtar, and the numbers were smaller. In 2024, the shelter managed a heterogeneous mix of families from different regions with varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

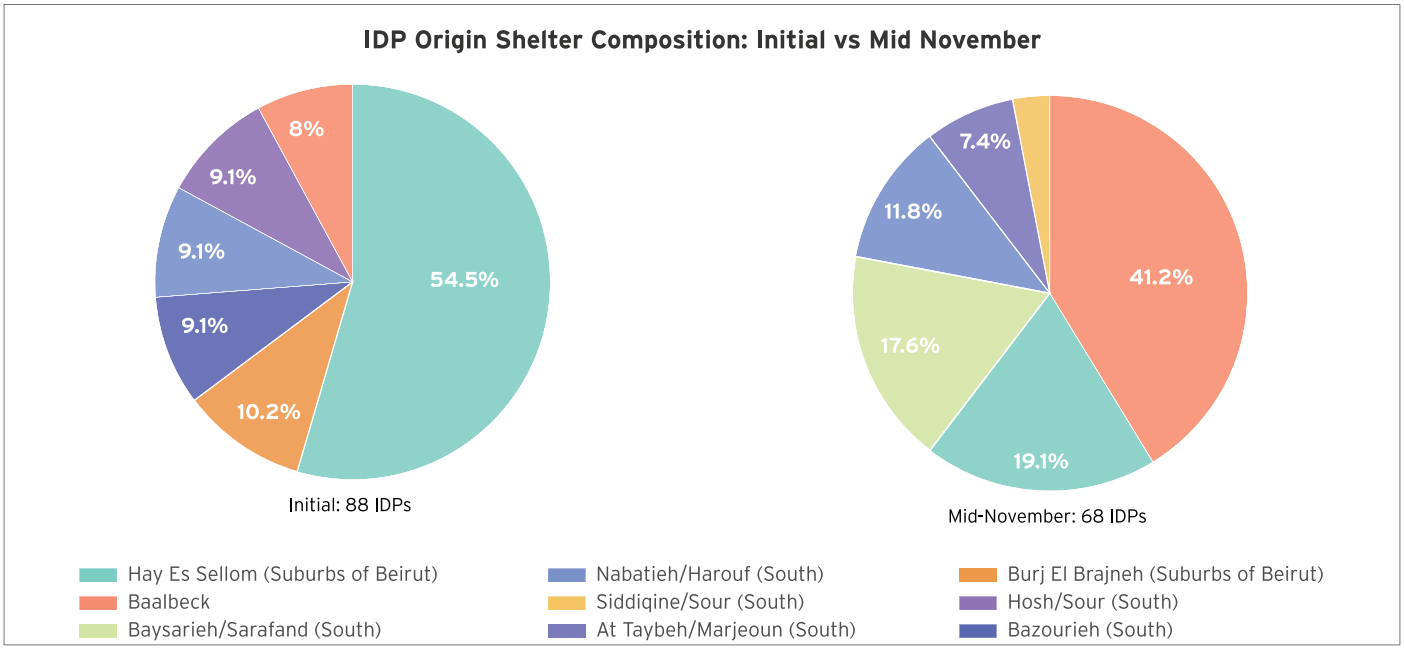


Figure 14. IPD origin at the beginning and end of the war in OCA designated shelter in Baskinta (based on data from Mr. Haddad)

Stakeholder Category	Specific Stakeholder	Role in Crisis / Shelter Management
I. Core Management & Operations (Local)		
Shelter Manager	Mr. Haddad (Retired High School Principal/Public servant, OCA Vice President)	Primary de-facto responsible manager; agreed to open the center; volunteered to manage operations; coordinated with the Municipal Crisis Room, Military Intelligence, and the other designated shelter center in Baskinta; jointly managed the independent treasury; made a detailed log of IDP profiles/needs; coordinated aid distribution; reported needs to the Qaimaqam's office and Red cross.
Assistant Manager	Mr. Abou Haidar (Physical Training Teacher)	Assisted Mr. Haddad in all management tasks, especially in Mr. Haddad's absence; jointly managed the independent treasury; was a full-year resident; recruited IDPs for paid work.
Local Volunteers	Local Volunteers	Provided general support and aid distribution; a local painter provided drawing classes.
II. Governance & Authority (Governmental)		
National Authority	Detailed in table 1	Designated the building as a shelter despite it being unused.
Local Authority	Municipality of Baskinta	Formed a Crisis Committee in which all local political parties were represented to manage the crisis; had a crisis room for coordination; provided police patrols.
Caza Level	Metn Qaimmaqam's office	Received reports from the shelter manager (Mr. Haddad); coordinated aid distribution within the Metn Caza (e.g., central food preparation).
Security	Military Intelligence	Coordinated closely with Mr. Haddad for security matters.
	Municipality Police	Coordinated with Mr. Haddad for security; conducted local patrols to prevent friction with locals.
	Lebanese General Security Forces	Forced Syrian migrants to leave the center after the first month.
Support	Lebanese Civil Defense	Provided domestic water when the public network was in shortage.
III. Owner & Previous Lessee		
Building Owner	Orthodox Charitable Association (OCA)	Owns the shelter building and plot; responsible for plot management; cabinet members (including Mr. Haddad) agreed to open the center without a general assembly.
Former Lessee	Ministry of Education	The Municipality Rented the building from OCA on behalf of the Ministry until 2011; its historical use as a school is why it was the "go-to asset" for crisis management.
IV. Humanitarian & Aid Providers (NGOs & International)		
Medical	Lebanese Red Cross	Coordinated aid distribution from the Metn Qaimmaqam's office; provided medical assistance/support for hygiene matters; assisted a woman in labor to Karantina public hospital.
	Local Doctors/Dental Clinics	Accepted displaced persons for free visits in their clinics; other doctors made visits to the center.
	Islamic Health Society	Paid a visit to the center.
Cash/In-Kind Aid	Religious NGOs (Affiliated with Sistani from Iraq)	Provided cash donations at the beginning of the war ($100 per family).
	Local & National NGOs ('Amel Foundation, Makhzoumi Foundation, League Cultural Sportive Baskinta, etc.)	Provided cash and in-kind aid.
Food Distribution	Caritas	Distributed the main food course coordinated and cooked centrally at the Caza level.
Children's Activities	World Vision	Hosted activities for children, including a puppet show.
UN Agencies	UNHCR	Provided mattresses and blankets.
V. Local Support & Private Sector		
Local Resources	Local Farmers	Donated food.
	Private Individuals	Donated clothing.
Infrastructure/Services	Generator Providers, Plumbers	Provided essential services (electricity from private generator, plumbing repairs, shower installation).
Political Parties	Political Parties	Provided initial essential supplies (toilet paper, clothing, food cutlery, small gas stoves) that sustained the center until proper organization was established. Donated bread daily and gas cylinders.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This report has examined displacement patterns and Lebanon's hybrid governance structure during the 2024 war. It focused on government-designated shelters not only as a modality of accommodation, but as sites where displacement, governance, and local agency intersect under conditions of crisis. The analysis highlights how emergency responses were shaped less by pre-established systems and more by improvised coordination, negotiated authority, and uneven institutional capacity.

The evolution of accommodation modalities over the course of the crisis reflects the adaptive yet uneven nature of displacement governance in Lebanon. Prior to the war, hosting within private homes was the primary modality, relying heavily on kinship and community ties. During the war, as displacement surged beyond the capacity of these networks, government-designated collective shelters emerged as emergency overflow spaces. Following the ceasefire, renting was the primary accommodation for those who remained displaced, marking a shift from improvised collective sheltering to market-based longer term solutions.

Lebanon's shelter system during the 2024 war was marked by rapid mobilization, largely centered on public schools at the national level, which formed the backbone of designated shelters. The government's emergency response relied heavily on repurposing these assets to accommodate the sudden surge in displaced persons. The extensive use of public schools for sheltering IDPs created significant tensions with educational continuity, necessitating government interventions to adapt academic schedules and provide alternative learning solutions.

This mobilization was coordinated by the National Committee for the Coordination of Disaster and Crisis Response and the Ministerial Emergency Committee, technically supported by the Disaster Risk Management Unit and the National Operations Room, and monitored through Governorate and Caza Operations Rooms. Despite formal designation, the actual capacity and readiness of shelters varied widely, and many suffered from infrastructure deficits that required on-site rehabilitation. School principals became de facto managers of these shelters but depended heavily on informal, local-level management in the context of limited public capacity. The rapid activation and near saturation of shelters underscore the system's function as an emergency overflow mechanism rather than a planned response, with shelters closing swiftly following the ceasefire and with limited follow-up support for displaced families.

The Baskinta case study reveals how Lebanon's displacement governance operates in practice, beyond formal national frameworks. Rather than functioning as an exception, the Orthodox Charitable Association (OCA) shelter illustrates the dominant operational logic of the shelter system: formal state designation combined with activation, resourcing, and day-to-day management by local and non-state actors. Although the OCA shelter was not a school, its governance dynamics closely mirrored those of the public school shelter in Baskinta, reinforcing the broader pattern identified at the national level.

The case exemplifies the reliance on local networks and historical precedents in Lebanese crisis governance, as the OCA building had previously served as a public school and designated shelter during the July 2006 war. Immediate rapid-response aid - including cash assistance, stoves, and initial food supplies - came from local and political actors rather than national public institutions. These actors sustained the shelter during the critical first 48 to 72 hours. This finding validates arguments (Fawaz, 2009) that political networks in Lebanon possess a "logistical readiness" that surpasses state bureaucracy, effectively filling early-stage crisis management vacuums.

Physical infrastructure was not pre-prepared; the building required urgent rehabilitation (plumbing, solar panels, electricity) during the crisis, exemplifying Fawaz's (2007) notion of "bricolage" - an improvised, fix-as-you-go strategy that substitutes for planned preparedness. This lack of readiness significantly affected shelter conditions and highlights the need for pre-crisis asset maintenance and logistical planning.

The dynamics of shelter management and operations reflect Lebanon's "hybrid sovereignty" model (Fregonese, 2012; Hazbun, 2016), in which the state shares authority with non-state actors, including religious endowments (waqfs), political parties, and local notables. In Baskinta, the government crisis room formally designated the shelter but lacked the capacity to activate it. Instead, the OCA and the personal social capital of Mr. Haddad enabled shelter activation and day-to-day operations. In this configuration, the state primarily provided legal cover, while non-state actors supplied assets and operational capacity.

Throughout the war period, the OCA shelter operated less as a site of stable refuge than as a transient node within a constantly shifting displacement landscape. Residents arrived and departed frequently, challenging assumptions of static sheltered populations. The abrupt and uncoordinated dissolution of the shelter following the ceasefire, without structured follow-up or return support, reinforces the interpretation of designated shelters as short-term "warehousing" solutions activated exclusively during active hostilities (Milner, 2009).

During the war, Syrian nationals residing in designated shelters experienced formal evictions by Lebanese authorities, reflecting broader patterns of exclusion faced by Syrian refugees within Lebanon's displacement landscape. This aligns with existing literature documenting the precarious status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, where legal ambiguities, security concerns, and political sensitivities often result in restrictive policies and forced relocations (Al-Harithy et al., 2021). This incident underscores the fragile position of Syrian nationals within Lebanon's displacement governance and crisis management frameworks.

Security concerns following an Israeli strike on displaced people in the Zgharta Caza created a de facto separation between shelter residents and host communities. Despite the absence of formal camp boundaries, restricted mobility and visitor bans effectively isolated displaced individuals. Moreover, the political sensitivities stemming from the Zgharta incident may significantly complicate the reception of displaced populations in future crises.

Based on these findings, this report recommends that DRM Unit move toward anticipatory governance of shelters. Clear roles, authority structures, and volunteer coordination mechanisms should be predefined to reduce reliance on ad hoc decision-making during crises. Pre-established coordination protocols among government agencies, NGOs, and local political actors are essential to ensure rapid aid delivery in the critical early phase of displacement. Regular inspection and maintenance of public assets identified as potential shelters should be institutionalized to avoid emergency-time rehabilitation. Security management protocols must balance protection with freedom of movement to prevent the isolation of displaced populations and to mitigate political tensions within host communities. Finally, shelter deactivation should be accompanied by structured return and follow-up mechanisms to prevent abrupt displacement transitions and reduce the vulnerability of IDPs post-displacement.

8. Bibliography

Al-Harithy, H. (2010). Lessons in post-war reconstruction: case studies from Lebanon in the aftermath of the 2006 war (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203851524

Al-Harithy, H., Eltayeb, A., & Khodr, A. (2021). Hosting Syrian refugees in Saida (Lebanon) under protracted displacement: Unfolding spatial and social exclusion. International Journal of Islamic Architecture, 10(2), 413–439. https://doi.org/10.1386/ijia_00050_1

Al-Harithy, H. (2022). Urban Recovery: Intersecting Displacement with Post War Reconstruction (H. Al-Harithy, Ed.; 1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003091707

Al-Harithy, H., & Yassine, B. (2023). The Co-Production of a Shared Community Space in Al-Khodor, Karantina, in the Aftermath of the Beirut Port Blast. Land (Basel), 12(7), 1400. https://doi.org/10.3390/land12071400

Beirut Urban Lab. (2022a). An Urban Recovery Strategy for Post-Blast Karantina.

Carpi, E. (2017). Learning and unlearning: The engagement of local actors in the humanitarian response in Lebanon. In Local Engagement in Humanitarian Action: Realities from the Field.

Disaster Risk Management Unit (DRM–Lebanon). (2024). 51 Israeli hostilities on Lebanon: Daily situation reports, 23 September–6 December 2024. DRM Lebanon. Retrieved December 3, 2025.

Fawaz, M., Ghandour, M., & American university of Beirut. Reconstruction Unit at the Department of Architecture and Design. (2007). The reconstruction of Haret Hreik: design options for improving the livability of the neighborhood. American University of Beirut, Reconstruction Unit at ArD.

Fawaz, M. (2007). The city as a sanctuary: The role of urban networks in the 2006 war. Issam Fares Institute Policy Memo. Beirut: American University of Beirut.
Fawaz, M. (2009). Hezbollah as urban planner? Questions to and from the field. Planning Theory & Practice, 10(3), 323–334.

Fawaz, M., Gharbieh, A., Harb, M., Salamé, D., & Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, issuing body. (2018). Refugees as city makers (M. Fawaz, A. Gharbieh, Mona. Harb, & D. Salamé, Eds.). Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut.

Fregonese, S. (2012). Beyond the "weak state": Hybrid sovereignties in Beirut. Political Geography, 31(3), 132–141.

Haddad, G. (2025, June 18). Personal interview.
Harb, M., Kassem, A., & Najdi, W. (2019). Entrepreneurial Refugees and the City: Brief Encounters in Beirut. Journal of Refugee Studies, 32(1), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey003

Hazbun, W. (2016). Assembling security in a weak state: The contentious politics of plural policing in Lebanon. Third World Quarterly, 37(6), 1053–1070.

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024–2025). DTM Mobility Snapshots (Rounds 18–88). IOM Lebanon. Retrieved December 3, 2025.

Khawaja, M., Assaf, S., & Yamout, R. (2011). Predictors of displacement behaviour during the 2006 Lebanon war. Global Public Health, 6(5), 488–504. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2010.546806

Milner, J. (2009). Refugees, the state and the politics of asylum in Africa. Palgrave Macmillan.

Public Works Studio. (n.d.). Israeli attacks map. Public Works Studio. Retrieved December 3, 2025.

...

The Beirut Urban Lab – AUB

The Beirut Urban Lab is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research space. The Lab produces scholarship on urbanization by documenting and analyzing ongoing transformation processes in Lebanon and its region's natural and built environments. It intervenes as an interlocutor and contributor to academic debates about historical and contemporary urbanization from its position in the Global South. We work towards materializing our vision of an ecosystem of change empowered by critical inquiry and engaged research, and driven by committed urban citizens and collectives aspiring to just, inclusive, and viable cities.

Raymond Ghosn Building, American University of Beirut,
Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture.

PO Box. 11-0236 Riad El Solh 1107 2020, Beirut Lebanon
+961-1-374374 ext: 3603
beiruturbanlab@aub.edu.lb
beiruturbanlab.com

Beirut Urban Lab
thebeiruturbanlab
@BeirutUrbanLab