



Chronicles of Displacement

POLICY BRIEF

INVISIBLE REFUGE: SUPPORTING IDPS IN SELF-SETTLED ACCOMMODATIONS DURING THE 2024 HEZBOLLAH-ISRAEL WAR

JOELLE BOU GHANTOUS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The 2024 Hezbollah-Israel war displaced many individuals, exposing critical gaps in Lebanon's displacement response. While formal shelters received significant attention, challenges faced by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in self-settled accommodations remained underexplored. These individuals often faced limited access to humanitarian aid and essential services, exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. This reality underscored the urgent need to integrate independent housing into Lebanon's policy frameworks and humanitarian planning.

Recommendations:

1. Integrate Independent Housing into National Aid Framework

- Recognize self-settled accommodations in official policies to ensure equitable aid distribution.
- Provide essential services, food, and healthcare to IDPs in private housing.

2. Provide Cash Assistance to IDPs and Host Families

- Establish conditional cash transfer programs to help IDPs cover rent and basic expenses.
- Provide financial aid to host families to prevent resource depletion and mitigate tensions.

3. Develop a Database to Track IDP Needs and Locations

- Create a digital platform to register IDPs in self-settled accommodations and track needs in real-time.
- Ensure data accessibility for humanitarian organizations to improve response coordination.

4. Invest in Affordable and Durable Housing Initiatives

- Implement low-cost housing initiatives in partnership with NGOs and international donors.
- Support long-term displaced persons (LDPs) through subsidized housing and government-backed loans.

5. Enhance Community Engagement and Coordination

- Establish management committees with IDPs and host communities to foster integration and minimize conflict.
- Create feedback mechanisms to assess intervention effectiveness and inform future policies.

Implications:

1. Promotes equitable aid distribution.
2. Strengthens Lebanon's readiness for future displacement crises.
3. Reduces overcrowding in formal shelters by supporting self-settled accommodations.
4. Enhance resilience and improve the quality of life for displaced individuals and host communities.

Lebanon faced significant challenges in managing internal displacement during crises, and the 2024 Hezbollah-Israel war exposed weaknesses in its humanitarian response. By November 2024, over 886,000 individuals were displaced within Lebanon (Reuters, 2024), with many seeking refuge in self-settled accommodations¹. According to ChildFund Alliance, “22% of IDPs have chosen rental housing, [and] the majority of IDPs (46%) reside in host settings”. These choices, while offering privacy and dignity, posed difficulties in accessing aid and essential services.

Despite the establishment of official shelters, Lebanon’s response struggled to address the unique needs of IDPs in private accommodations, leading to significant strain on resources. Long-term needs, including reconstruction in heavily damaged areas like the South and Dahye, remain unmet, leaving many IDPs in precarious conditions.

Consequently, we asked **what were the key challenges faced by IDPs who did not seek refuge in formal shelters during the 2024 Hezbollah-Israel war, and how did their choices impact their access to essential services and overall well-being?**

This policy brief examined these challenges, evaluated existing frameworks and applied international best practices to recommend improvements for Lebanon’s crisis preparedness and inclusiveness.

A **mixed methodology** was used, combining desk research and Key Informant Interviews, with five participants: a municipal council member, a displaced individual in rental housing, a host family, an IDP with a host family, and a church worker providing aid to IDPs.

¹ In this policy brief, self-settled accommodation refers to any housing solution independently chosen and financed by displaced individuals without direct aid or assistance including renting apartments, staying with relatives or friends, or moving to secondary residences.

Challenges Faced by IDPs in Self-Settled Accommodations:

An analysis of the displacement patterns revealed that Lebanon's response disproportionately supported IDPs in formal shelters, leaving those in self-settled accommodations inadequately assisted.

Rented Homes:

Rented accommodations presented a dual challenge: while they provided a degree of privacy and autonomy, they also strained host resources and limited access to humanitarian aid. An anonymous informant highlighted the financial strain faced by those in rented homes, where in addition to high rental costs, IDPs were often responsible for furnishing apartments and covering living expenses without external assistance (Anonymous key informant, 2024).

Living with Host Families:

According to a municipal council member from Debel, overcrowding was a significant challenge in private housing, where multiple families shared a single household. This resulted in insufficient living space, strained access to sanitation facilities and a lack of privacy. These conditions heightened health risks and contributed to psychological stress among IDPs. The strain on host resources was particularly significant when hosts covered all expenses for IDPs, including food, utilities and other necessities.

It is worth noting that some IDPs chose formal shelters over relatives' home believing they would better support their needs (Key Informant Interview, 2025).

Support from Local Community Groups:

Support provided by local community groups and organizations helped fill some gaps in private accommodations by providing food, medicine and essential goods (Key Informant Interview, 2025). However, these efforts were mainly based on informal networks, which limited their reach and effectiveness.

Impact on IDPs Well-being and Integration:

The well-being of IDPs was impacted by scattered shelters and limited support. While private accommodations provided privacy and autonomy, they also introduced challenges compromising psychological, social and physical well-being. These challenges increased stress and limited social integration (Anonymous key informant, 2024).

IDPs living with host families faced overcrowding, lack of privacy and strained relationships. Integration was particularly difficult for those from different regions, such as South Lebanon or the Bekaa, due to differences in background and community ties.

The lack of access to humanitarian aid further exacerbated their vulnerability and isolation as those in private housing were frequently overlooked by organizations.

Consequences of Unequal Aid Distribution:

Unequal aid distribution worsened the situation as humanitarian organizations struggled to reach private accommodations, leaving IDPs with inconsistent support. Formal shelters receiving aid from NGOs and INGOs still faced significant challenges. Overcrowding led to instability and a lack of privacy, while essential services such as clean water and electricity were often insufficient (Debel Municipal Council Member, 2024).

Financial strain, particularly for those reliant on seasonal agricultural work, forced many to seek refuge in formal shelters. The war disrupted their employment, compounding vulnerabilities and increasing strain on shelter resources (Debel Municipal Council Member, 2024).

Recurring Challenges and Continued Inaction:

During the 2006 Lebanon-Israel war, public schools and community centers were repurposed as formal shelters, causing overcrowding and lack of privacy (UNHCR, Lebanon Crisis Response Report, 2006); and IDPs experienced stress, insecurity and tensions (Toole, 2011), mirroring internal conflicts observed in 2024. These challenges led many IDPs to seek refuge in self-settled accommodations, where they also encountered limited access to humanitarian aid.

The challenges faced in 2024 are strikingly like those experienced in 2006, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive policies that provide equitable support for all displaced individuals, regardless of their shelter type. Despite enduring these challenges, no significant actions were taken to improve the conditions for displaced individuals.

Policy Options for Addressing IDP Challenges:

To address challenges faced in self-settled accommodations during the 2024 war, three policy options can be considered:

Policy Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Enhancing Support for Self-Settled Accommodations via Direct Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reduces overcrowding in official shelters.Provides immediate relief.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Uneven distribution.Requires robust tracking systems
Improving Coordination Among Humanitarian Actors for Centralized Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Efficient use of resources.Prevents duplication of efforts.Ensures aid reaches all IDPs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Bureaucratic delays.Logistical obstacles.Fragmented political landscape
Legal Recognition and Policy framework for Independent housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Legal protection and security for hosts and IDPs.Strengthens privately managed accommodations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires legal reforms.Resistance from local authorities and landlords.

Evaluating Global Best Practices to Enhance Lebanon's Displacement Framework:

Global best practices can provide **valuable insights** to address Lebanon's IDP challenges. This table shows effective approaches that can inform Lebanon's displacement framework.

Country	Best practice	Description	Lessons for Lebanon
Colombia	<i>Community-Based Approaches</i>	Local communities provided shelter and support to IDPs through mutual assistance networks and community-led initiatives (Miller, 2024).	Fosters solidarity by encouraging host communities to support IDPs.
Jordan	<i>Cash-based Assistance</i>	Cash transfers and vouchers empowered IDPs to make their own decisions about housing, food, and healthcare (UNHCR, ReliefWeb, 2017).	Implement cash-based interventions to help IDPs meet their needs and reduce dependency on traditional aid.
Turkey	<i>Technology-Enhanced Aid Distribution</i>	Digital platforms registered refugees and monitored aid distribution in real-time ensuring transparency (UNHCR, (n.d.)) (AIDA, 2024).	Develop digital systems to track IDPs in private housing, ensuring equitable aid distribution and minimizing risks of misallocation.
Uganda	<i>Multi-level Coordination Mechanisms for IDP Policies</i>	At the national level, Uganda ensured policy oversight through committees, while local committees handled implementation (Government of Uganda, 2004).	Establishing national and local committees to ensure cohesive policy implementation and oversight.
Somalia	<i>Housing Programs for IDPs</i>	Construction of low-cost housing for long-term displaced communities (Committee, n.d.).	Develop affordable housing for IDPs and host communities.
Georgia	<i>Privatization of Collective shelters</i>	IDPs in government-owned collective centers meeting minimum living standards can self-privatize their living units for a symbolic price (UNHCR, Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia: A Gap Analysis, 2009).	Explore self-privatization of public housing for IDPs for a symbolic price.

Overview of Policies for IDPs in Self-Settled Accommodations:

During the recent Hezbollah-Israel war, several policies were implemented to support IDP's residing in self-settled accommodations. This table summarizes some of these policies.

Policy	Description
Activation of emergency shelters by UNRWA	The UNRWA launched an Emergency Response opening emergency shelters to accommodate IDPs.
Flash Appeal for Lebanon by UN-OCHA	The UN-OCHA issued a Flash Appeal to address the needs of over a million IDPs.
National Registry for IDPs	In December 2024, an agreement was signed between UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and the WFP to register IDPs in a national registry, laying the foundation for coordinated assistance.
Rental Subsidy Program for IDPs	The Lebanese government introduced a rental subsidy program.
Health and Sanitation Services for Independent housing	The Ministry of Health partnered with international organizations to expand health services.
Financial Assistance for Host Families	The Lebanese Government worked with humanitarian organizations to provide financial assistance to host families accommodating IDPs.
Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2024	The LCRP's framework provided a basis for addressing displaced populations, offering emergency shelters, healthcare, and food assistance. This policy relied on partnerships with local municipalities and INGOs.

Impact and Effectiveness of the Policies:

These policies had a **mixed impact**. Immediate measures like emergency shelters and expanded health services benefited vulnerable IDPs, preventing worse humanitarian outcomes, however the limited reach of such measures left IDPs with inadequate support. Structural initiatives, such as the national IDP registry, were crucial for long-term coordination but had a limited impact during the crisis. The LCRP highlighted poor access to services for IDPs outside formal shelters, while health and sanitation services for independent housing were more effective.

The **effectiveness** of the policies **varied widely depending on their design and execution**. Financial assistance to host families and rental subsidies provided relief to some, but inequities in access reduced overall effectiveness. Overwhelming the infrastructure further hindered the effectiveness of interventions. Structural policies like the LCRP and the national IDP registry showed high potential but fell short due to their underfunding and the delayed implementation.

Cost Challenges:

Supporting IDPs in self-settled accommodations can be **more cost-effective than establishing and maintaining formal shelters**. However, limited resources and funding, particularly for long-term initiatives, prevented the expansion of critical programs such as the LCRP and the national IDP registry.

Logistical Challenges:

The dispersed nature of IDPs increased [administrative and logistical expenses](#). Coordination among stakeholders was insufficient, resulting in fragmented efforts leaving self-settled populations without adequate support. The response also overlooked the needs of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

Logistical complexities in reaching dispersed populations, combined with environmental and social challenges, compounded the difficulties in meeting the surge in demand.

Strengthening Future Crisis Response:

To prepare for [future displacement crises](#), Lebanon needs a strong plan with early warning systems, contingency plans and coordinated response mechanisms. The government and humanitarian organizations should collect and analyze data to identify at-risk populations. Additionally, strengthening the role of civil society alongside the government will ensure a better response. Finally, flexible policies with scalable interventions will minimize delays in delivering essential services during crises.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Addressing IDP's challenges requires a comprehensive approach to secure durable solutions for future crises. Past interventions have been hindered by key factors, necessitating more effective strategies. The following recommendations aim to not only address immediate needs but also pave the way for long-term resilience and stability.

1. Shelter Infrastructure and Living Conditions		
Category	Responsible Entity	Timeline (months)
IDPs with Host Families	○ MoSA & local NGOs , can assess host families' capacity through surveys, questionnaires and interviews.	3-6
	○ Municipalities can map local areas and support MoSA's evaluation process.	2-4
	○ International Organizations can provide technical expertise for displacement management.	4-6
	○ Local NGOs can identify vulnerable families, distribute aid and address community tensions.	3-6
	○ Ministry of Finance can allocate funds for financial support to host families.	4
IDPs in Rented Houses	○ Local NGOs & UNHCR can identify vulnerable IDPs and facilitate the distribution of conditional cash assistance, with funding from International donors .	2-4
	○ UNHCR can coordinate programs and ensure needs-based assistance.	3-4
	○ Ministry of Justice can ensure that rental agreements are fair protect IDPs from exploitation.	4
IDPs in Private Accommodations	○ Municipalities & Humanitarian Organizations can identify areas requiring repairs and ensure legal compliance.	2
	○ Ministry of Public Works, NGOs & INGOs can oversee repairs, address IDP needs and assist in materials distribution.	3-5
	○ International Organizations can design subsidized housing and loan programs.	3-4
Long- term displaced Persons (LDPs)	○ The private sector can offer expertise and resources for cost-effective construction.	12-18
	○ Ministry of Public Works & the World Bank can lead the construction of low-cost housing units by providing technical expertise.	12-24
	○ International Donors & Central Bank of Lebanon can fund and design subsidized housing and loan programs, ensuring that long-term solutions are both feasible and sustainable.	12-18

2. Coordination and Policy Development		
Responsible Entity		Timeline (months)
Municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lead the establishment and operation of coordination hubs, addressing local IDP needs. ○ Partner with the government, UN Agencies and NGOs to align strategies and pool resources. ○ Set up local feedback channels to gather community input and address concerns. 	<p>4-6</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>3-4</p>
UN Agencies and NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide technical assistance, training and financial resources for hub operations. ○ Collaborate with municipalities to ensure hubs are effective and offer real-time support. 	<p>4-6</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Ministry of Telecommunications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop and maintain infrastructure for centralized and decentralized data management systems. ○ Collaborate with UNHCR to integrate secure technology for regional coordination. ○ Create a centralized digital platform to map IDPs, assess needs and consolidate data, supported by mobile data collection units. 	<p>6-8</p> <p>4-6</p> <p>4-6</p>
MoSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coordinate among local authorities, international agencies, NGOs and IDPs to ensure inclusivity. ○ Facilitate dialogue among stakeholders and oversee the implementation of coordination hubs. 	<p>3-4</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

3. Formalizing Shelter and Cash Assistance Programs for IDPs		
Responsible Entity		Timeline (months)
Local Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify eligible IDPs and provide logistical support for cash distribution. ○ Collaborate with UN Agencies and donors to set criteria and monitor disbursement. 	<p>2-3</p> <p>3-5</p>
UN Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide funding, technical expertise and data collection for cash programs. ○ Partner with local authorities to monitor and evaluate distribution processes. 	<p>4-6</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

International Donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supply financial resources and ensure accountability and transparency. ○ Coordinate with UN agencies and local authorities to align fund usage with IDP needs. 	Ongoing 3-6
MoSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop and oversee shelter formalization programs in collaboration with local housing cooperatives and municipalities. 	4-6
Ministry of Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Draft and enforce legal frameworks for land-use and shelter agreements. ○ Collaborate with legal aid organizations to ensure fairness and enforcement. 	6-8 Ongoing
Ministry of Telecommunications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop technology and infrastructure for secure, user friendly systems. ○ Collaborate with UNHCR and private tech firms for system functionality and security. 	6-8 Ongoing

4. Community Engagement		
Responsible Entity		Timeline (months)
MoSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coordinate management communities ensuring equal representation of host communities and IDPs. ○ Work with municipalities to identify representatives and improve communication. ○ Organize regular dialogues to reduce tensions, with support from UNHCR and municipalities. 	4-6 4-6 Ongoing
Municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partner with MoSA to provide logistical support for community formation. ○ Ensure dialogues are widespread and address specific local issues. 	4-6 Ongoing
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provides technical and financial support for management communities. 	4-6
Local NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Help form mutual aid networks and ensure their sustainability. 	3-4

CLOSING REMARKS:

To support IDPs and strengthen Lebanon's preparedness, combining immediate relief with long-term planning can rebuild a resilient and inclusive response framework. Equitable and coordinated solutions are essential; and inclusive policies integrating self-settled IDPs into aid frameworks are crucial for reducing vulnerabilities and ensuring a lasting impact. As reconstruction continues and displacement persists, these solutions ensure that IDPs in private housing aren't left behind.

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