

# Housing Monitor

Documenting cases  
of housing threats

March 1 —————

November 31, 2022

# The Plight of Housing in Lebanon

Annual report submitted to  
the UN Special Rapporteur  
on Adequate Housing



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## Public Works Studio

### *Who We Are*

**Public Works Studio is a multidisciplinary research-based organization made up of urbanists, architects, designers, researchers, and legal experts critically engaged in public and urban issues in Lebanon. By taking a right to the city approach, our work addresses spatial inequality and social exclusion in Lebanon, as it affects residents whose livelihoods, housing, and surrounding environment are being destroyed by neoliberal urbanization and real estate speculation.**

Our long term vision is centered around engaging in an iterative process of production of knowledge where data gathering, community engagement, mapping, academic research and activism contribute equally and dialectically to each other, in shifting understandings of rights to the city in Lebanon, and expanding the approaches used in issue led organizing.

The studio initiates research projects that study, shape and implement counter strategies to urban planning and policy making in Lebanon. During the last decade, we have been producing – through a number of collaborations – uniquely conceptualized urban studies that are innovative, deeply researched and essential in initiating a national discourse on social equity in Lebanese cities. Our projects bring together multiple activities that we believe contributed to addressing the root causes of inequality:

- Formulated interdisciplinary professional teams that brought diverse perspectives and methodologies to address complex urban challenges holistically.
- Integrated diverse community groups (across age, religion, income and gender) in our studies to whom we provided a discussion platform where they can inform the analytical process and contribute to the conceptualizing of conclusions.
- Represented highly complex urban studies in a highly original, accessible visual and textual form through publicly disseminated booklets, newspapers publications and other widely distributed public/social media as well as academic venues.

## Mission

- > To address and actively respond to the root causes of inequality and the chronic challenges facing just cities and equitable development.
- > To produce and disseminate urban studies with the purpose of initiating a national discourse on social equity in Lebanese cities, as well as contributing to grassroots organizing.
- > To revive, defend and produce socially-inclusive and sustainable spaces
- > To develop methods and tools that build common knowledge, networks of solidarity, communal organizing and collective responses to challenge structural inequalities.
- > To forge possibilities that make urban planning a democratic process where ordinary citizens can understand, judge and make decisions to respond to structural and spatial inequalities.
- > To practice and promote design, architecture and urbanism as political and social professions
- > To provide socially viable and high-quality professional consultancies and services in graphic design, architecture, consultancy, development planning and research within a communal work environment.
- > To foster the culture of knowledge-sharing and anchor the right-to-know and to access information as a means for engaged and active responses

## Goals

- > To produce engaged knowledge, critical investigations and creative communication on justice in planning, the right to housing, and equitable development in Lebanon.
- > To make visible and accessible systems, institutions and practices that (re)produce socio-spatial injustice, and their local manifestations.
- > To study, shape and implement counter-strategies to policy-making in Lebanon, namely on issues of housing, planning, and comprehensive development.
- > To monitor, collect data, map, narrate, historicize, and represent transformations, state interventions, and lived experiences at the scale of the household, neighborhood, city, region, and country.
- > To provide a publishing platform for local urban movements and spatial causes.





\_ housingmonitor.org

\_ beirutevictions.org

\_ thinkhousing.org

## The Housing Monitor Battling Evictions in Lebanon

Claiming housing rights and confronting injustices often occur in the private realm. Households are singled out, seemingly isolated from the mechanisms that drive gentrification, urbanization and displacement, and left alone to face the slow violence that housing rights violations incur. These acts of dispossession are not recorded, nor are the tools of investigating trends and patterns in urban rights violations appropriated as venues to drive communal confrontation. The inability to minimize the gap between the daily suffering of urban dwellers and public response, only serves to normalize evictions and housing vulnerabilities in general. Placing housing rights as a public concern that needs to be addressed on all levels: the neighborhood, the district, the city, and at the scale of national politics, has become detrimental to practicing good urban governance and building inclusive cities.

As such, Public Works developed the Housing Monitor: a community tool developed to protect and advance housing rights in Lebanon. The tool is used by residents from various marginalized social groups to report on housing vulnerabilities and eviction threats. In response, Public Works Studio provides individualized legal and social services, mobilizes tenants around shared grievances, and identifies any trends in housing injustices. In doing so, it empowers marginalized city dwellers to claim their housing rights, while raising attention over detrimental housing policies in Lebanon that have affected vulnerable residents. Public Works Studio developed this project to document and report housing right violations in a country where a lack of data allows ongoing corruption, poor planning, and marginalization of low-income city dwellers; to respond to marginalized city dwellers' housing needs with legal and social support, building rights-based awareness and establishing a direct hotline of responsiveness; to build and mobilize tenant and community member organizations based on shared housing vulnerabilities and interests; and to identify general housing trends and develop informed response strategies and policy recommendations.

Since January 2020, with the outbreak of the COVID pandemic and the deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon, the Housing Monitor followed on 603 housing vulnerabilities, of which 472 were responded to with direct service intervention. This includes 184 consultations and legal tips (104 with migrant domestic workers); 150 field visits; the prevention of 92 evictions; and the referral of 131 cases for social support. As of September 2020, following the port explosion, Public Works Studio started operating a hotline for the Housing Monitor.

For 2022, PW will pursue its institutionalization of the Housing Monitor, continue the monitoring practices, while developing two main aspects: promoting the practice of reporting beyond Beirut and developing training workshops to widen the network of housing activists. The latter includes students and professionals (such as lawyers and urbanists), independent political groups, and community members. We also aim to build the Right to Housing Legal Task Force as an active lab that brings together law students, legal researchers and lawyers with urbanists and economists to think in multidisciplinary terms, creatively and critically of strategies for the defense of housing rights.

# I. Executive Summary

Despite it being a fundamental human right with constitutional value, access to affordable and adequate housing has long been one of the most significant challenges in Lebanon. The housing crisis has been exacerbated by decades of market speculation operating in a complete absence of fair housing policies, dependence on land as a commodity, and a framework that enables the dominance of private interests in the regulation of the housing sector. It has become clear that the choices the Lebanese state has historically made have been to ignore the social value of housing, placing it under market control. The state abandoned its social responsibility in providing affordable housing, and the only policy put in place was loans for homeownership, which were completely stopped in conjunction with the worst economic crisis in Lebanon.

Currently, these factors, historical, emerging and successive, have rapidly exacerbated the housing crisis. This deterioration has resulted in a skyrocketing rise in housing expenses, as well as a rise in the prices of basic services. In fact, according to recent studies, the percentage of rental costs and housing services accounted for 85% of the total income of families residing in Beirut, and reached 100% in the most vulnerable neighborhoods. All this is in the context of loss of incomes, severe inflation, the deterioration of the value of the Lebanese pound and the multiplicity of exchange rates, in addition to the August 4 port explosion, as well as the recent decision to raise the official exchange rate from 1500 L.L. to the dollar to 15,000 L.L., which was taken without any consideration for its repercussions on rent fees for tenants and on home purchase installments. Moreover, the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria also had a serious impact on the safety of buildings in Lebanon, especially in the northern region.

The Lebanese state is obliged - under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which Lebanon acceded to in 1972 - to submit periodic reports on the housing situation in Lebanon, including the progress towards ensuring respect for this right. However, the Lebanese state failed to submit its periodic reports, such that only two reports related to the right to housing were submitted in 1993 and 2015.

In light of the Lebanese state's inability to fulfill its minimum obligations, a central dilemma arises related to its ability to formulate an effective national strategy to ensure respect for the right to adequate housing, especially in the absence of data and statistics. In this context, and through this report, Public Works Studio seeks to provide an adequate and comprehensive picture of the prevailing situation and the extent to which Lebanon violates the right to housing.

The report begins with an analysis of the 163 cases received on the Housing Monitor hotline between March and November 2022, and looks at the types of housing vulnerabilities<sup>1</sup>, in addition to the scale and scope of eviction, documenting that 22% of eviction demands were accompanied by arbitrary behavior. Then we move on to a detailed review of the extent of the violation of each of the criteria for the right to housing. In this regard, the report shows that these cases suffer from the absence of the minimum legal security of tenure (74.2%), inadequate living conditions and a continuous deterioration in the habitability of houses (65.6%), the inability to bear the escalating costs associated with housing (67.5%), as well as a lack of basic and vital services and infrastructure (60.1%), residential sites exposed to risks of pollution and real estate speculation (70.6%), as well as social and cultural discrimination (96.3%), and finally the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities are often ignored (27.3%).

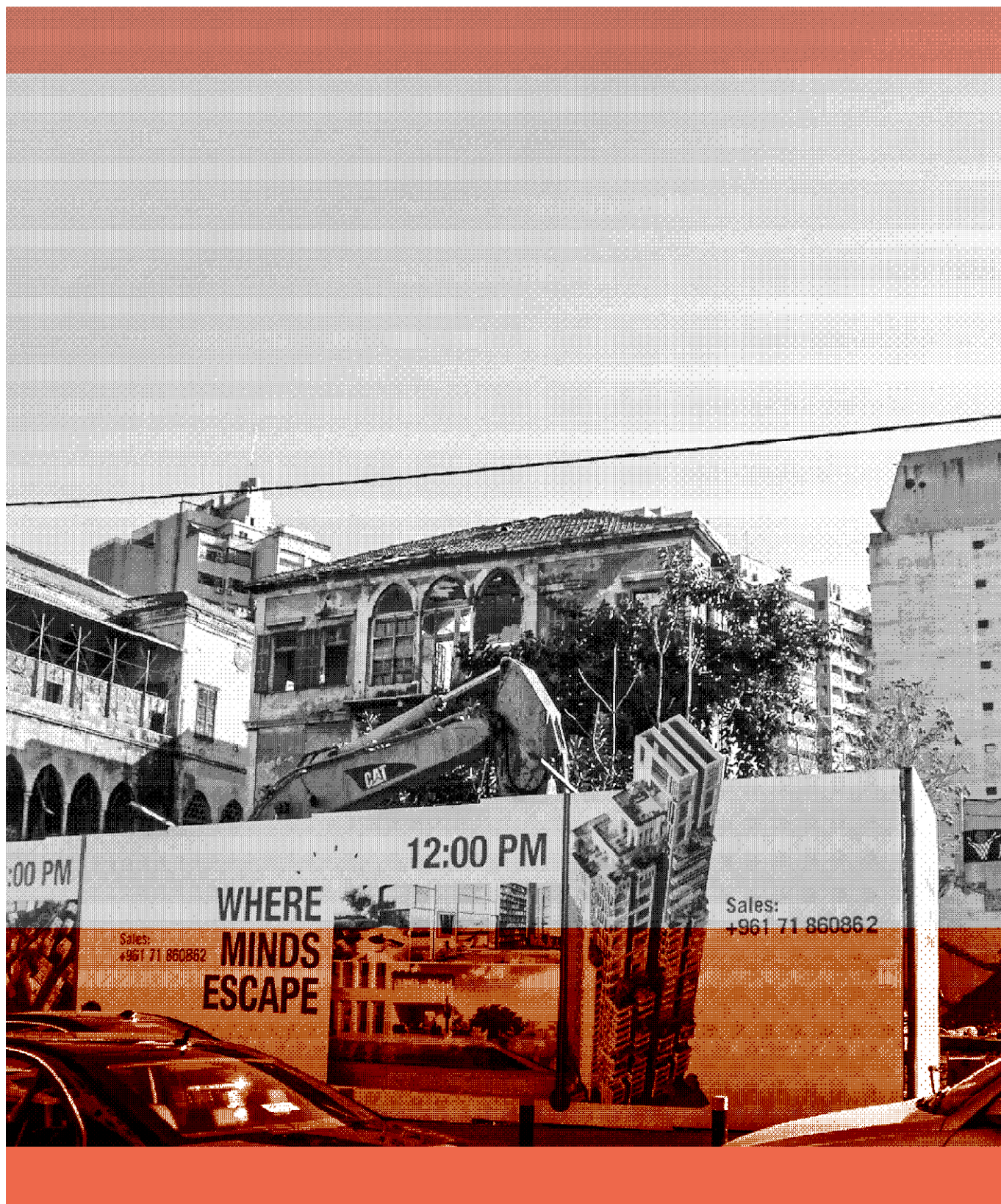
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<sup>1</sup> Threats resulting from the cost of housing include: accumulated rent, adjusting the value of monthly housing allowances (imposing rent payment in dollars, raising the value of rent in lira, adopting the market price for dollars, adopting a price different from the official price in dollars, increasing the value of expenses and entitlements related to housing), defaulting in paying the housing loan. Threats resulting from practices and conditions unrelated to the cost of housing include: poor housing conditions, request for termination of the contract, harassment/infringements by the landlord, harassment/ encroachments from surrounding areas, restriction of freedom of use of the leased property, construction hazards, real estate developments, disputes over the right of ownership.



Finally, the report reviews the responses we have undertaken to show the shortcomings of the legal framework that limits the ability to defend the right to adequate housing, and accordingly provide guidance on the laws, programs and practices needed to ensure the provision of affordable and adequate housing for all. In this respect, we advocate for the need to implement a comprehensive right to housing law in Lebanon, that takes into consideration the priorities and aspirations of all social groups.

The crisis intensifies, and with it Lebanon's housing plight is further exacerbated. Local and international action remains a necessity to work towards the promulgation of this law and push towards its adoption.





## II. Context

Despite it being a fundamental human right with constitutional value, access to affordable and adequate housing has long been one of the most significant challenges in Lebanon. The housing crisis has been exacerbated by decades of market speculation operating in a complete absence of fair housing policies, dependence on land as a commodity, and a framework that enables the dominance of private interests in the regulation of the housing sector. It has become clear that the choices the Lebanese state has historically made have been to ignore the social value of housing and consider it the responsibility of individuals, placing it under the control of market laws in order to accumulate larger profits for privately owned companies.

Since Lebanon's independence in 1943, the Lebanese state has neither developed any public policy related to securing basic social needs, including housing, nor has it adopted the necessary measures to ensure affordable and decent housing. Following a large displacement of rural residents to the city, including those in response to natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods, the adopted legislation was represented by separate laws to control rent due to the tremendous growth witnessed in Beirut. However, these steps have not risen to the level of broader housing policies that regulate the expansion of cities and villages in inclusive ways. Thus, it often appeared that the only available solution to secure housing for low-income residents was to resort to building, renting or informally owning either public or private properties that do not belong to them in the corresponding official records. As a result, informal neighborhoods spread across Lebanon.

During Fouad Chehab's presidency between 1958 and 1964, the state established several housing institutions in order to secure housing for a number of disadvantaged groups, but failed to implement a comprehensive and integrated strategy to provide decent housing for all. This has contributed to the expansion of informal neighborhoods, coupled with the displacement of people to Beirut and its suburbs in the aftermath of the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. The disintegration and weakening of the central state during the years of civil war led to the near-final collapse of state institutions, including those related to housing.

After the civil war came to an end, this reality was immediately exploited to strengthen the interests of the private sector at the expense of the public interest, and to dismiss the state's responsibility to ensure the right to housing. Instead, the state ushered in a large-scale neoliberal phase that saw massive investments devoted to re-establishing Beirut as a center for regional services, and placing "investment promotion" and thus the interests of large companies as a priority.

As such, this period produced a new form of state, one which is completely biased against the interests of the vast majority. Successive governments worked to facilitate the conditions for local and foreign investors to invest in real estate, and thus increased the percentages allowed for construction. With the increase in demand for buildings and the presence of excess liquidity in banks, a policy of lending in order to own a home was established as the only state response to the growing housing crisis, while it was clear that the vast majority of the population does not meet the criteria for obtaining these loans and cannot afford it. Effectively, this meant that the state was only concerned with supporting the interests of banks and investors under the pretext of the sanctity of private property on the one hand, and encouraging the culture of ownership and housing as an individual responsibility on the other. This was manifested by the spread of empty high-rise buildings that replaced historical neighborhoods, and a vacancy rate of 23%<sup>2</sup> in the capital. About 65% of the vacant apartments remained unsold, compared to 35% kept by their owners without allocating a use to them. After a while, these loans completely stopped in conjunction with the worst economic crisis in Lebanon, revealing that they were never a viable substitute for a real housing policy.

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2 According to a 2019 survey conducted by the Beirut Urban Lab on properties constructed between 1996 and 2018, which numbered more than seven thousand apartments distributed throughout the city.

The rent control system was also suspended immediately after the civil war (1975-1990), and was replaced by an investment system in the name of contractual freedom. Leases concluded before 1992 were converted according to the needs of the real estate market and the interests of developers. Public institutions concerned with housing and urban planning have also been abolished, with the most recent example being the Ministry of Housing and Cooperatives which was dissolved in 2000, while the few social housing projects built in the sixties of the last century suffered from neglect.

Currently, these factors, historical, emerging and successive, have rapidly exacerbated the housing crisis. This deterioration has resulted in a skyrocketing rise in housing expenses, as well as a rise in the prices of basic services (in addition to their interruptions), where the water bill is expected to be raised 4-fold and the electricity bill is expected to increase by a minimum of 16 times and a maximum of 36<sup>3</sup> times or more (the new bill will not be fixed).

Rental and housing services account for 85% of the total income of households living in Beirut, and 100% in the most vulnerable neighborhoods, where the burdens borne by the impoverished classes in terms of housing services costs have become very heavy<sup>4</sup>. All this is against the low value of citizens' incomes<sup>5</sup>, severe inflation<sup>6</sup>, the deterioration of the value of the Lebanese pound and the multiplicity of exchange rates that have resulted in serious challenges to the economy<sup>7</sup>, as well as the general mobilization measures related to combating the Coronavirus pandemic, in addition to the August 4 bombing and the process of rehabilitating the affected areas. The aforementioned factors lead to a decision to raise the official exchange rate from 1500 L.L. to the dollar to 15,000 L.L., which was taken without any consideration for its repercussions on rent fees for tenants and on home purchase installments - which multiplied tenfold - in the absence of serious alterations of wages. Moreover, the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria also had a serious impact on the safety of buildings in Lebanon, especially in the northern region.

As a result, eviction rates have increased across the country, coinciding with the difficulty of finding affordable housing. The sharp increase in rental fees in the absence of state control has also reduced the size of the segment of citizens whose incomes allow them to rent on the one hand, or pushed them to conclude leases for relatively short periods, making it impossible to guarantee and/or demand decent housing arrangements on the other. In particular, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, migrant families and refugees from non-Lebanese communities<sup>8</sup> are at risk of losing their homes, especially as they are part of the most economically affected groups. The phenomenon of displacement, which is concealed by forcibly removing displaced persons from central neighborhoods to the periphery, has also been exacerbated. All this in the absence of state oversight and the obstruction of judicial or legal paths for residents to respond to threats of evictions.

At the same time, local (municipal) or central (government and parliament) authorities have not taken any serious measures to secure the right to housing in the face of a crushing economic collapse and a parallel collapse on the level of state services, which has affected urban dwellers across Lebanon and has rapidly exacerbated the marginalization of social groups and geographical areas that had already been suffering from various forms of discrimination. As the suffering continues to pile up, Lebanon's housing plight is intensifying, although its manifestation varies among Lebanese regions.

3 <https://www.imlebanon.org/2022/01/05/electricity-prices-leb/>

4 Based on the "City of Tenants" platform developed by the American University of Beirut's Urban Lab.

5 In Arabic: <https://housingmonitor.org/content/housingloans-inequality>  
in English: <https://housingmonitor.org/en/content/home-loans-exacerbate-inequality>

6 According to the World Bank's report entitled "Economic Monitor for Lebanon: The Great Denial," Lebanon's inflation rate in 2021 averaged 145%, the third highest in the world after Venezuela and Sudan. (The Crisis in Lebanon: Great Denial in a Deliberate Depression (albankaldawli.org)). The annual inflation rate for the year 2022 reached 171.2%, according to the CPI study issued by the Central Administration of Statistics (cas.gov.lb))

7 According to the World Bank's report entitled "Economic Monitor for Lebanon: The Great Denial."

8 In Arabic: <https://tinyurl.com/48ezavzv> ; in English: <https://housingmonitor.org/en/content/migrant-workers-and-refugees-are-facing-dilemma-specter-eviction-hovers-economic-crisis>



### III. About this report: 163 cases of housing threats

Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which Lebanon acceded to in 1972, the Lebanese state is obliged to submit periodic reports on the housing situation in Lebanon<sup>9</sup>, based on effective monitoring, and containing detailed information on marginalized and impoverished groups, including homeless individuals and families, those living in inadequate housing or “informal” areas, those who are subjected to forced evictions, etc.<sup>10</sup> Such reports should also include progress towards ensuring respect for this right. However, the Lebanese state failed to submit its periodic reports to the international committee tasked with monitoring the implementation of this covenant, such that only two reports related to the right to housing were submitted in 1993 and 2015.

In light of the Lebanese state’s inability to fulfill its minimum obligations, a dilemma arises related to its ability to formulate an effective national strategy to ensure respect for the right to adequate housing, related to the lack of accurate data, including periodic studies and statistics on the housing conditions of residents in Lebanon.

In this context, Public Works Studio seeks to address the problem through developing tools to defend housing rights in Lebanon, and collecting actual data on the multiple violations of this right through the “Housing Monitor” program, which urges residents to report threats of eviction and violations of their housing rights, to which we respond by putting to use several methods, including establishing a legal path specific for each case, applying pressure on the involved stakeholders, and collective solidarity. The Monitor’s data is based on reports received through its hotline, its field team, or through groups and individuals collaborating with it, and is followed up by the Monitor’s team of researchers and human rights defenders. Since 2020, the Housing Monitor has been issuing periodic reports on the increasing rates of evictions, and since the beginning of its launching, it has warned of the worsening housing crisis both as a result of old deep-rooted and structural issues as well as recent factors mentioned above.

In our work to document the extent of violations of the right to adequate housing, we have also redefined and adapted these standards to the local sociocultural context and to the common violations and practices governing the housing sector in Lebanon, based on the criteria and characteristics set by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its General Comment No. 4. Indicators were developed to measure these criteria, and these indicators were then translated into a set of questions to be presented to the reporting cases.

Therefore, this report is an effort to provide an adequate and comprehensive picture of the prevailing situation and the extent at which Lebanon violates the right to housing. As such, we will begin with a quantitative analysis of the received reports, and consider the scale and scope of evictions; then move on to a detailed review of the extent to which each of the standards set for the right to housing has been violated; finally we will review the responses we have undertaken to show the shortcomings of the legal framework that limits the ability to defend the right to adequate housing and provide guidance on the laws, programs and practices needed to ensure the provision of affordable and adequate housing for all.

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<sup>9</sup> Pursuant to articles 16 and 17 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).

<sup>10</sup> According to General Comment No. 4: The right to adequate housing (article 11 (1) of the Covenant) (1991), article 13.

In Arabic: CG4\_ar.doc (live.com); in English: General Comment No. 4: The Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11 (1) of the Covenant)

Number of monitored cases

163

Number of affected individuals 659

## Report Sources

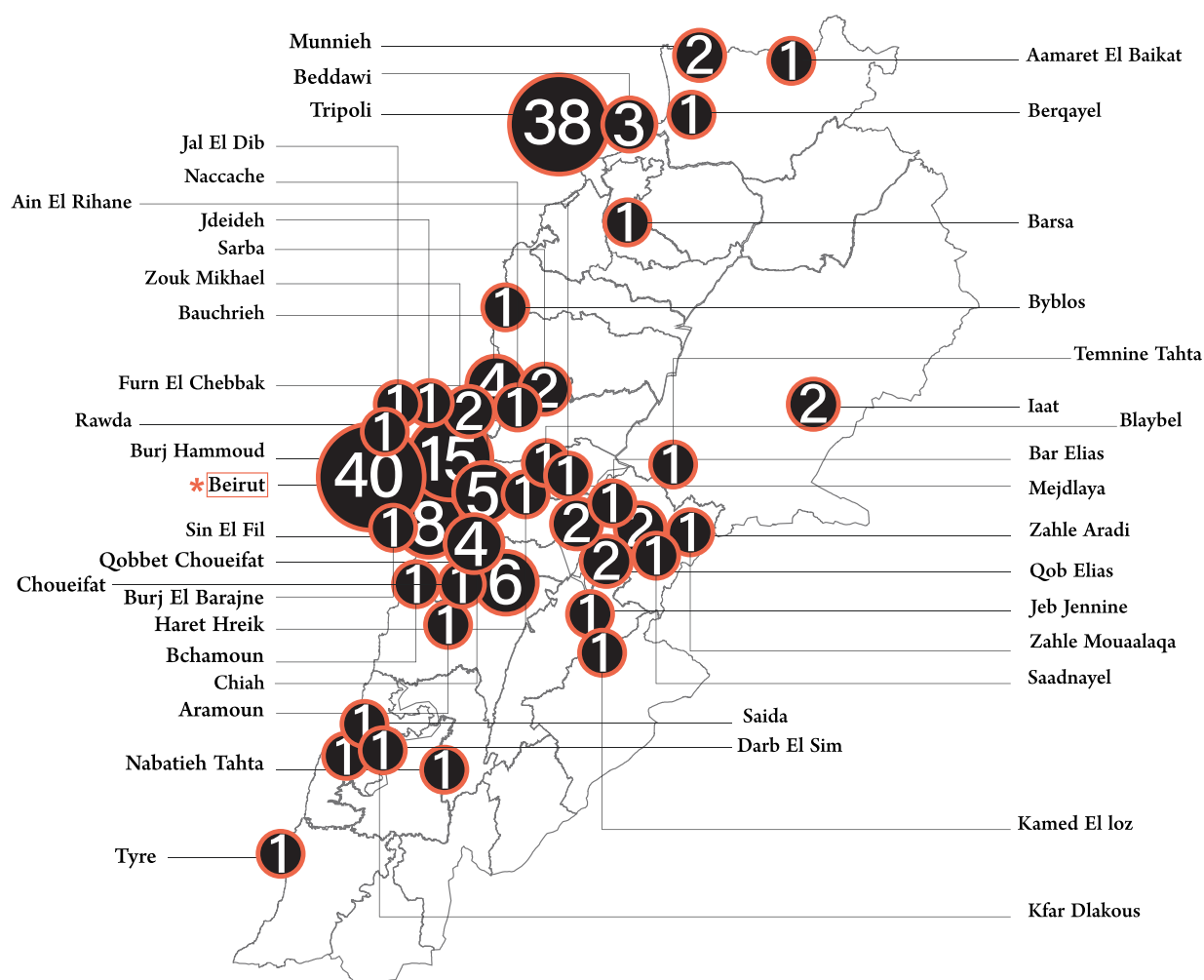
134 Monitor hotline

17 Monitor fieldworkers

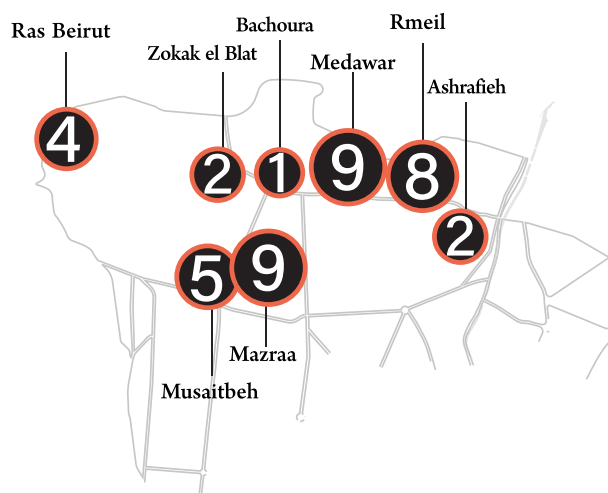
10 Monitor partners

2 Monitor email

## Housing Precarity and Residents



## Beirut\*



## About the Cases

This report documents cases of housing threats, between the first of March and the end of November 2022<sup>11</sup>. During this period, the Monitor received 170 violation reports<sup>12</sup>, out of which 163 cases had their housing conditions analyzed. The latter constitute the sample on which this report's analysis will be based.

The number of individuals affected by these housing threats reached 659. These threats have particularly affected families (82.2%)<sup>13</sup>, individuals (11%), while the rest of the cases were distributed among independent women (3.8%), employees (1.8%) and students (1.2%). With the increase in the percentage of families facing housing threats, different age groups were almost equally affected, with affected individuals over 18 years of age being 58.3%, and children under 18 years of age 41.7% of whom 3.5% were children under three years of age. On the other hand, among the most vulnerable groups monitored, the percentage of women living alone or with children was 8.8%, the percentage of the elderly was 3.95%, the percentage of people with special needs was 0.91%, and the percentage of queer individuals was 0.46%.

Geographically, the largest number of reports originated from administrative Beirut at 24.5%, of which 10.4% of all reports came from neighborhoods directly affected by the August 4 explosion (Medawar, which includes the Karantina and Rmeil neighborhoods), 3% from adjacent areas (Achrafieh, Zoukak al-Blat and Bachoura), and 11% from other administrative areas in Beirut<sup>14</sup>. Following Beirut, Tripoli accounted for the highest percentage of reports (23.3%)<sup>15</sup>.

By examining Greater Beirut more thoroughly, it becomes clear to us that 30% of reports came from the area that practically extends along the Lebanese coast between Khaldeh and Dbayeh and on the western slopes of the districts of Aley, Baabda and Metn, among which 9.2% were from Bourj Hammoud, which houses low-income and working-class population of all nationalities (refugees and migrant workers), in addition to multiple reports from neighborhoods that lie closer to administrative Beirut<sup>16</sup>. The remaining reports (22.2%) were distributed among different Lebanese regions, including reports received from major cities and their surroundings such as Tyre, Saida, Zahle and Jounieh or from other areas outside the main cities and their suburbs<sup>17</sup>.

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11 This report compiles the findings documented in three previous periodic reports.

12 139 reports were documented through the Monitor's hotline, 18 through the Monitor's team on the ground, 11 through groups/ individuals cooperating with the Monitor and two email reports.

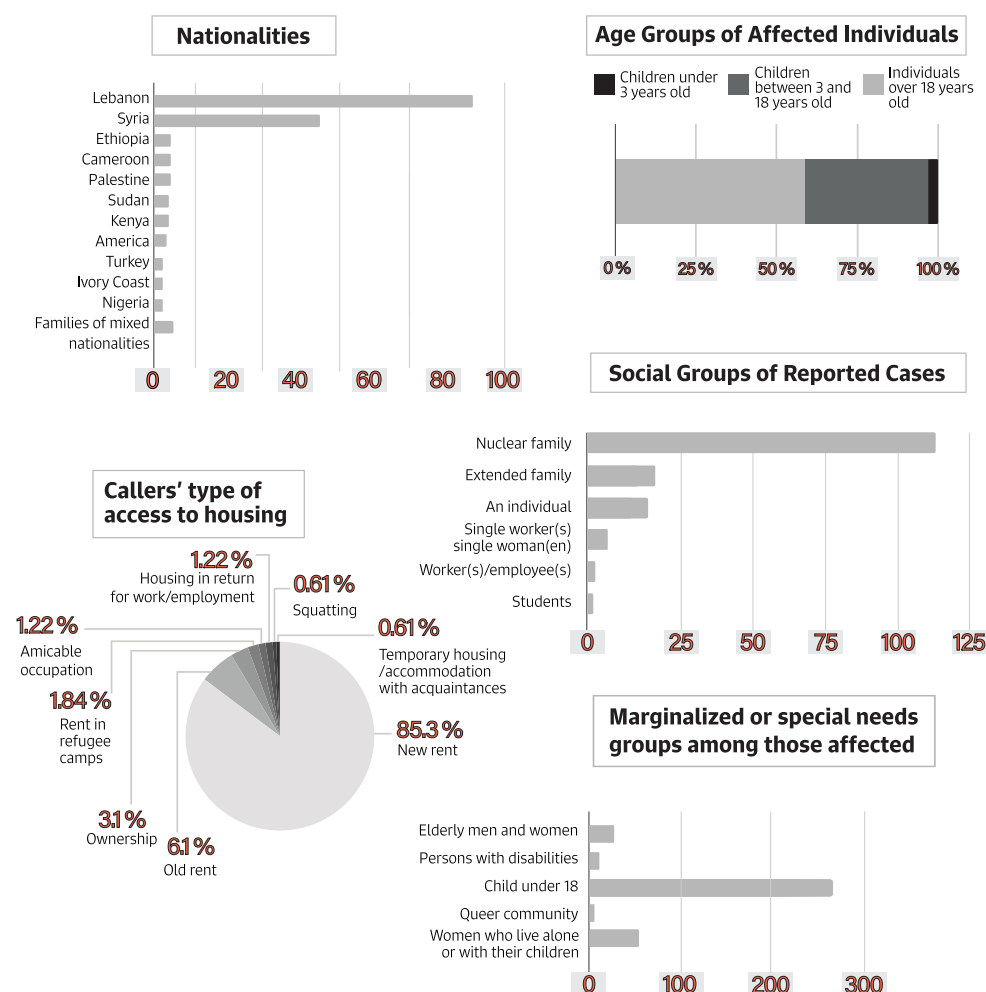
13 Of these, 70% are nucleated families and 12.2% are extended families.

14 Mazraa, Msaytbeh and Ras Beirut.

15 The reason for the significant increase in the percentage of reports received from the city of Tripoli compared to previous annual report is due to the intensification of the Monitor's field team efforts in the city and the continuous deployment of the Monitor's hotline amongst different neighborhoods, following a research workshop led by the Public Works Studio entitled "A participatory research space to activate the right to the city and housing in Tripoli" was held in Tripoli in October 2021, during which a selected group of city residents participated. During this workshop, a number of structural issues were documented, including the deterioration of the built environment, which resulted in a number of reports related to structurally unsafe buildings and threats of the collapse of residential buildings in different neighborhoods.

16 Reports from Greater Beirut include Bourj Hammoud, Sin El Fil, Qobba Choueifat, Furn El Chebbak, Bouchriyeh, Chiyah, Jdeideh, Naccache, Burj El Barajneh, Jal El Dib, Haret Hreik, Rawda, and Choueifat.

17 Beddawi, Eiat, Minieh, Zahle Lands and Zahle Hanging Lands, Zouk Mikael, Sarba, Qab Elias, Majdalia, Jeb Jenin, Nabatieh Tahta, Bar Elias, Barsa, Berkayel, Bchamoun, Blaybel, Tamnin Tahta, Byblos, Darb El Sim, Saadnayel, Tyre, Saida, Aramoun, Amara El Beikat, Ain Rihana, Kamed El Louz and Kfar Dalaqos.



With regard to the nationalities of the reporting persons, the highest percentage of reports came from Lebanese nationals (55.2%), unlike the previous annual report which documented cases of housing threats between the first of May 2021 and the end of February 2022, during which Syrian refugees were the most affected. After the Lebanese, the highest percentage of reporting persons were of Syrian nationality (27.6%), followed by immigrants from various nationalities including Ethiopia, Cameroon, Sudan, Kenya, America, Turkey, Ivory Coast and Nigeria (11.75%). These figures, along with our knowledge and awareness of the current state of affairs in Lebanon, show us that the severe and indefinite economic crisis is weighing on the Lebanese and the most vulnerable groups of refugees and migrants alike, especially with regard to housing rights.

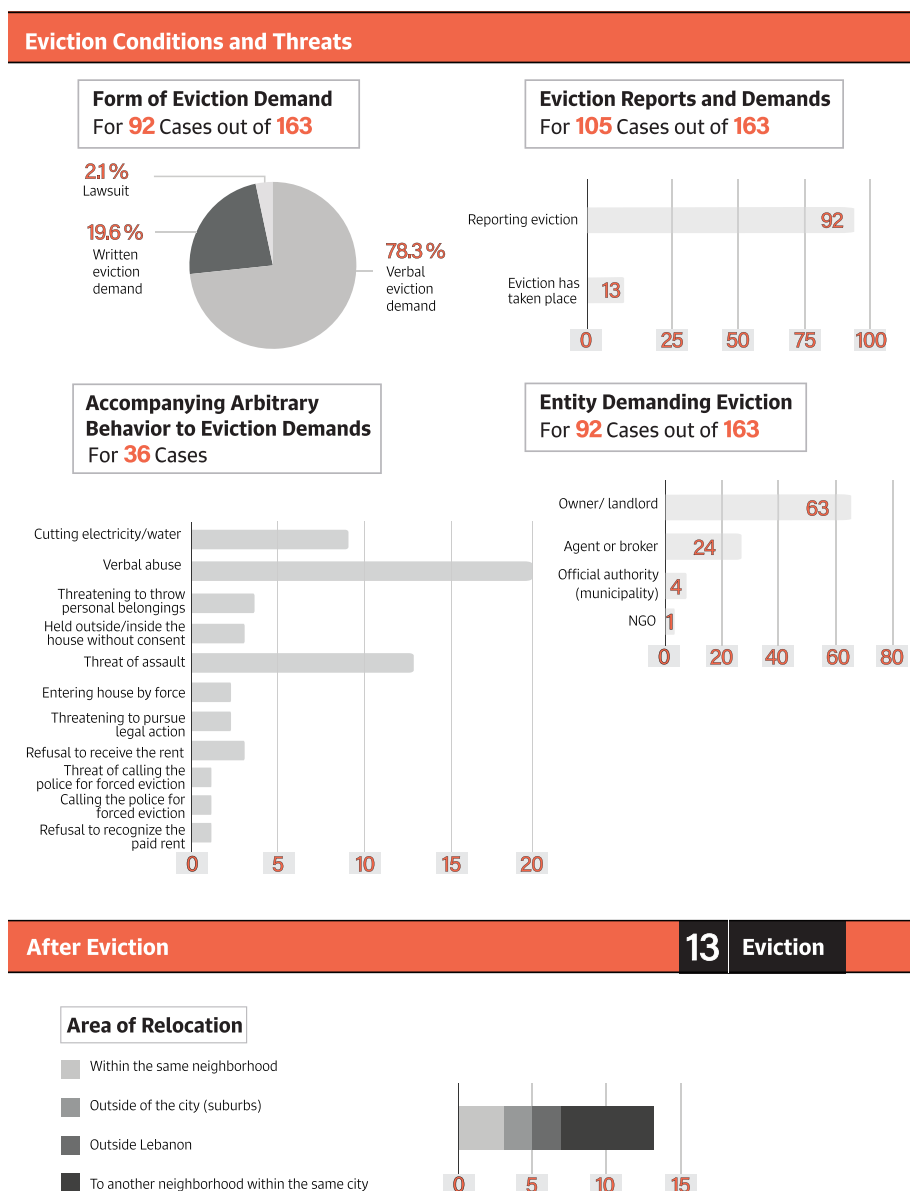
We found a marked disparity in the ratios of reporting persons by type of access to housing. New rent reports<sup>18</sup> accounted for the largest share of reports at 85.3%, compared to 6.1% for old rents<sup>19</sup> and 3.1% for housing accessed through ownership. The Monitor also documented other more fragile types of access to housing, such as rented housing in refugee camps, housing in return for work or employment, and housing through temporary accommodation with acquaintances. The high rate of reports for rent subject to the new rent law may be an indication of the shortcomings of this law - which is clearly biased in encouraging real estate investment instead of sustainable housing - in protecting and preserving the housing rights of tenants. The high percentage of these reports also indicates a clear violation of this law, which, at the very least, is supposed to guarantee the right to occupy the rental for a period of three years.

<sup>18</sup> A new rent law was issued in Lebanon in 1992, applicable to the finalization of new contracts (after 1992), and is based on the principle of free contracting.

<sup>19</sup> From the forties of the last century until 1992, lease contracts in Lebanon were organized on the principle of controlling rents according to the so-called "old rent law."

## IV. Scale and Scope of Eviction

According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “forced evictions can only be justified in very exceptional circumstances and in accordance with relevant principles of international law”<sup>20</sup>, as the practice of forced evictions constitutes a grave violation of human rights, as it affects the housing security of individuals. Yet, out of all reports received by the Monitor, 92 cases were of eviction demands, while 13 cases of eviction were carried out.



Eviction demands take many forms, most of them being illegal. Despite Decision No. 501 (issued on 11/11/2002 by the single judge in Beirut) specifying that the landlord must resort to the judiciary to evict the tenant when the latter refuses to evict by mutual consent<sup>21</sup>. The reports revealed that oral demands

<sup>20</sup> According to General Comment No. 4: The right to adequate housing (article 11 (1) of the Covenant) (1991), article 13.

In Arabic: CG4\_ar.doc (live.com); in English: General Comment No. 4: The Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11 (1) of the Covenant)

<sup>21</sup> A warning is also required to terminate the written contract, such as an oral warning, provided that the legal written warning is made by a notary public or via guaranteed mail (Liban Post). The landlord must give the tenant sufficient time for eviction, which is specified by legal custom for a period of not less than two months. In all cases, the landlord is not entitled to carry out the eviction himself, and he must submit an eviction request before the competent court in the event that the tenant is unable to leave the leased property within the two-month period.



constituted 78.3% of eviction cases, compared to 19.5% for written eviction demands and 2.1% for lawsuits. As for written eviction demands, some were issued by a public notary (44.4%) or a lawyer (33.3%), and the Tripoli Municipality sent 3 written eviction demands representing 16.6%. While the landlord (68.5%) or the agent or intermediary (26.1%) is the one who usually demands eviction, we also identified 4 cases (4.3%) in which the eviction demand was made by an official body (municipality), in addition to one case (1.1%) in which an NGO requested temporary eviction, which is related to a project to restore heritage residential buildings damaged by the August 4 bombing.

Demands for eviction are often accompanied by abusive practices, and indeed we have tracked 36 cases in which the eviction demands were accompanied by arbitrary practices. Verbal abuse is the most common violation (20), followed by threats of assault (13 cases), cutting off water and electricity (8 cases) and forcibly entering the house, confining the tenant outside or inside the house, threatening to throw the tenant's property out of the rental, refusing to receive the rent allowance, and other practices, or even several abusive practices enacted simultaneously.

With regard to alternative housing options for cases threatened with eviction, 14.3% reported that they would be homeless if evicted, 11% would temporarily live with friends or relatives, while only 2.5% would be able to move into a an apartment they can own, and the largest percentage (74.8%) expressed that they would sign a new rental contract if evicted, which indicates a constant threat to housing stability. The alternatives available to individuals and families threatened with eviction remain limited, which often causes a deterioration in their quality of life and exposes them to extreme poverty and destitution, especially for the already marginalized or vulnerable in society.

Of the 13 cases observed for which the eviction was carried out, six moved to another neighborhood within the same city, three moved within the same neighborhood, and two were forced to move out of the city (into the suburbs), which could incur additional transportation expenses; While two other cases moved outside the country.

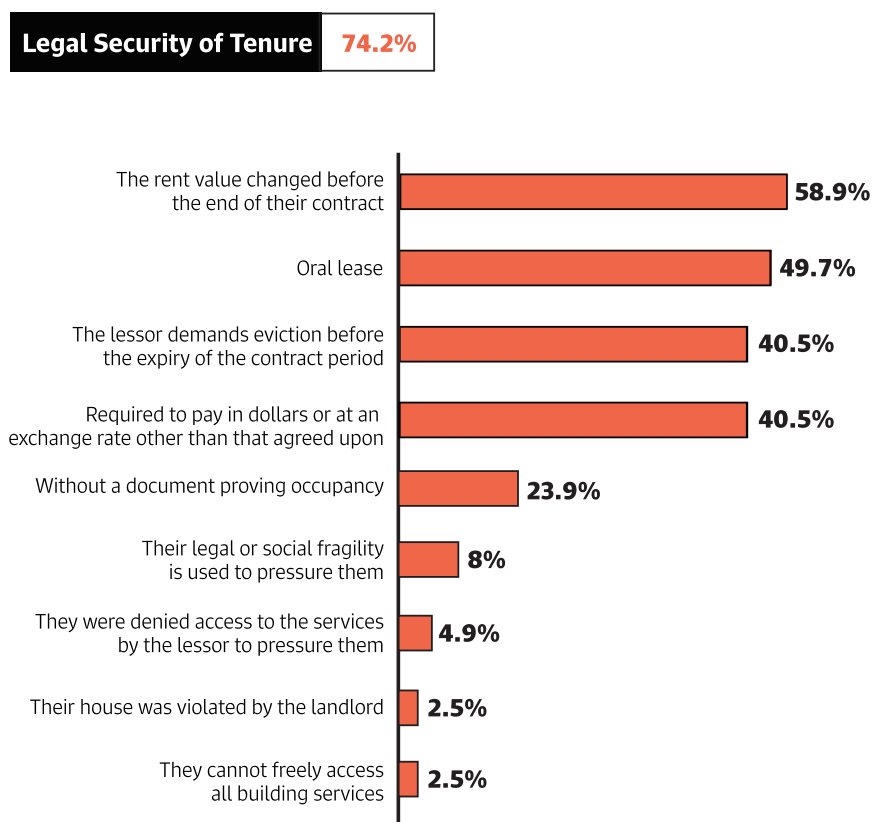
In its General Comment No. 4 on the right to adequate housing, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasizes the importance of providing legal safeguards that prohibit discrimination and arbitrariness, promote due process and procedural fairness, including consultation, participation in decision-making, access to remedies and compensation, and the provision of adequate alternative shelter, including the possibility of legal appeals aimed at preventing planned evictions through injunctions of the court; securing the necessary legal process to ensure compensation after unlawful evictions; filing complaints against unlawful acts by landlords in relation to rent determination, maintenance of the dwelling and any form of discrimination and complaints regarding unsanitary or inadequate housing conditions; and exploring the possibility of facilitating class action in cases involving significantly increased levels of homelessness.



*"the beast has destroyed my village"*

## V. Housing Rights Violations

### Absence of legal protection for tenure security



The percentage of reporting persons with verbal lease contracts reached 49.7%, and we also found that 23.9% of cases do not have any document proving the legality of their rented occupancy and its conditions. The Lebanese Rental Law guarantees the continuity of the lease to the lessee for the first three consecutive years from the date of conclusion of the contract - whether the contract was verbal or written. However, tenants on verbal contracts often find themselves unable to prove the terms and conditions of their contracts, placing them in a more vulnerable position and putting them at greater risk of eviction.

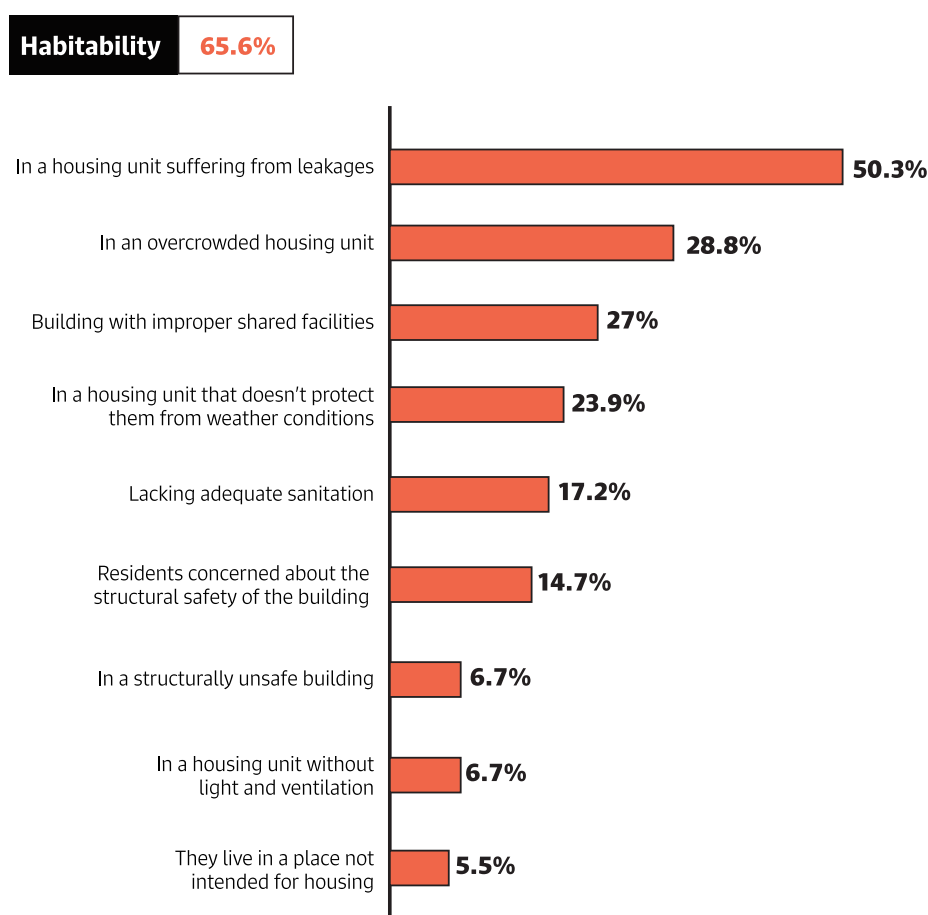
Indeed, the percentage of cases in which the landlord requested eviction before the expiry of the contract period - i.e. three years - reached 40.5%, and the percentage of cases in which the value of the rent changed before the expiry of the contract period reached 58.9%, including reports of a repeated increase in the value of the rent during the year (18.8%). Finally, 40.5% of the reporting cases were required to pay in dollars or at the parallel market exchange rate (other than the agreed rate), so that a large number of tenants were continuously exposed to unreasonably high rent increases.

Some of these cases have also been subjected to practices aimed at intimidating the tenants and inducing them to leave the leased property, which is an additional violation of the Tenancy Law, which requires the landlord not to be exposed to the lessee in a way that deprives him of the benefit of the leased property, and to ensure that others do not interfere with it during this period (see the table).

All of this indicates not only a clear violation of the Lebanese Tenancy Law, but also of the minimum legal protections afforded by this law, as well as a violation of the standards set by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the right to adequate housing, which dictates that everyone should enjoy a degree of tenure security that guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment, and

other threats. These practices also indicate a shift in the pattern of relationships towards more exploitation by landlords. This would not have been possible had it not been for the spread of a social culture that asserts the right of owners to their properties, even if this leads to harm, exploitation and derogation of the rights of others.

## Inadequate living conditions and a continuous deterioration in the habitability of housing



In terms of habitability and suitability, data related to documented reports showed that there are a number of cases that live in unsafe housing conditions, which is a flagrant violation of this principle. The percentage of housing units that suffer from leakages reached 50.3%, in addition to 6.7% of cases that live in residential units without light and proper ventilation. Additionally, the percentage of housing units that do not protect their residents from harsh weather conditions is 17.2%, and 14.7% of them lack adequate sanitation supplies.

Similarly, the percentage of tenants living in a non-residential place was 5.5%, the majority of whom are non-Lebanese, including those who live in a new unit on the roof, in a caretaker room, a caravan or a container, a loose tent, or an old or heritage facility that is not equipped for housing. Most of them are families of Syrian refugees, in addition to a Sudanese and a Lebanese family.

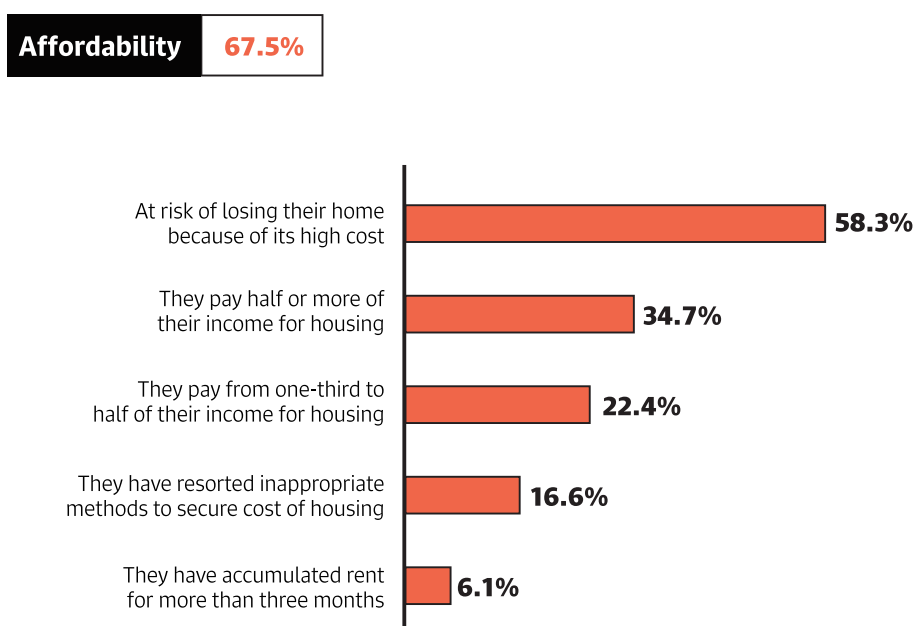
On the other hand, the percentage of those who live in overcrowded housing units reached 28.8%, as more and more people are forced to share housing in order to be able to bear the expenses. Also, 27% of the cases reported that they lived in buildings with improper common spaces and facilities.

With regard to structural risks, 23.9% of reporting persons are concerned about structural factors that threaten the building they live in, whether due to cracks in the building, exposed iron rods, frequent overflowing of water into the building or due to several factors combined. In fact, we found a real structural hazard threatening some of these buildings, with 6.7% of the total reporting persons living in structurally unsafe buildings, most of which were concentrated in the city of Tripoli.

We must note that these numbers do not cover the period following the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria, which had repercussions on Lebanon, and consequently on dilapidated buildings and neglected infrastructure in a number of Lebanese regions, most notably in Tripoli. The earthquake has exacerbated the risk of buildings collapsing, putting thousands of residents at risk of eviction and displacement. Over the course of three consecutive reports and prior to the earthquake, indicators related to the violation of the principle of adequate housing (in terms of ensuring the physical safety of occupants and protecting them from structural risks as well as other factors that may threaten their health) continue to rise, especially in the city of Tripoli, which has witnessed a series of building collapses since 2019.

As Lebanon's economic collapse intensifies, housing conditions are constantly deteriorating, and the capacity to restore and repair the houses is decreasing, especially for the most vulnerable in society. This situation poses a problem related to the deterioration of the built environment and the ability of already fractured buildings to withstand the consequences of natural disasters, and the consequences to the lives of their residents in the absence of alternative housing, and in the absence of any effective official response plan and strategy to manage disaster risks and ensure public safety.

## Inability to bear the escalating housing-related costs



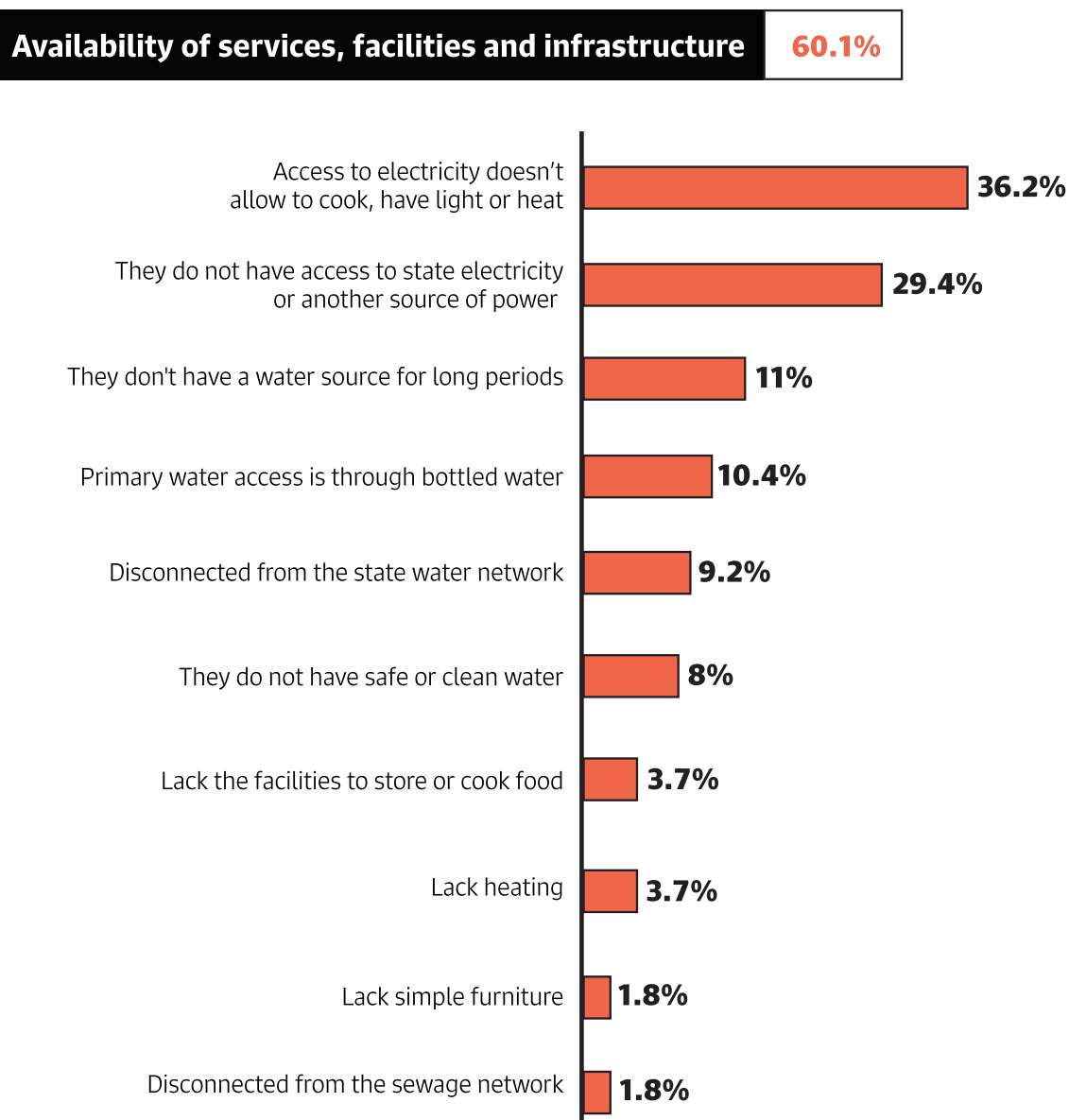
Among the cases that the Monitor analyzed for this report, 98 cases shared data on the value of the rent fees that the tenant owes, compared to their monthly income. Of these, 57.1% spent more than two-thirds of their income on housing, including 34.7% who spent more than half. Among tenants who reported accumulating rent payments, about 6.1% had accumulated rent for more than three months.

On the other hand, 16.6% of the total amount relied on inappropriate methods to secure the cost of housing, such as borrowing or requesting assistance to secure part or all of housing expenses (8%), or defaulting on rent to secure other needs (10.4%).

In light of the current economic crisis, with the increase of rental fees and the continuous deterioration of the value of the monthly income of a large part of the population in general and tenants in particular, housing costs are bound to constitute a worsening and escalating burden on tenants, while being disproportionate to income levels. Indeed, this was very visible in the cases observed, where 58.3% of reporting persons feel the risk of losing their homes due to the high cost. Consequently, housing costs threaten the financial capacities of individuals and families, and undermine the ability to meet other basic needs.

Moreover, the already distressed housing sector received a new blow on the first of February 2023, following the implementation of the decision to raise the official exchange rate from 1,500 L.L. to the dollar to 15,000 L.L., which was taken without any consideration of its consequences on rent fees for tenants (old and new alike), and the installments of owners who still pay for the purchase of their homes. As such, and in the absence of any serious alterations on wages which reflect the ongoing inflation, housing costs have increased tenfold, including taxes and service charges.

## Deterioration of services, facilities and infrastructure



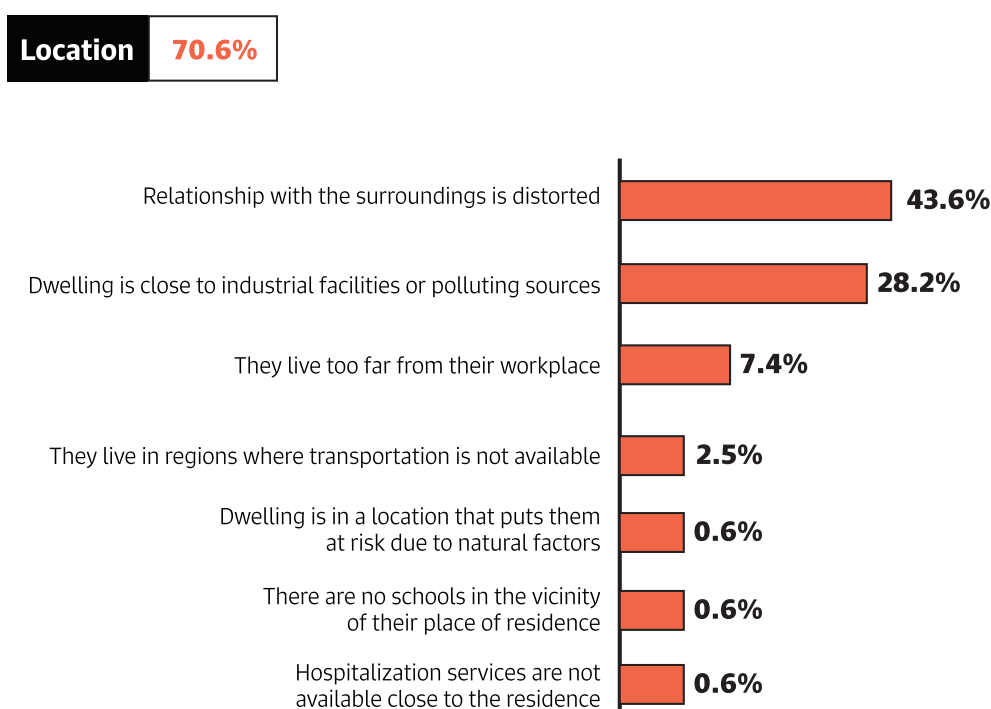


Decent and adequate housing should offer some of the basic facilities required for health, security, comfort and nutrition. In reality, according to the documented cases, reporting persons lack the minimum services that make homes habitable. This was evident among the cases received by the Monitor, as the percentage of cases that do not have access to electricity or any other energy source such as a generator reached 29.4%. In addition, 36.2% of all cases do not have the necessary energy for cooking, heating and lighting, and 3.7% lack heating, in addition to a similar percentage that lacks the necessary equipment to store or cook food. Most of these cases came from Tripoli, Beirut and Bourj Hammoud and mainly affected Lebanese nationals and Syrian refugees.

On the other hand, with regard to the availability of drinking water, 8% of cases lack healthy or clean water and 10.4% of the reporting persons rely on bottled water from private water businesses as the main means of obtaining water, as the percentage of cases disconnected from the state water network reached 9.2%. Additionally, 11% of all reported cases reported missing a water source for long periods, with 4.9% unable to reach water for a full day or more.

It should be emphasized here that if these basic services are available, individuals or families usually incur high costs to secure them: from a subscription to state electricity, a private generator, a state water subscription, and bottled water from private water businesses, such that the value of these costs may even exceed the value of the total rental fees.

## Residential sites exposed to the risks of pollution and real estate speculation



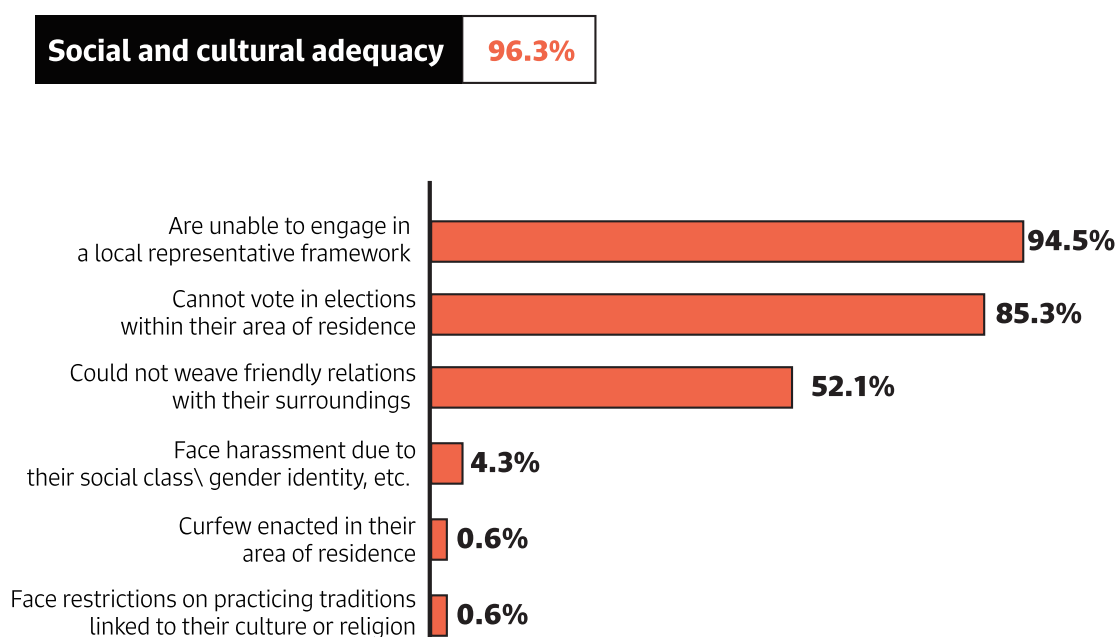
Referring back to the standards set by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adequate housing should not be in contaminated locations or close to sources of pollution that threaten residents' right to health. However, among the cases observed, 28.2% of reporting persons live in housing units located within an area close to industrial facilities or polluting sources, and the percentage of housing units located in an area that puts them at risk due to natural factors was 0.6%, both of which can negatively affect their health in the long term and poses a threat to their lives. The most prominent of these cases

came from areas close to landfills (Khaldeh, Bourj Hammoud, Saida landfill) or thermal power plants (Deir Ammar and Zouk plants), which are sometimes located in densely populated areas and usually do not observe the necessary health standards.

Additionally, housing is considered decent when residents' relationship with their surroundings is not distorted. However, according to reports, 43.6% of the cases live in neighborhoods that are subject to demolition, real estate speculation or major projects, which destroys the urban fabric and also foreshadows waves of evictions that may worsen in the future of these neighborhoods.

Adequate housing must also be situated in a location that provides access to employment options, health-care services, schools and other social facilities. It is worth taking into account the costs involved in transporting between one's residence and these facilities, which may manifest as additional pressure on household budgets. However, according to the cases documented in this report, 7.4% of cases live far away from their place of work, incurring additional transportation expenses, and 2.5% live in areas where transportation is not available. Despite the decrease in the percentage of cases where there are no schools (0.6%) or hospitalization service (0.6%) nearby, a large number of children attend schools close to their residence (94 children) in addition to 6 students in universities close to their residence. These cases are exposed to an additional threat in the event that their families are forced to evacuate their homes and do not find another home in the same vicinity, in light of the high cost of transportation, which will lead to these families incurring additional expenses for housing.

## Social and cultural discrimination



The right to adequate housing cannot be considered in isolation from the full enjoyment of other human rights such as the right to freely express cultural identity (freedom of expression), the right to social integration, the right to freedom of association or to form local committees, and the right to participate in public decision-making, especially in the case of marginalized groups.

As for the cases monitored during this period, 52.1% expressed that they could not establish friendly relations with their environments, and 94.5% of them stated that they were unable to engage in a local regulatory framework, as there were no building or neighborhood committees or that they could not

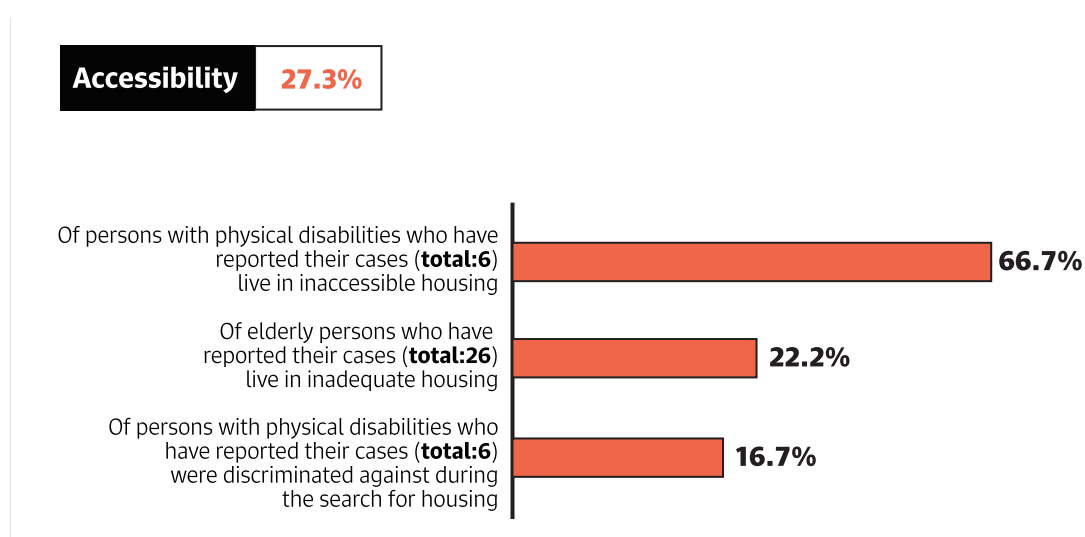
be included in these committees, if any. In 4.3% of reported cases, callers reported not feeling safe in their surroundings due to harassment they have faced as a result of their class position, gender identity or sexuality. Additionally, 0.6% are confronted with curfews (imposed by several municipalities) directed against refugees in the public spaces of their area of residence, and a similar proportion of reporting persons face restrictions on practicing traditions linked to their culture or religion.

While international law stipulates the need to ensure access to housing, free from any kind of discrimination in treatment, some individuals are vulnerable and exploited because of their diverse social, ethnic, cultural, gender or religious backgrounds as well as a lack of social, economic and legal privileges, all with the aim of imposing inadequate or unsafe housing conditions. They are also subjected to harassment and all forms of discrimination by their surroundings (the landlord or the agent), pressuring them to vacate or trying to impose unfair new conditions regarding rental fees. Also, if they report a violation of their housing rights and file complaints of harassment and assault, they are even more likely to be discriminated against by the security and judicial authorities.

Furthermore, 85.3% were unable to vote in municipal or parliamentary elections within their area of residence. Thus, most tenants<sup>22</sup>, and especially vulnerable groups of women, young people, refugees, impoverished persons and others, are unable to effectively participate in public decision-making and are therefore excluded from various important issues for their own community.

Residents threatened with eviction are also hindered from access to alternatives to legal marginalization, as the unjust Lebanese legal framework is not matched by social solidarity and collective support, which are usually expected in cases of injustice. Thus, the current housing rights framework suffers from multiple levels of erosion, as a result of the lack of protections offered by both the law and society, which leaves tenants alone to confront market laws and abusive practices by landlords.

## Ignoring the needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities



Of the total number of individuals affected by housing threats, 6 are persons with physical disabilities, 66.7% of whom live in inadequate housing, given that either their apartments or their building entrances and elevators are not equipped for wheelchair access. 16.7% of them also reported being subject to discrimination during their search for housing.

<sup>22</sup> This applies to residents in general, not just tenants, due to the “registration system” in Lebanon, since official paperwork is linked to the place of registration rather than the place of residence and the payment of taxes.



As for the elderly, 22.2% reported that they also live in an apartment that does not suit their needs, such that the building is not equipped with an elevator or safe staircase. The diversity in the needs of people with disabilities as well as the elderly is often not taken into account. Their rights to live within their community, in adequate housing, and to safe and independent movement are neglected despite the existence of Law 220/2000 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Lebanon's signature of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



*"because living is more expensive than my salary"*



## VI. Laws, programmes and practices needed to ensure that housing is affordable and decent to all

Through the Monitor's interventions (see graph) to provide the necessary legal or social support for situations facing these threats, we have clearly seen the extent to which laws are insufficient in protecting the right to adequate housing in Lebanon. These interventions, especially legal ones, have demonstrated the limitations of the available legal framework, particularly with regard to the Lebanese Rent Law, in the sustenance, protection and promotion of the right to housing in Lebanon. In this context, it seems clear that the law does not ensure sufficient sustainability in housing, as it guarantees the continuity of the lease for only the first three consecutive years from the date of signing the contract, which is not enough time to ensure the stability and security of housing for individuals or families. It also confirms the clear bias of the law in encouraging real estate investment instead of sustainable housing. After the expiry of this period, the landlord has the right to raise rent fees without control, independently from any form of criteria related to income levels, annual inflation rates or other critical factors.

Moreover, the law also requires the landlord not to deprive tenants of fully benefiting from the rental and to ensure that others do not interfere with them during this period. In reality, however, it does not provide effective protection against the landlord's abusive practices, which do not constitute a punishable offense. As such, there exists no deterrents to landlords from abusive practices or tenant harassment, as in many cases the tenants will not be able to file a complaint to defend their rights.

With regard to evictions, there is no real control over its practice in Lebanon, despite the comments issued by the International Committee in charge of monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in response to the reports on the right to housing sent by the Lebanese state in 1993 and 2015, which clearly emphasize the need to establish clear eviction mechanisms. Yet, most evictions carried out in Lebanon remain illegal and/or involve arbitrary practices. In the event of their forced eviction, tenants also do not have any legal mechanisms or judicial references to resort to in order to ensure their rights and claim compensation or restitution of the leased property.

International law has stressed that evictions should not expose tenants to human rights violations and/or result in their displacement. It additionally stipulates that the state must be accountable for taking all appropriate measures, to the maximum of its available resources, in order to ensure the provision of adequate alternative housing for evicted residents, especially in the event that they are unable to meet their needs. Nevertheless, there is no real protection for the right to housing in Lebanon, as the eviction and displacement of the most marginalized communities is rampant, and the state remains lacking in its readiness to protect individuals and families from this phenomenon. In light of the current crisis, this situation is expected to become even worse.

In fact, the only measure adopted by local authorities in this regard is to prohibit citizens from their right to occupy public spaces through their continuous expulsion from public spheres, which is a strategy deployed in an attempt to cover up the manifestations of homelessness and deny the existence of this structural problem, instead of implementing serious and sustainable solutions to it, including housing alternatives for tenants in the event of their forced eviction.

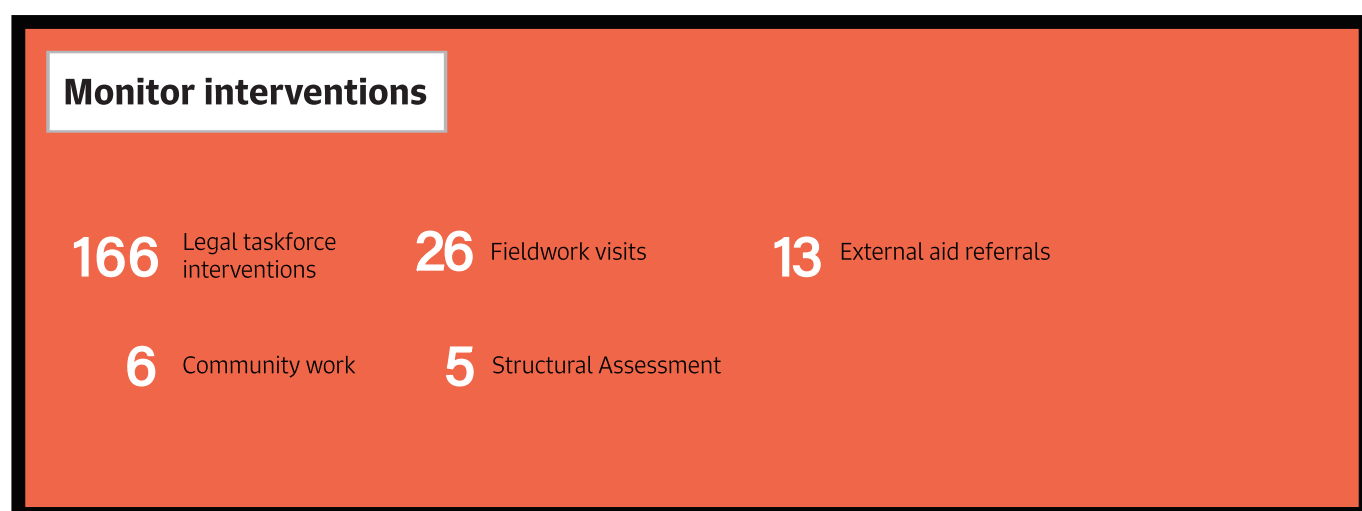
Thus, today more than ever, promoting the right to housing and the need to develop an emergency plan within a comprehensive policy which takes all segments of society, including families, workers, the elderly, women, persons with disabilities, students and refugees, and others into account, is a pressing priority.



Following its assertion that the right to housing “is one of the basic constitutional rights based on international laws,” the Lebanese Constitutional Council stated that “the provision of housing to citizens is a goal of constitutional value, the legislative and procedural authorities should formulate policies and laws to achieve it” in one of its decisions issued in 2014. As such, we see the need to implement a comprehensive law on the right to housing in Lebanon, the components of which are the following:

- Providing and producing decent housing for impoverished, marginalized and vulnerable communities, in accordance with the Housing Law 58/1965 and the Municipalities Law 118/1977.
- A tax policy that controls real estate speculation, preserves the social value of land by preventing price inflation, and contributes to maintaining a stock of affordable apartments and reducing vacancies within them.
- An active role for the state in regulating residential rent, including imposing flexible controls on raising rent prices and restricting evictions in line with its international obligations.
- Legislative and institutional frameworks supporting various forms of tenure and its arrangements, such as collective tenure and cooperative housing, which would provide affordable housing for low-income people.
- Programs and projects aimed at consolidating housing in informal areas, protecting it, and implementing solutions to improve its conditions.
- Promoting the establishment of local residents’ committees, and expanding their roles to include working for residential, social, economic and environmental rights at the level of neighborhoods, villages and regions, and to represent the community’s concerns and demands.

However, local and foreign support remains a necessity to work towards the promulgation of this law and push towards its adoption.



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