



The hostilities in south Lebanon have driven tens of thousands of local residents to flee to the northern areas

Overview¹

- ▶ Hezbollah joined the fighting against Israel on October 8, 2023, the day after Operation Iron Swords began,² and opened a front on Israel's northern border, attacking IDF posts and military crews along the border. The IDF has responded by firing artillery at the sources of the rocket attacks and by attacking Hezbollah facilities in south Lebanon. In the wake of the tense situation and the fear of escalation, residents of villages and towns in south Lebanon began to move to northern areas, noteworthy because Hezbollah usually places its posts and bases in or near civilian settlements.
- ▶ According to current estimates, between 20,000 and 60,000 Lebanese have left their homes for the north and the number may be higher. Some of them left on their own initiative and some following orders from Hezbollah. The tension has caused most government services and economic activity in the south to stop functioning. Some of the towns and villages in the border area have been almost completely emptied, while others where a substantial chance was not seen. Many Lebanese who lived near the border with Israel moved to the city and suburbs of Tyre.
- ▶ As long as the situation in south Lebanon remains tense and people fear escalation, it is more likely that most of the displaced civilians will not return to their homes. Such a situation will have serious long-term economic consequences, primarily on those who earn their living from agriculture and on Lebanon's economy as well, which is in the throes of a deep economic crisis.
- ▶ The current situation poses a dilemma for Hezbollah: it feels "obligated" to mobilize its forces to help Hamas, which is part of the Iranian-led "axis of resistance,"³ but at the same

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

² For further information, see the November ITIC report, "[Operation Iron Swords: The fighting on the Israel-Lebanon border.](#)"

³ Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian terrorist organizations, the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

time it knows that joining the fighting harms its base in Lebanon. Therefore, it is trying to maneuver between providing aid to Hamas by opening another front with Israel, and materially assisting the civilians of south Lebanese whose lives are affected by the war. In the meantime, for the most part it compensates them through the Jihād al-Binā', a Hezbollah social institution which deals with construction, rehabilitation and various social projects and attempts to mobilize the Lebanese government and other countries to help compensate the south Lebanese population.

Further Information

The extent of Hezbollah's participation in the war

- ▶ According to reports, as early as October 8, 2023, a day after the beginning of Operation Iron Swords, when Hezbollah first attacked Israel on the Lebanese border, south Lebanese, especially those who were not permanent residents, left the border area following the Israeli response to Hezbollah's attacks ([thisislebanon.com](https://www.thisislebanon.com), 8 Oct. 2023).⁴ The following day, October 9, 2023, a mass movement of refugees towards the cities of the north was reported from the southern towns, especially from around al-Naqoura in the western sector (Lebanon and the World X account, October 9, 2023).
- ▶ From the beginning of November 2023, as Hezbollah expanded and escalated its attacks and Israel responded, the wave of displaced civilians from the border area increased accordingly. On November 10 and 16, 2023, a large-scale exodus of residents from 28 towns and villages along the entire border was detected, from al-Naqoura in the west to the Har Dov region (the Shebaa Farms) in the east (Sky News, November 10 and 16, 2023; al-Anadolu News, 16 in November 2023).
- ▶ During the temporary ceasefire in the fighting in the Gaza Strip, and the hiatus in Hezbollah attacks that followed, from November 24 to December 1, 2023, some residents returned to their homes, and according to reports, the number of displaced civilians dropped to about 16,000 (Facebook page of the Tyre Municipalities Association, December 1, 2023). When the fighting in the Gaza Strip resumed and Hezbollah resumed attacking Israel, south Lebanese again began leaving and their numbers in and around Tyre rose to 18,000 (beirut-news.com, November 28, 2023; [almarsadonline](https://almarsadonline.com) X account, December 5, 2023). According to reports on December 5, 2023, the wave of south Lebanese displaced civilians had increased and they

⁴ <https://www.thisislebanon.com/exclusive/257878>

were going to the towns in and around the Sidon and Tyre regions (X almarsadonline account, December 5, 2023).

► According to various estimates, between 20,000 to 60,000 residents left their homes in south Lebanon. According to Muhammad Shams al-Din, a researcher at the Beirut-based Information International company, as of November 16, 2023, approximately 45,000 south Lebanese left, only a partial evacuation compared to 2006 during the Second Lebanon War, when approximately 600,000 south Lebanese evacuated (Sky News, November 10 and 16, 2023).⁵

► On November 23 2023, the UN International Organization for Migration published a report about the scope of internal Lebanese migration following the escalation along the Israel-Lebanon border between October 8, 2023 and November 21, 2023. According to the report, 55,491 Lebanese residents left their homes, 73% of them from south Lebanon districts (United Nations Migration Organization website, November 23, 2023). It can be assumed that the majority were from the border area and moved mainly to the districts south of Beirut.

► On December 9, 2023, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 58,835 residents of south Lebanon left their homes because of the fighting, about 66% of whom went to live with relatives and about 30% rented apartments in more remote locations, with only about 4% moving to public shelters or other housing (reliefweb.int, December 9, 2023).



South Lebanon, from the border line (blue) to the Litani River (black) (Wikipedia)

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7KJp96R0wo>

► On December 12, 2023 IDF Spokesman Brigadier General Daniel Hagari stated in a media briefing that more than 100,000 south Lebanese had evacuated to the north. He added that Hezbollah operated from the villages and built-up areas in south Lebanon, thereby endangering Lebanese land (IDF spokesman, December 12, 2023).

Lebanese leave the region

► According to the Alma-Israel Research Center, the exodus is mainly from the towns and villages along the border front line, including the towns and villages Alma al-Shaab, Yarin, Roumieh, Aita al-Shaab, Bint Jbeil, Maroun al-Ras, Aitaroun, Blida, Meiss al-Jabal, Yaroun, Markaba, al-Adissa and Kfar Kila (Alma Center, November 27, 2023).



**The town of Aita al-Shaab: significant destruction and few residents visible on the streets
(Nour Mansour's X account, December 11, 2023)**

► According to estimates, the rate of displaced civilians differs from settlement to settlement and ranges from 10%-90%. More departure is evident in Christian areas compared to Shi'ite areas. For example, about 20% of the residents evacuated from the Shi'ite Bint Jbeil Shi'ite, about 70% from the Christian village of Rmeich, which, according to the head of the village council, became a "ghost town." Lebanese sources reported that about 90% of the residents of the villages of Kila, Houla, al-Adissa, Yaroun and al-Khira, the overwhelming majority of whom are Shi'ite, evacuated, as did the about 75% of residents of Shuba. Most of the residents of the town of Jadeeda (also called Jadeeda-Marjayoun), in the center of Marjayoun district, remained in their homes (Facebook page of Farid Kteich, December 8, 2023; Beirut News, November 16, 2023; Sky News, November 10, 2023; Sputnik, November 13 2023).



**The deserted village of Houla (Facebook page Farid Kteich, December 8, 2023.
The video was originally published on TikTok)**

- ▶ The evacuation rate is also apparently directly related to the intensity of the fighting in the area, even in Shi'ite communities where local residents are sympathetic to Hezbollah, such as Aitaroun, Alma al-Shaab and Aita al-Shaab.
- ▶ Some border residents do not leave for long periods of time, and there are those who do leave but return several times, depending on the level of tension and on their economic and agricultural needs, especially regarding picking olives and cultivating the land.
- ▶ Qassem al-Qadri, the mayor of the village of Shuba, said the residents were afraid to move between the settlements close to the border because civilians had been injured by the fighting (Sky News, November 10, 2023). In many instances Hezbollah operatives placed their firing points, surveillance positions and weapons storehouses in populated civilian areas and buildings.
- ▶ The Lebanese Janoubia website reported that tens of thousands of residents of Tyre, Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun and Hasbaya were facing a difficult situation, which was getting worse because of the rains and cold weather. According to the site, approximately 21,000 displaced persons were registered with the disaster management unit of the Tyre District Union of Municipalities. Some of them are housed in shelters, but most find refuge in towns and villages, where local residents offer to host them. However, there is a shortage of vacant houses, forcing them to rent apartments in the Tyre area, where rent had skyrocketed even before the war. The displaced civilians also lack basic equipment, including heaters, blankets, diapers, hygiene products and diesel fuel for generators, and the host towns find it difficult to provide them with what they need (al-Janoubia, December 12, 2023).

The reasons for leaving

► According to some reports, fear for their lives motivates residents to leave because the conflicts are near their homes. However, it was also reported that Hezbollah operatives called on residents to leave and sent messages to the families living in the border area telling them to evacuate. That occurred mainly in the east, in the Har Dov region (Sky News, October 17, 2023).

The places the displaced residents move to and their distribution

► South Lebanese who left their homes scattered to dozens of different places, including, Sidon and Tyre, Beirut's southern Shi'ite area, Iqlim el-Kharrub (in the western part of the Chouf Mountains region), Saoufar and Bhandoun (east of Beirut on the Beirut-Damascus highway, and Jbeil (Sky News, November 10-16, 2023). According to the UN Migration Organization's report, between October 8, 2023 and November 21, 2023, 16,990 residents from the south arrived in Tyre, 8,191 in the town of al-Nabatiyeh, 6,113 in the capital, and 5,903 in Sidon (UN Migration Organization website, November 23, 2023).⁶ According to another source, some of the families rented houses in Mount Lebanon and the Chouf Mountains region in northern Lebanon, in preparation for a future departure (Sky News, October 17, 2023).

► Some of the residents moved to relatives' homes in settlements further away from the border and some were taken in at shelters. On November 5, 2023, it was reported that approximately 10,000 residents who arrived in the area of Tyre were divided between four shelters which had been set up in schools and apartments donated by local residents. Two floors were allocated in each shelter to open classes for resuming children's studies (Sky News, November 10, 2023; Breaking News Service Telegram account, November 5, 2023).

► A local source stated that some of the residents of the villages from the eastern sector in the Mount Dov-Shuba area, Kfar Hammam and their surroundings, evacuated to the town of Hasbaya, and that the local town council provided them with electricity and water (Sky News, November 16, 2023).

► When the temporary ceasefire went into effect, Hezbollah tried to represent the towns as bustling with life. On November 24, 2023 Ali Shoeib, a correspondent of Hezbollah's al-Manar TV, recorded a video in the town of al-Adissa, in south Lebanon, where about ten residents were seen on the street (Ali Shoeib's X account, November 24, 2023). According to reports, on

⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-displacement-tracking-matrix-mobility-snapshot-round-12-23-november-2023>

the same day, residents returned to their homes to examine them and their property, which did not necessarily indicate that they returned regularly (beiruttime-lb.com, November 24, 2023). When the temporary ceasefire ended, according to reports they left their homes again (beirut-news.com, November 28, 2023; X account almarsadonline, December 5, 2023).



**Ali Shoeib, correspondent for al-Manar TV in the town of al-Adissa, near the border
(Ali Shoeib's X account, November 24, 2023)**

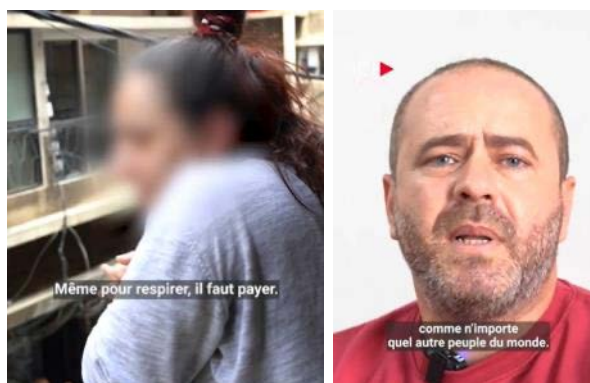
The south Lebanese who remain near the border

► Living conditions are reportedly becoming increasingly difficult for residents who did not leave. Kamel Razuk, the *mukhtar* (local head) of the town of Jadeeda-Marjayoun, in the center of the Marjayoun district, said that most of the town's residents, numbering about 1,600, remained, but the surrounding economy had stalled. Some of the district's institutions, such as financial institutions, civilian society institutions and courts were closed, and residents had been directed to al-Nabatiyeh for some of the services. In addition, about two weeks after the escalation began, the lack of security in south Lebanon caused several companies to stop sending goods to the border areas. According to Razuk "Representatives of pharmaceutical and food companies and fruit and vegetable merchants stopped coming and even bakeries no longer sent anything except a limited number of loaves of bread to each store" (Beirut News, November 16, 2023). In addition, parents reportedly refused to send their children to school because the schools were not open and the students were sitting at home (al-Jazeera, November 18, 2023).

► Milad al-Alam, mayor of the municipality of Rmeich, near Bint Jbeil, and about two kilometers (a little over a mile) from the Israel-Lebanon border, said that given Lebanon's severe economic crisis and the ongoing fighting, there was a shortage of food and medicine in the border area and the meager budgets of the municipalities were too small for them to help the residents (lebanondebate.com, November 18, 2023).

► The disaster management unit of the Tyre District Union of Municipalities held a meeting, attended by Qassem Shaalan, director of the national disaster management unit of the Lebanese Red Cross, Beatrice Rubio Navarro, chairman of the European Union's Civil Defense and Humanitarian Aid Program (ECHO) and Branko Golubovic, the technical assistant of the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid. The European representatives received information about the displaced civilians' needs in light of the shortages, which were worsening daily as the number of displaced civilians increased, and the importance of providing all necessities was emphasized, (Facebook page of the Union of Municipality in the Tyre District, November 14, 2023).

► Some of the residents expressed indignation, frustration and concern because of Lebanon's being dragged into the fighting, and by implication criticized Hezbollah as responsible for bringing the war to Lebanon. In a video published on the X network, residents said it was difficult to find basic food and sanitation products. They complained about the cost of living, especially in the current circumstances, after being forced to leave their homes, and noted that "even to breathe you have to pay." They stated that they supported the Palestinian issue but did not want a war, or their homes to be destroyed, or to be displaced, or militias or illegal weapons (Ici Beyrouth X account, December 10, 2023).



**Residents express indignation at Lebanon's being dragged into the fighting
(Account X Ici Beyrouth, December 10, 2023)**

► The Lebanese government provides the residents with some help through the Council of the South, a group that works for their well-being on behalf of the Lebanese government, distributing aid packages to the needy in the southern villages, for example in the town of Markaba on December 11, 2023 (Facebook page of the town of Markaba, December 11, 2023). However, the aid is limited and cannot substantially improve the residents' conditions, especially in light of Lebanon's precarious economic situation.



**Distribution of aid packages in Markaba
(Facebook page of the town of Markaba, December 11, 2023)**

Hezbollah's involvement in the evacuation of residents

- While Hezbollah ordered some residents to evacuate their homes, it is evident that the organization is trying to help the residents of the south, mainly so as not to lose their support, especially in the wake of the resentment voiced by the residents at the beginning of the fighting over the Hezbollah's disregard for them (almarsadonline, November 9, 2023). Hezbollah promised to compensate south Lebanese who were directly affected by the situation. Such a promise was made in Aita al-Shaab, during a memorial service held for a Hezbollah operative who was killed on the border in an Israeli attack. Hassan Fadlallah, a Hezbollah member of the Lebanese Parliament, said the organization "has begun to compensate residents who were directly affected by Israeli attacks" and that "damage assessment is currently being conducted." He also noted that while the organization's operatives were fighting, the organization's teams were engaged in assessing the damages and determining how residents would be compensated (Telegram channel al-Alam al-Muqawama, November 27, 2023). Fadlallah also took action regarding compensation with the Lebanese government, when he asked **Najib Mikati, the prime minister of Lebanon's interim government**, to compensate the residents of the south, and in fact Mikati pledged to provide them with full compensation (Janoubia, November 30, 2023). Hence, Hezbollah is working with the Lebanese government so that compensating the south Lebanese for the damages caused by the Hezbollah-initiated fighting, will be shifted to the shoulders of the Lebanese taxpayer.
- In addition, according to a report, Hezbollah's Jihād al-Binā' established groups to protect the civilian front and secure the supply of food, medical services and shelters for displaced civilians. It also deals with damages to the rural houses in the south and conducts surveys to assess them. According to a preliminary Jihād al-Binā' survey, as of the end of November 2023,

37 buildings had been completely destroyed, 11 were damaged by fire and about 1,500 were damaged in other ways, from broken glass to collapsed walls. Providing compensation to repair damages began in the villages of the "second line" even before the temporary ceasefire went into effect to allow the residents to carry out immediate repairs. In addition, Lebanon is holding a dialogue with other countries and requesting financial support. China promised it would transfer millions of dollars to Lebanon to repair the direct damages resulting from the war so far (beirut-news.com, November 28, 2023).