

Lebanon: Aid Security Insight

October 2020

In the afternoon of 4 August 2020, two explosions occurred at Beirut's seaport causing over 180 deaths and injuring more than 6,000 people. The blast destroyed several major hospitals, some 20 clinics, and over 120 schools. The blast happened against a background of a deep political, financial, and economic crisis. The coping capacity of services were already stretched, compounded by the spread of COVID-19. Today, there are a wide range of humanitarian needs in Lebanon, a country where refugees make up 30% of the population. The number of daily COVID-19 infections rose sharply at the end of August and has been steadily climbing since then.

This document provides information on safety and security concerns aid agencies responding to the wide range of needs in the country should consider in their duty of care responsibilities towards their staff and local partners. The analysis is based on security incidents and concerns shared by ten aid agencies through the Aid in Danger project. It provides a unique insight into the environment in which aid agencies work. It is based on data for January 2015 and June 2020. Overall there has been no significant change in humanitarian access in Lebanon so far. This document describes the security trends affecting aid observed over the past five years.

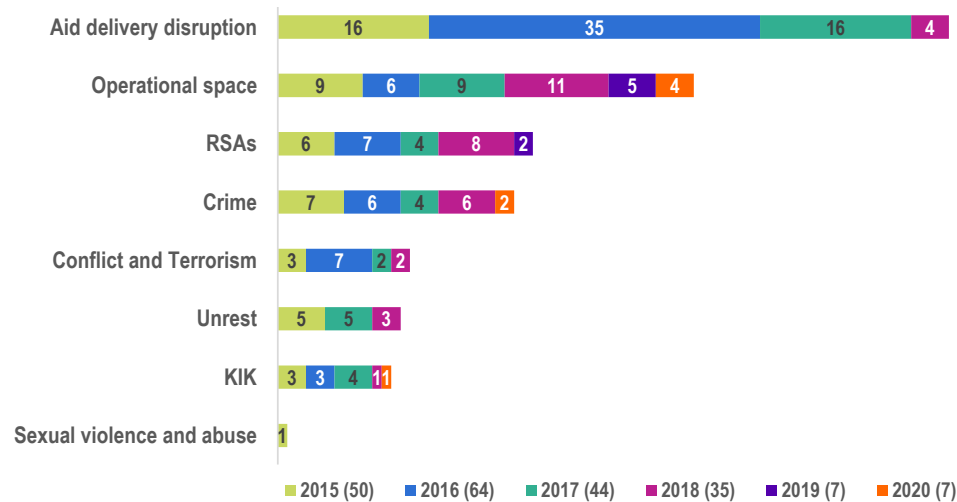
Reported concerns affecting aid delivery in Lebanon

- **Aid delivery disruption: Common in the past.** Threatening behaviour by local individuals and beneficiaries towards NGO staff members, notably over beneficiary lists, and aid contracts and activities.
- **Operational space: Most frequently reported issue in 2020.** The spread of COVID-19. Virus containment measures. Protests in the country. NGO staff member arrests and detention; threats and intimidation.
- **Road Safety Accidents (RSAs): Common.** However, there have been no incidents reported in the first half of 2020. 15% of all reported RSA incidents caused NGO staff injuries.
- **Crime:** Types of crime affecting aid workers: **Petty crime: Common.** Includes burglaries, break-ins, fraud, thefts. **Violent crime: Occasionally.** Includes armed/unarmed robbery, sexual violence and abuse, stray bullets, and arson.
- **Weapons use:** 14% of NGO-related security incidents involved weapons use.
- **Critical events: Infrequent:** One international female NGO staff member was sexually assaulted and killed in 2017; two NGO staff were injured and eight physically assaulted since January 2015.
- **No changes to the country-typical patterns have been identified in 2020:** The main threats continue to be related to operational space and RSAs. There have been recent reports of NGO staff members being threatened over aid contracts and activities.

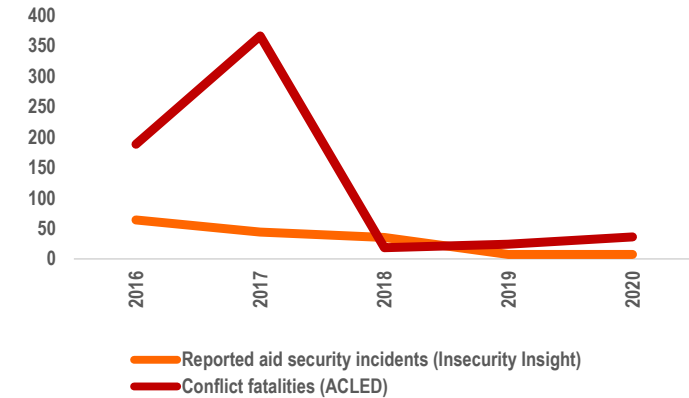
Long-term specific patterns of aid security risks in Lebanon, based on data January 2015-June 2020

Threatening behaviour towards NGO staff related to aid delivery practices is the most common concern.

Aid in Danger project-reported security incidents, by incident type (2016 to 2020)



Aid in Danger project-reported security incidents and conflict fatalities* (2016 to 2020)



The fall in reported security incidents mirrors the fall in conflict fatalities in Lebanon.

*Source: [Lebanon Conflict Data](#) by [The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project](#)

Aid delivery disruption: NGO staff members threatened over beneficiary lists, aid contracts and aid activities. Incidents were frequently reported in northern and eastern Lebanon.

Operational space: Arrests and detentions, mostly at airport immigration and in residency as well as documentation checks and searches.

Road safety accidents: No NGO staff member deaths or injuries were reported between January and June 2020. 73% of reported RTA incidents did not cause NGO staff injuries.

Crime: NGO property was damaged in March 2020 in the Beqaa governorate. In three-quarters of reported crime incidents the perpetrators were unarmed.

Conflict and Terrorism: IED attacks targeting cafés, churches, municipality buildings and military checkpoints can occur. Such events frequently lead to security measures to protect staff, assets, and programmes with consequences for aid access.

Unrest: Visible signs of the dysfunctional state bureaucracy caused public outrage that may lead to further unrest and violence. Demonstrations over difficult living conditions and tightened security measures in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19 reported in northern Lebanon from March to May 2020. Following the explosion on 4 August, protests against the government have increased. Necessary security measures by aid agencies during demonstrations, civilian unrest or rioting may affect aid access.

Aid workers killed, injured and kidnapped (KIK): Mostly unarmed assaults by fellow staff members, beneficiaries and authorities. Male national NGO staff member assaulted during protests in January 2020 in Zahle.

Sexual violence: An international NGO staff member was sexually assaulted and killed in Beirut in 2017.

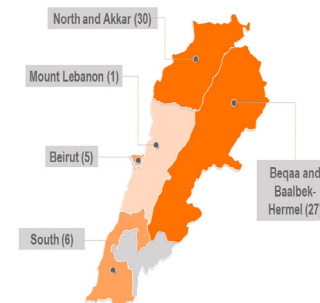


Aid delivery disruption: Carried out by locals and beneficiaries notably over beneficiary lists, and aid contracts and activities.

- Incidents were frequently reported in northern and eastern Lebanon; less so in Beirut and southern Lebanon. No incidents were reported in Beirut between January and June 2020.
- Three-quarters of aid delivery disruption incidents involved threatening behaviour towards NGO staff members over beneficiary lists, aid contracts and aid activities.
- Several Syrian beneficiaries were arrested for failing to present legal identification and residency papers during raids carried out by state authorities on refugee camps along the Lebanon-Syria border areas.

Comment: Disruptions caused by food insecurity, high unemployment levels and high inflation rates. Public services have become over-stretched, notably as a result of Lebanon's hosting of over 1.5 million Syrian refugees. An estimated 41% of the population are [below](#) the poverty line. Tensions have grown between Syrian refugees and host communities, in particular over competition for jobs.

Aid in Danger project-reported known locations of aid delivery disruption events



Operational space: Arrests and detentions of NGO staff members; threats and intimidation.

- Over half of operational space incidents reported are NGO staff member arrests or detentions at airport immigration, during random documentation checks, often following social media postings or an RSA incident (see below for further information).
- In February 2020, two NGO staff members conducting needs assessment in South Lebanon (Tyre) were stopped by intelligence officers who checked their IDs and ordered staff to go to a military base in Tyre to clarify the NGO's right to operate in area. After an hour, both staff were released and permitted to continue the assessment the next day.
- Threats, including death threats via WhatsApp, as well as intimidation of NGO staff members by past employees, failed job applicants, and disgruntled contracted drivers and construction contractors were also reported in 2020.
- In March 2020, a landlord threatened an NGO team via phone, claiming he would keep WASH materials if his request to change the location of a latrine away from a beneficiary's residence in Zahle was not met..

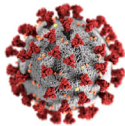
Comment: Legal documentation issues are a concern – including risks of fines, arrests, detentions, exploitation, and deportation as well as Hezbollah-member interference in NGO activities.



Unrest: Widespread demonstrations and clashes with police can disrupt the delivery of aid.

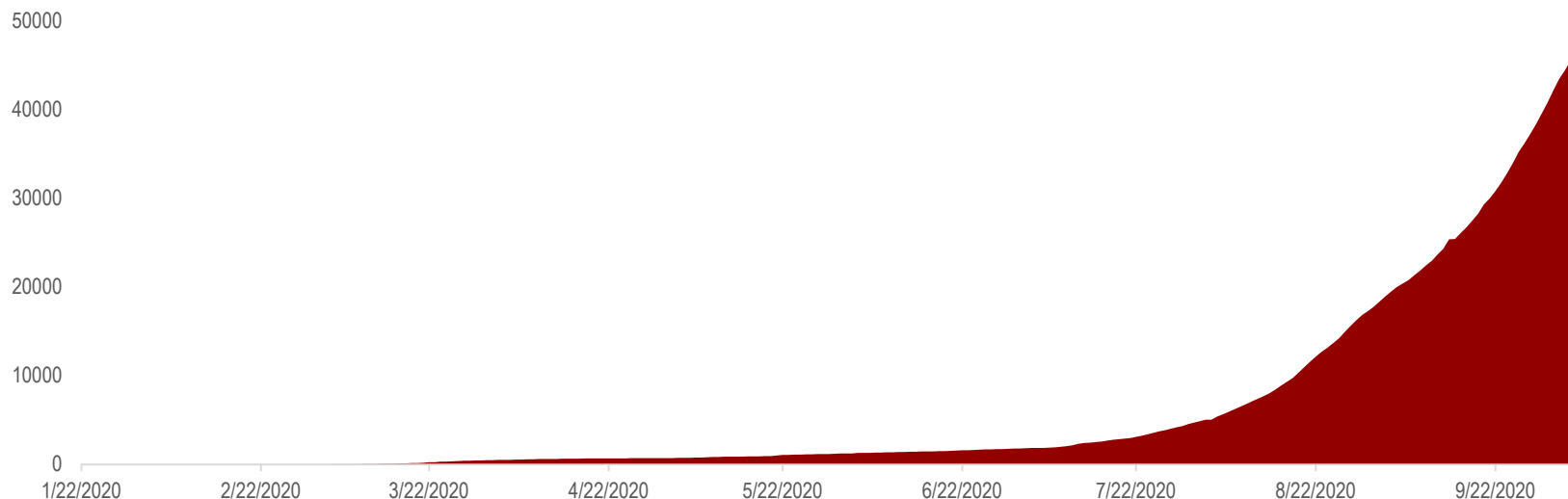
- Unrest rarely directly affects aid agencies but often impacts upon operational space.
- 76% of unrest incidents reported demonstrations. NGOs frequently restricted staff movements due to demonstrations.
- No reports were identified that involved NGO staff members being directly affected by clashes with police.
- Demonstrations were held as a result of difficult living conditions, and tightened security measures imposed in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19 were reported in northern Lebanon between March and May 2020. In September 2020, hundreds of Palestinians demonstrated at the Rachidiye refugee camp against the normalising of ties between UAE, Bahrain, and Israel. Protesters burned pictures of flags and leaders of the US and Israel.

Comment: Anti-government protests following the 04 August explosion and over COVID-19 lockdown measures is a concern. Roadblocks and vandalism against state-owned infrastructure, politicians' residences, political offices, media offices and financial structures frequently reported. Unrest is further driven by a precarious political power-sharing agreement, the presence of Hezbollah, and growing inequality. Demonstrations are mostly peaceful; however, they can turn violent if politically tinged movements involve Hezbollah's presence. Responses by security forces are generally forceful and the use of batons, shields and tear gas by riot police is common.



COVID-19 and Lebanon

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Lebanon* (January to September 2020)



Total reported cases of COVID-19 in Lebanon have dramatically risen since later August. *Source: [John Hopkins University](#)

Surge in COVID-19 cases in September

- The absence of a long-term strategy, poor implementation of the country's post-lockdown reopening, mistrust of the government, poor communication, and sometimes-contradictory policies have meant new measures are often resisted and flouted, contributing to the spike in infections. In addition, the 04 August Beirut blast caused people to mix more with others outside of their households and immediate social circles.
- At the start of October, night curfews and bar closures were introduced, and over 160 towns were locked-down in an effort to stem the spread of COVID-19.
- In April, high numbers of COVID-19 cases were reported in Bsharre town in North Governorate, two hours away from Beirut. Rural migration from urban areas as the country went into lockdown along with high numbers of relatives living together, may have facilitated the spread of the virus in the area. A two-week total lockdown came into effect on April 10 with soldiers patrolling the streets.

Example of recent COVID-19 events impacting aid security and access:

- On 12 September 2020, Palestinian refugees in the Ein El Hilweh refugee camp in Saida, South governorate demonstrated outside the Red Cross office building in the camp, demanding that their family members in the Roumieh prison be protected amid the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Similarly, in Sad El Baouchriye, Mount Lebanon governorate, Nepalese citizens demonstrated outside the Nepal Consulate, demanding the Nepalese government return them to Nepal after international flights were cancelled or re-scheduled.

If you are interested in the latest available data on COVID-19 related violence impacting aid and health operations, then explore [this](#) dataset to find out where and when incidents were reported so far in 2020. Or visit our dedicated [COVID-19 website](#) for previous bulletins.

Crime: Violent crime, including armed/unarmed robbery, sexual violence, stray bullets, arson. Petty crime, including burglaries, break-ins, fraud, thefts.

- Actual and attempted armed robberies, break-ins, burglaries, fraud, sexual violence, and abuse (see below), thefts and fraudulent activity by NGO staff members, reported by partner agencies.
- Incidents were frequently reported in eastern Lebanon, less so in Beirut and southern Lebanon. No incidents were identified in Beirut between January and June 2020.

Type of location

- **Roads:** A third of crime incidents occurred by the roadside: actual and attempted armed robbery of NGO staff members in NGO vehicles in Beqaa (2015-10, 2015-12); stray bullets injured an NGO staff member and damaged three NGO vehicles.
- **Project sites:** Arson attacks, damaged tents, cash stolen from project centres.
- **Residences:** Burglaries and break-ins. Personal assets were taken, but no NGO staff members were present.
- **Offices:** Break-ins and theft.

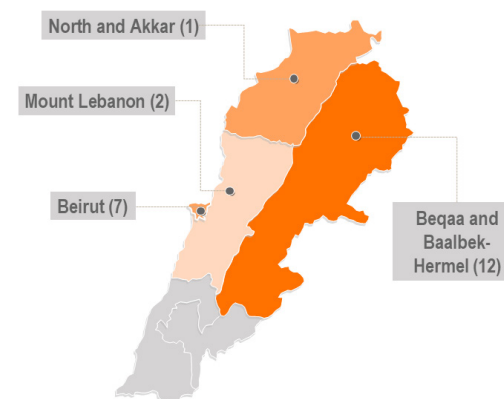
Weapon use

- Unarmed: In three-quarters of reported crime incidents, the perpetrators were unarmed.
- Armed: Five reported crime incidents involving firearms occurred during road travel. There was an arson attack at IDP camp in Beqaa governorate reported in April 2015.

Comment: Petty crime is quite common in densely populated urban centres. Tripoli is a hub for petty crime and foreigners may be specifically targeted. Gender-based assaults and violent crime directed towards Syrian refugees is a concern. Organised criminal gangs operate sophisticated drug-smuggling networks throughout Lebanon, using the Mediterranean coast as a gateway to Europe.

Violence associated with organised gangs was reported in the Aarsal area and Beqaa Valley, where many makeshift refugee camps are located. Reports of locals carrying assault rifles and explosives, including hand grenades and mortar rounds.

Aid in Danger project-reported known locations of crime incidents



Sexual violence and abuse: Available reports attribute this violence to local males.

- A female international staff member for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (formerly DfID) was sexually assaulted and killed by an Uber driver in Beirut in December 2017.
- There was another sexual assault of a female NGO staff member in the street in Beirut by a local male.

Aid workers killed, injured and kidnapped (KIK): Mostly unarmed assaults by authorities, beneficiaries, and staff members.

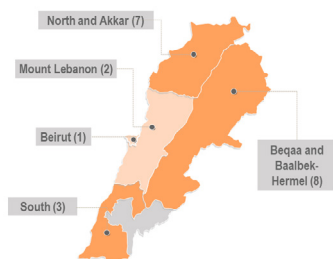
- 20% of KIK incidents involved the use of weapons.
- An NGO staff member was shot by a stray round, and an NGO deminer was injured during demining activities..



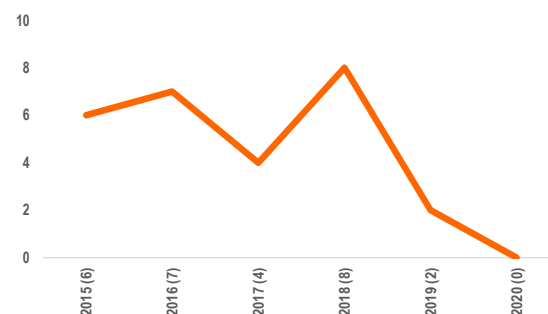
Road safety accidents (RSAs): Poor infrastructure and reckless driving.

- There have been no incidents reported in the first half of 2020. It is unclear if this is due to lockdown measures or improvements to road safety.
- 27 vehicle aid-worker-related RSA incidents were identified by the Aid in Danger project between January 2015 and June 2020.
- 15% of incidents caused NGO staff injuries. There were no reports of RSAs causing NGO staff member deaths. However, five children were injured in five separate NGO-related RTAs between March 2016 and November 2017.
- In August 2017, a male NGO staff member was detained for three days following an RTA in Beqaa governorate that injured a civilian. The staff member was released after family of injured victim claimed responsibility and liability.

Aid in Danger project-reported known locations of RSAs



Aid in Danger project identified RSA incidents, by year



Comment: High vehicle density – there are over 1.5 million registered vehicles for a population of over 6.8 million. Reckless driving behaviour can be common in cities, including Beirut and Tripoli. Enforcement of traffic laws is often minimal, with speed checks and drunk-driving violations rarely reported. Government reports indicate a seatbelt-wearing rate of 15%. Verbal abuse, deliberate obstruction, and general road rage are commonplace. Driving at night in rural areas can be dangerous. Routine vehicle breakdowns pose risks to NGO staff members because there is no nation-wide emergency breakdown coverage.



Conflict and terrorism: Conflict fatalities have been low over the past three years (2018-2020). However, IED attacks targeting cafés, churches, municipality buildings, and military checkpoints remain a possibility.

- There were no reports identified of terrorism-related incidents causing NGO staff member deaths or injuries, or NGO property damage.
- Five incidents involving explosive weapons use targeting cafés, churches, municipal buildings, and military checkpoints led to NGO staff member hibernation and monitoring.
- In May 2020, an emergency doctor at the Dar al Shifaa Hospital in Tripoli was attacked by Lebanese soldiers after he insisted that the two patients the soldiers had brought in, allegedly involved in a clash between two families, be treated before they were interrogated.

Comment: Proximity to the Syrian conflict and its history of sectarian violence make the threat of terrorism high. Hezbollah's role in fighting Islamic State (IS) in Syria, the large Shia population in Lebanon and the proximity of the conflict in Syria have precipitated this violence. Despite recent collaboration between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Army, the armed wing of Hezbollah continues to pose risks for NGO staff and operations.