Thematic Report
Barriers to Accessing Aid among Lebanese

May 2023

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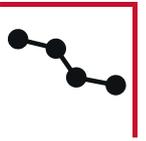
The Lebanon Crisis Analytics Team (LCAT) provides reactive and in-depth context analysis to inform the humanitarian community in Lebanon. The information and analysis contained in this report is strictly to inform the humanitarian response and policymaking on Lebanon.

Prepared by Mercy Corps Lebanon Crisis Analytics Team (LCAT) in Collaboration with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
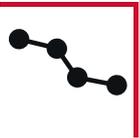
Introduction

Multiple crises have left a large share of Lebanon's resident population facing severe hardship, particularly the most vulnerable. This crisis has quickly rendered a significant share of the Lebanese population in need of humanitarian assistance, a service that so far has been mostly directed towards refugee communities in the country, mainly Syrian and Palestinian. As needs rapidly increase among a population that historically has not required emergency assistance, organizations face obstacles in appropriately engaging with communities regarding what assistance is available to them and how to access it, if they are eligible. In light of deteriorating living conditions and increased humanitarian need, international aid organizations and donors have rolled out assistance programs targeting Lebanese households, including cash assistance. However, the types of assistance needed, the means to understand them, and the channels used for reaching out to potential beneficiaries differ between Lebanese and non-Lebanese. As such, organizations working with Lebanese beneficiaries must understand these differing dynamics and improve communication with the Lebanese population. Not only could this improve the effectiveness of aid delivery, but it could also reduce social tensions triggered by perceptions of "aid bias" among Lebanese, notably towards support for other communities. This study, a collaboration between the Mercy Corps Lebanon Crisis Analytics Team (LCAT) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), examines the barriers facing vulnerable Lebanese when trying to access assistance, in an effort to develop recommendations for the broader humanitarian aid response in Lebanon.

In this context, the DRC conducted a survey of 744 Lebanese citizens distributed over six Lebanese governorates to gather data on the main challenges facing Lebanese families; their relationship with aid organizations, both local and international; and barriers to accessing aid. The survey was implemented by B.O.T in late 2021, and the results were shared with Mercy Corps' LCAT team for analysis. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with humanitarian stakeholders, and the LCAT team analyzed data from the 2022 Lebanon Multi-Sector Needs Analysis (MSNA) as well as from DRCs referral information management system (RIMS) for the period 2021 to 2022.

Recommendations and key findings

- Aid outreach must be tailored for each region, as the results show regional differences in people's preferences on the types of information they want to receive and the ways they prefer to receive it. Notably, Baalbeck-Hermel and Beirut were the least informed about the work of international aid actors. Over 75% of respondents did not know how to contact international aid organizations if needed.

- While the majority of those surveyed in late 2021 had not engaged with international aid organizations, nor knew anyone who had, there were significant variations between regions, with respondents from Baalbeck-Hermel and Mount Lebanon being the least likely to have done so. Reasons for not reaching out to international organizations varied, meaning further research into the perceptions of seeking aid is required to understand what drives or prevents people from reaching out for assistance when they need it.
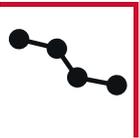
- Perceptions concerning the "fairness" of international aid delivery were mixed, although across the board many perceived aid delivery as "unfair". In particular, 56% of respondents who believed that support levels are not sufficient also believed that aid is not fairly distributed. These findings emphasize the importance of improving communication about assistance provided by the international aid response to the Lebanese population. This could be done by HC/RC in the form of developing a joint UN and NGO communication plan, highlighting the assistance that has supported Lebanese institutions and populations across the country.

- When seeking information on aid and assistance, the majority of respondents stated that personal networks, social networks, and social media were the most important sources of information within their communities. Aid actors should consider using local communities and networks when seeking to inform and connect with the most vulnerable individuals.

- Older age groups appear to be more uninformed, although they can be one of the most vulnerable population groups. Therefore, developing appropriate mechanisms for reaching out to this group is essential. Eighty-nine percent of those aged 65 and over reported that they did not know how to contact international aid organizations.

- Given that the majority of Lebanese seem to lack information on international organizations' support and presence, and the ways to reach them, it would be beneficial to hold large-scale community-level awareness sessions at which Lebanese are provided with basic information about NGOs, including locations, working hours, contact information, and explanation of programs and projects. Relying on one-to-one communication either over the phone or in person is encouraged instead of mass messaging when reaching out to potential beneficiaries.

Background

Multiple crises in Lebanon have left a large share of the resident population facing severe hardship, particularly the most vulnerable among the Lebanese and refugee communities. Since mid-2019, Lebanon has been mired in the worst financial and economic crisis in its modern history, exacerbating the effects of other long-running national challenges such as the Syrian refugee crisis. The Lebanese Lira (LBP) has depreciated against the US dollar from LBP 1,500 to fluctuating around LBP 100,000 as of April 2023, resulting in massive losses in purchasing power. This has led to a surge in poverty and vulnerability. According to ESCWA estimates in 2021, 74% of the Lebanese population had become income vulnerable by December 2020, representing approximately 2.86 million individuals.

Different data sources have illustrated the new and growing level of need among the Lebanese resident population. The MSNA (Multi-Sector Needs Assessment) published in July of 2022 shows that 43% of the Lebanese resident population is in "extreme need" and 55% is in "severe need", in terms of humanitarian needs at the household level. The North and Akkar regions were found to have the highest share of households in severe or extreme need (52% of households). Eighty-nine percent of households had food security needs, which is an alarming development and result of the economic crisis and hyperinflation. The inability to provide decent employment or work has also rendered 83% of surveyed households "in need" within the livelihoods sector. The health sector had 46% of households categorized as "in need".
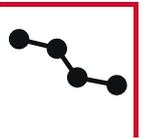
Data from DRC's referral database RIMS also corroborates these results and identifies similar areas of need, mainly related to basic needs and health. One-third of referrals for Lebanese nationals were related to basic assistance, i.e., relating to financial difficulties and an inability to meet basic needs. The second-highest percentage of referrals was in the health sector (17%), echoing challenges related to access and affordability of medicine and medical care. The third-highest percentage of referrals was within the WASH sector (15%), especially in the South governorate. This likely reflects shortages in basic services, especially water and electricity.

Furthermore, the psychological impact of crisis-related challenges is quite heavy on Lebanese families. According to the survey, about half of respondents referred to psychological impact (48%), including depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. This is also corroborated by 2022 MSNA data, according to which 47% of Lebanese households report that at least one adult family member has been affected by psychological distress. Additionally, the Lebanese organization Embrace, which operates the national emotional support and suicide hotline, has reported a 275% increase in callers since 2019, when the economic crisis began in earnest. Alarmingly, deteriorating conditions have weighed heavily on young Lebanese – about 60% of Embrace's callers are aged 35 or below.

Knowledge and Perceptions Regarding International Aid and Provision of Assistance

1.1 Obtaining Information on Aid and Assistance

Generally, personal and social networks were the main source of community-related information for people in all regions, while political and religious groups were the least sought out sources according to the results of the survey. Respondents were asked how they are informed about events in their communities, with 44% reporting that they derive this information from people they know, whether in person or through the social media accounts of people they know (Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp).
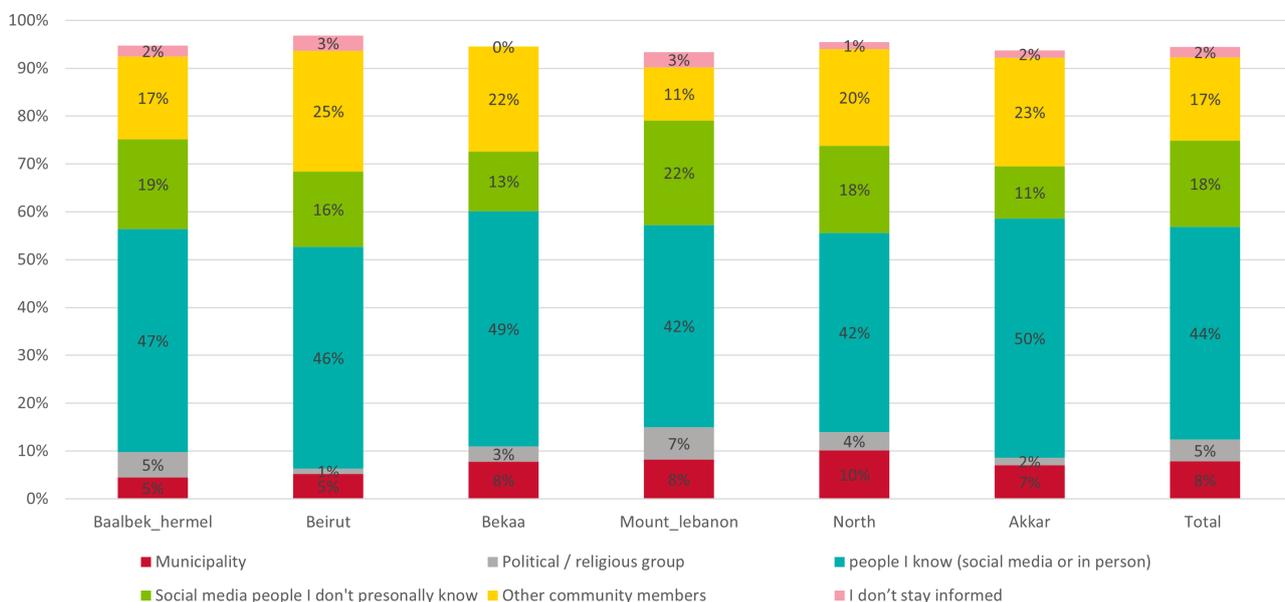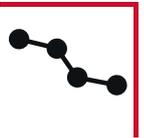

Figure 1: Sources of information about events in the community.

Most often, these people are family and friends, and other individuals they know (acquaintances, co-workers, and distant relatives). It is reasonable to assume - though the survey results do not show this explicitly - that some part of the respondents' personal and social networks are also part of political and religious groups, but respondents were reluctant to identify them as such. With a significantly lower share, the second-most common source of information was social media posts of people they do not personally know and institutions with which they are not affiliated, such as influencers and news agencies. The percentage of people by region who relied on this source of information was highest in Mount Lebanon.

There were no significant differences between male and female respondents regarding sources of obtaining information, but there were some differences between age groups. As the figure below shows, reliance on social media posts made by individuals one does not personally know decreases with age, while reliance on community members increases with age. Seniors were the most likely to report that they do not stay informed at all.
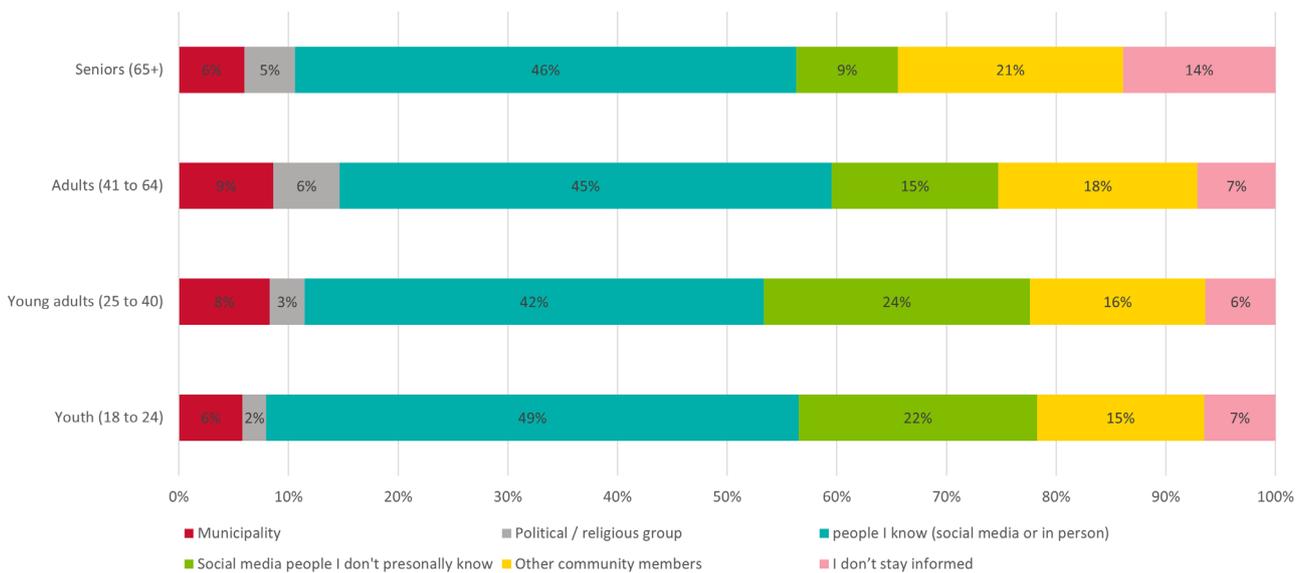

Figure 2: *Sources of information about events in the community, by age group.*

Regarding international aid in particular, a minority of respondents felt informed about aid organization assistance available to them, while a majority felt they had partial information. As the figure below shows, 27% of respondents reported that they were not very informed about available assistance, 24% reported not being informed at all, and 23% said that they knew about some services. Looking at regional differences, the highest share of respondents who knew about some services was in Akkar (40%), while the highest share of those who were not informed was in the North (30%).
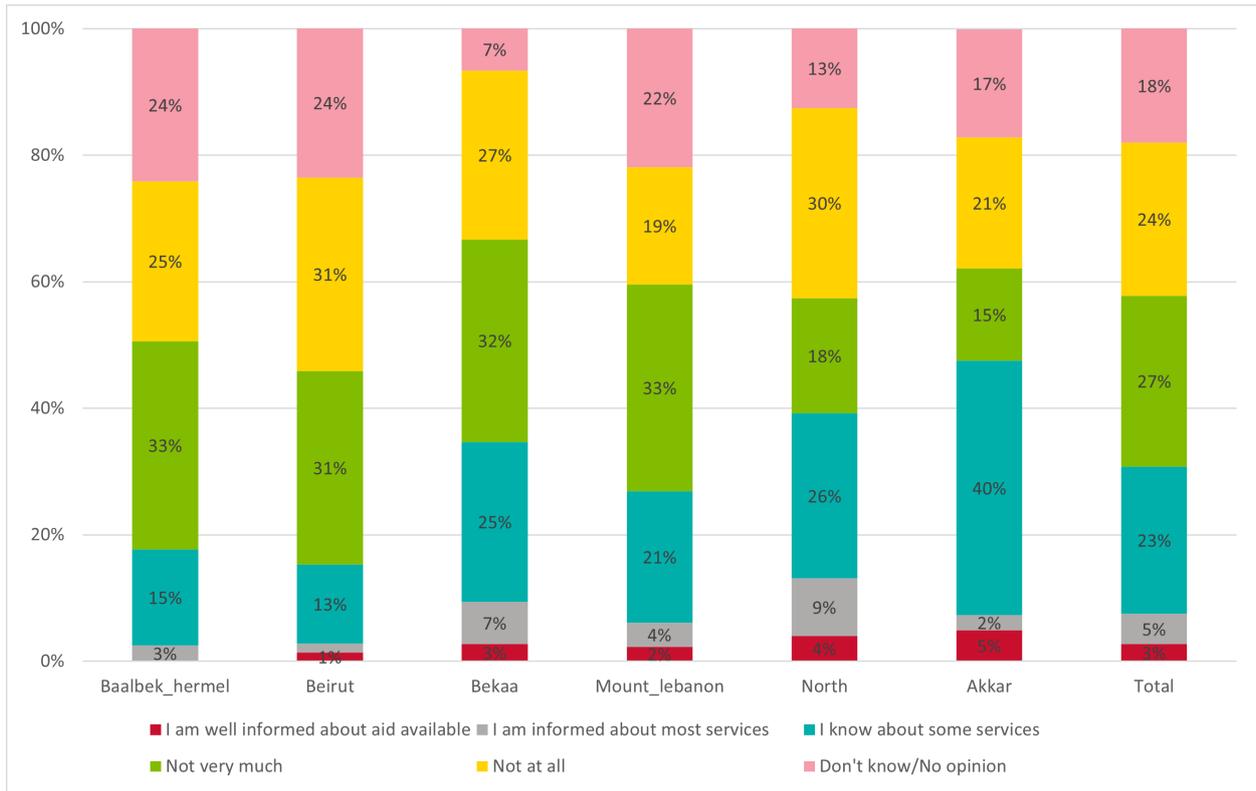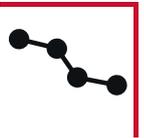
Figure 3: Do you feel informed about the kind of assistance available to you from international aid organizations and their partners (UN, NGOs, or INGOs)?

By simplifying the above results through dividing the responses into "informed" and "not informed", the figure below shows that 51% were not informed and 31% were informed about available aid. Residents of Beirut and Baalbek-Hermel were the least informed and residents of Akkar and the North were the most informed.
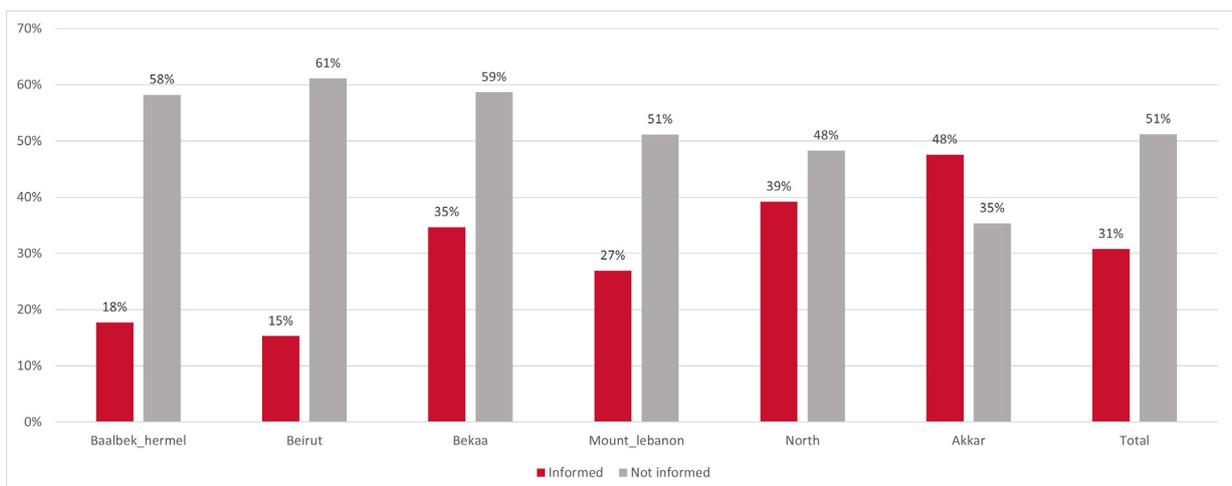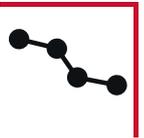

Figure 4: Do you feel informed about the kind of assistance available to you from international aid organizations and their partners (UN, NGOs, or INGOs)? : Simplified version

Seventy-five percent of respondents did not know how to contact international aid organizations if needed. When asked whether they knew how to contact international organizations, only 11% reported that they did know. This rate was highest in Mount Lebanon (15%) and lowest in Baalbek-Hermel (3%), as the figure below shows.
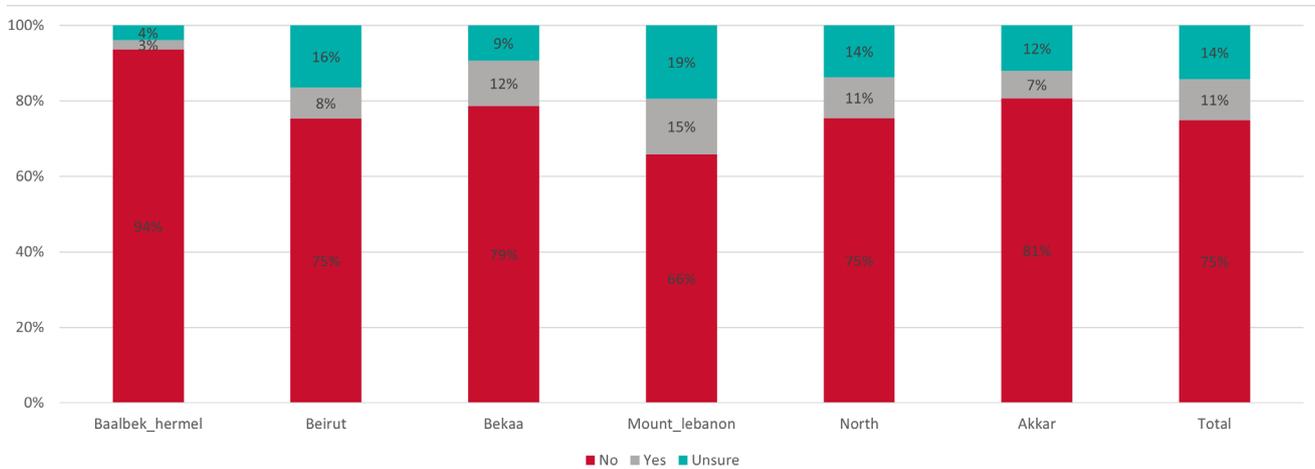

Figure 5: *Do you know how to contact international aid organizations (UN, NGOs/INGOs) if you needed to?*

Even those who feel informed about assistance may also not know how to contact international aid organizations as the results show that 25% of respondents who felt informed about assistance did not know how to contact these organizations.

Furthermore, seniors aged 65 and over were most likely to report that they did not know how to contact international organizations (89%), compared to 63% among youths and 67% among young adults.
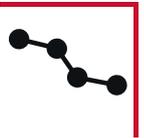
Seeking assistance from International Aid Organizations

The vast majority of respondents had not reached out to international aid organizations and did not know anyone who had done so. As the figure below shows, only 7% of respondents reported that they personally reached out to these organizations. The highest share of those who had not reached out to international organizations were in Baalbek-Hermel (61%) and Mount Lebanon (60%). The highest share of those who had personally reached out for support was in Akkar (14%), and those who knew someone who had reached out was in Beirut (34%).
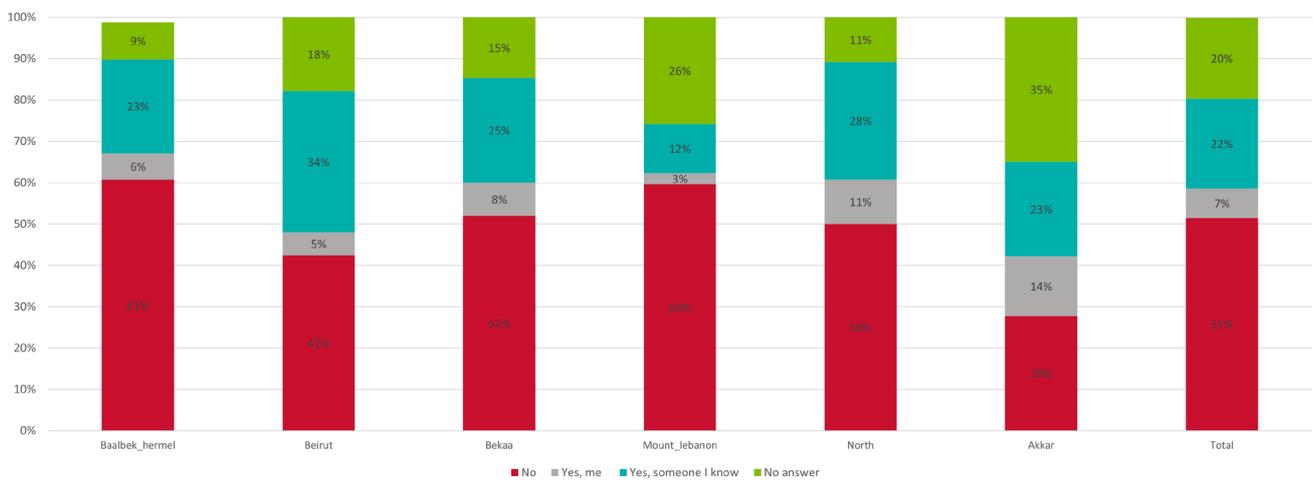

Figure 6: Have you or anyone else you know or heard of tried to reach out to international aid organizations for support?

Further analysis of those who reached out for support from international organizations shows that 47% of them also reported that they were not sufficiently informed about aid and assistance. Moreover, 40% of those who reached out to international organizations also believed that aid distribution is not fair.
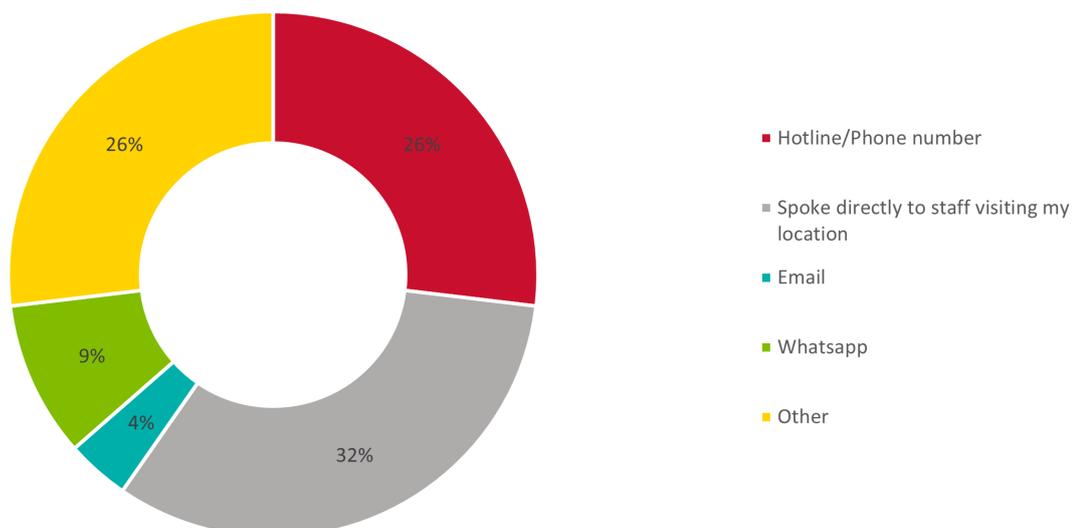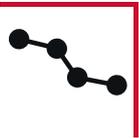

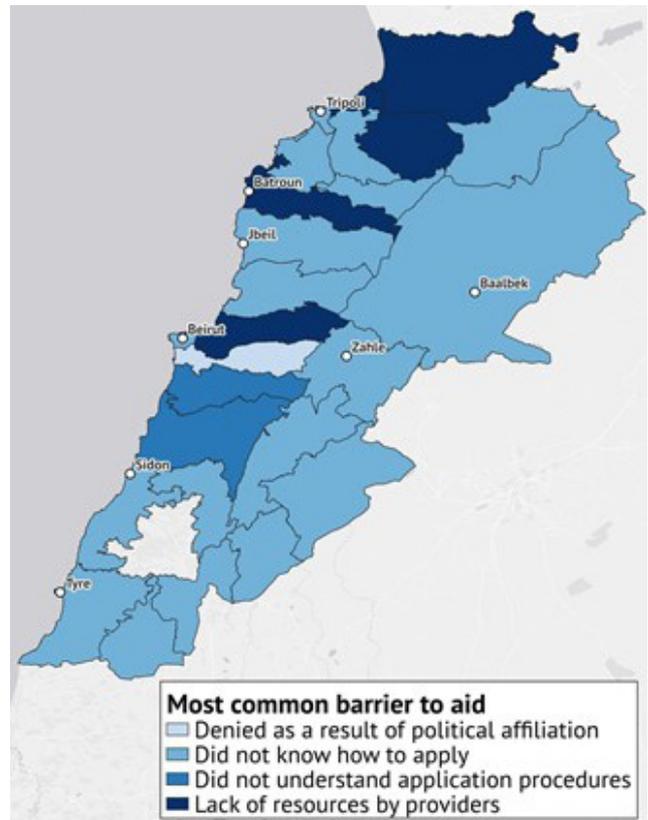*Figure 7*: Means of reaching out to international organizations.

A minority, 7% of respondents (53 people), who reached out to international organizations mostly did so through in-person meetings with organization staff or spoke with them over the phone. Those who reported other methods of reaching out mentioned going in person to an organization's offices or contacting those organizations through friends and family.

Data from DRC RIMS shows that 33% of referrals for Lebanese were identified through hotlines, especially those pertaining to basic assistance and livelihoods. Twenty-two percent of referrals were identified through an NGO frontliner, especially those pertaining to child protection and education. These results are in line with the survey findings, according to which contact with someone associated with an international organization was the main channel for reaching out for assistance.

| Row Labels	Basic assistance	Child Protection	Education	Food Security	GBV /SGBV	Health	Livelihoods	Protection	Shelter	WASH	Grand Total
Community Focal Point / Community Based Network	2%	6%	2%	4%	7%	6%	3%	5%	1%	0%	3%
Education Centers	0%	15%	9%	0%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	0%	3%
Governmental Authority	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%	91%	14%
Home visit	4%	3%	12%	8%	3%	10%	4%	8%	10%	0%	5%
Hotline Call	62%	5%	16%	45%	23%	21%	64%	16%	29%	0%	33%
NGO frontliner	16%	54%	40%	26%	23%	29%	12%	22%	26%	1%	22%
Phone Call	8%	8%	7%	7%	11%	10%	4%	29%	21%	0%	9%
Referral from outside agency	1%	1%	5%	0%	3%	3%	1%	8%	0%	8%	3%
Self-Referral	6%	7%	10%	10%	26%	18%	10%	11%	12%	1%	9%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Of those who reported reaching out to organizations, 75% reported receiving aid (40 people) and the majority were satisfied with the support. Those who did not receive support claim that aid organizations were not responsive and did not follow up.[1] MSNA data from 2022 shows that 21% of Lebanese received aid over the previous 12 months (although the survey does not specify whether aid is from international, local, or government agencies), and 88% of them reported being satisfied with the aid they received. Those who reported being dissatisfied with received aid mainly claimed that the quantity (54%) and / or quality (41%) of the aid was not sufficient. According to MSNA data, 15% of Lebanese received aid in 2021. Therefore, it is clear that assistance for Lebanese households scaled up from 2021 to 2022.

The map here shows the top barriers to aid in each region according to MSNA data. Not knowing how to apply appears to be prevalent in most regions.

Most common barrier to aid
- Denied as a result of political affiliation
- Did not know how to apply
- Did not understand application procedures
- Lack of resources by providers

Map 1: *The most reported barrier to receiving assistance per-kaada. Source: 2022 MSNA.*

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[1]   The sample of those who received support is too small for further analysis.
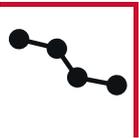
Echoing earlier results, the main reason for not reaching out to aid organizations was lack of knowledge (23%), followed by lack of need (11%). As the figure below shows, the reasons for not reaching out varied. Residents of Baalbek-Hermel appeared to have the highest levels of knowledge on how to reach out to aid organizations, while the highest lack of need was in Mount Lebanon (19%). Additionally, 8% reported being uncomfortable about asking for assistance, probably because they had not done so before. A very small share (3%) did not reach out for assistance because of negative things they heard about aid organizations. A slightly higher percentage (6%) reported not trusting aid organizations.
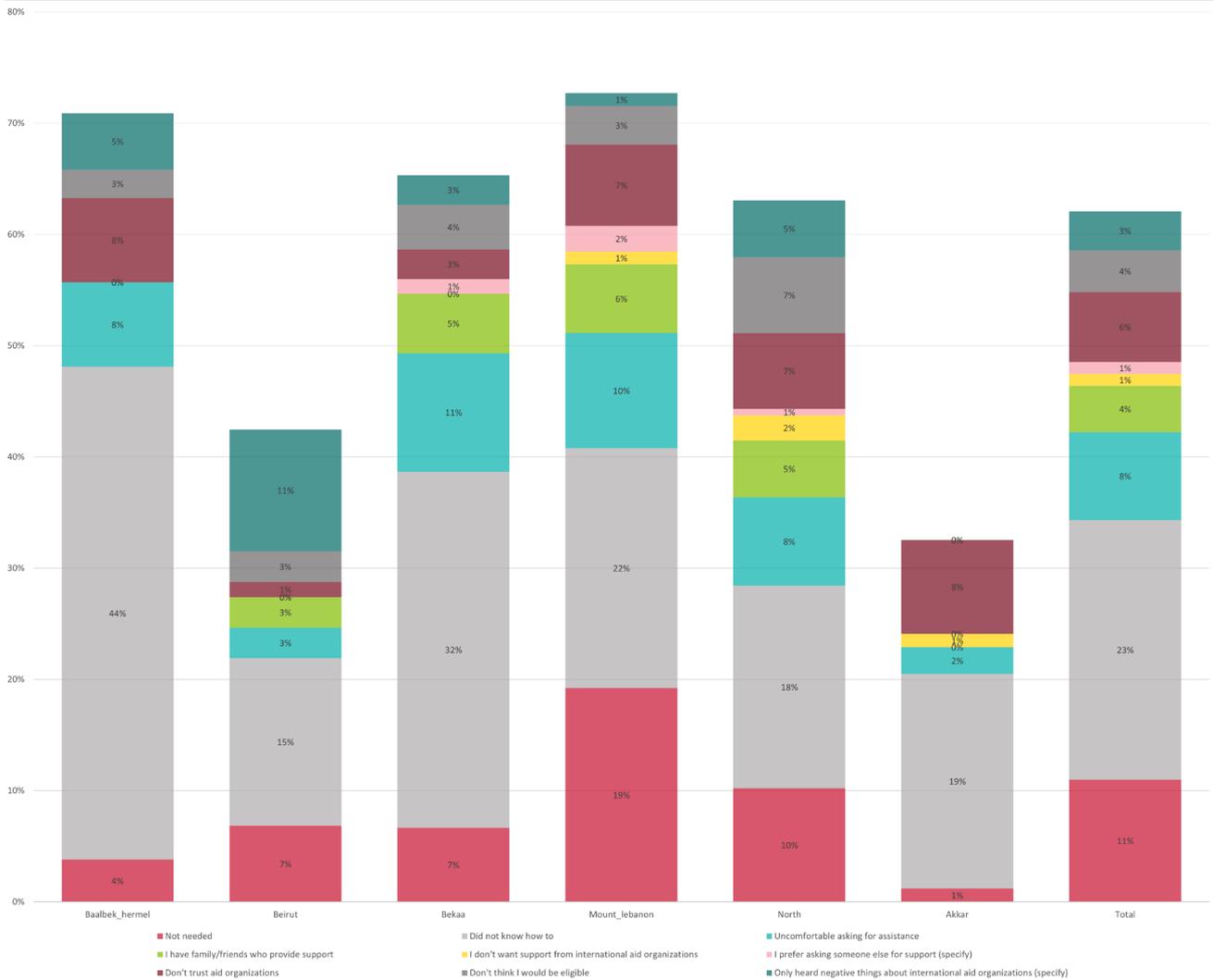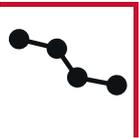

Figure 8: *Reasons for not reaching out to international organizations for support*

Most people would like to obtain information on aid and assistance from international organizations (38%), local NGOs (35%), or the United Nations (31%). As the figure below shows, there were some regional differences. Residents of Akkar had a stronger preference for local NGOs, while those in Mount Lebanon had a higher preference for international organizations. Residents of Baalbek-Hermel preferred to rely on family and friends (34%). The highest share of those who preferred to receive information from a municipality were in Beirut (18%). These regional differences show that information dissemination strategies implemented by organizations should consider the specificities of each region and the channels they trust most for obtaining information.
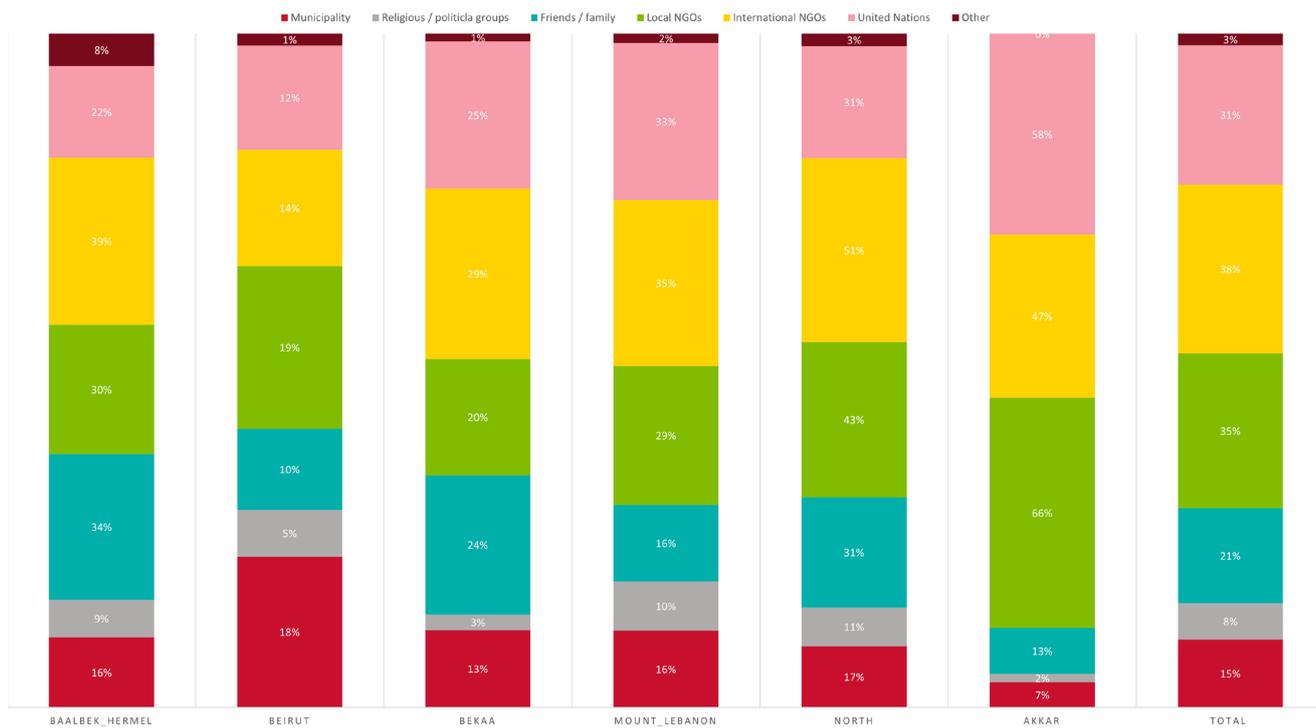

Figure 9: Where do you prefer to get information on assistance? By region

Most people preferred to receive information in person (41%), via phone calls (31%), or via SMS (26%), as opposed to social media or TV, indicating a desire for direct contact rather than mass messaging. The figure below shows the distribution of respondents by the type(s) of channels through which they preferred to receive information. Regional differences can be observed here as well. For example, while more people in Akkar and the North preferred to obtain information through in-person meetings/visits, in Baalbek-Hermel there was a higher preference for phone calls. In Beirut, 37% preferred receiving information by SMS. The highest share of those who preferred to rely on TV broadcasts was in Mount Lebanon. People's tendency to prefer receiving information through more direct contact may be related to their desire to meet or talk to someone from the organization in person and establish a two-way communication line rather than be passive receivers of information.
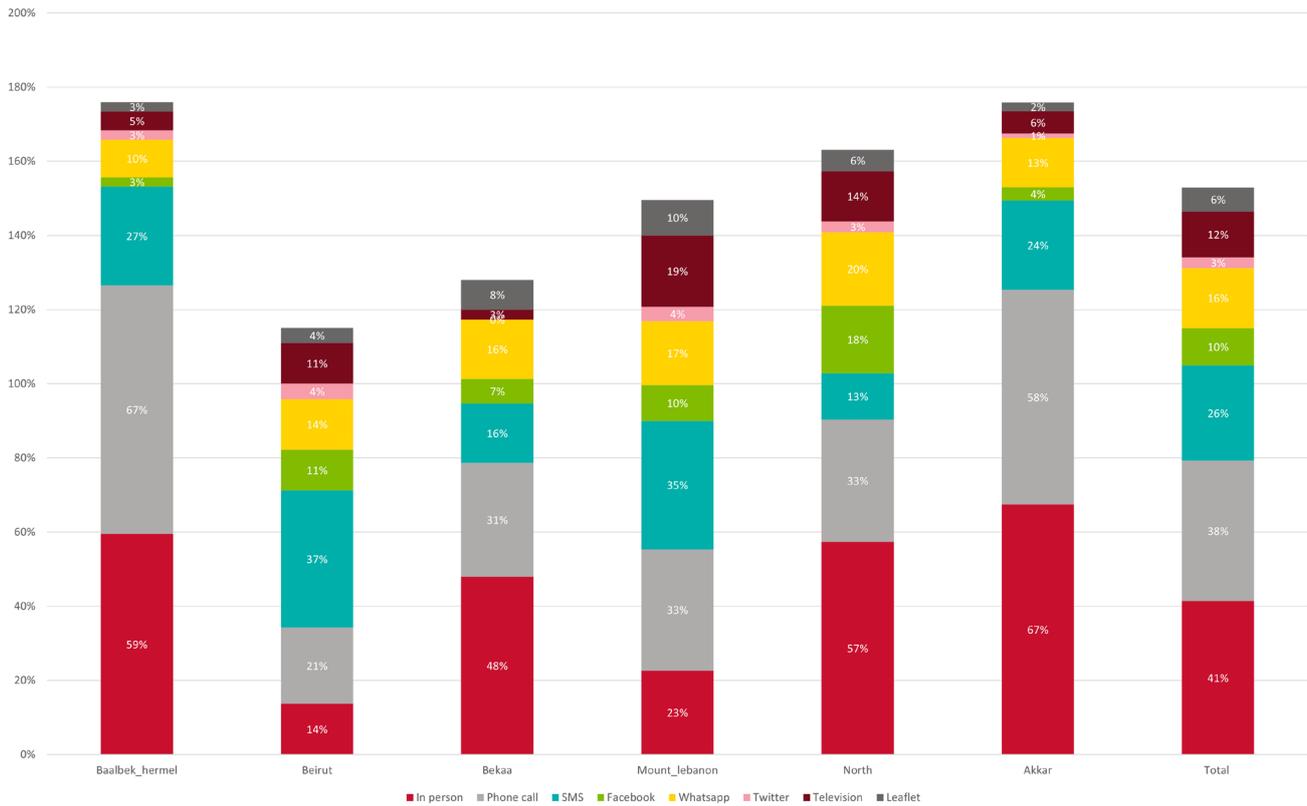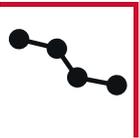
Figure 10: *Preferred channel to obtain information on assistance, by governorate.*

Note: The percentages add up to more than 100% because the question allowed for multiple responses, and they reflect number of responses not respondents

According to 2022 MSNA data, 56% of (Lebanese) respondents preferred to receive information on aid by calling an aid organization hotline, 34% preferred to receive information via SMS, 23% by social media, and 15% said that face-to-face meetings were their preferred way to obtain information. These results are not well aligned with the findings from the survey data, although it appears that phone calls are the common denominator between the two studies.

Respondents mostly wanted to access additional information about the working hours and contact information (24%) of international aid organizations, as well as services they provide (21%). A slightly lower share of people wanted additional information about their potential eligibility for receiving aid and about the application process. Ten percent reported wanting all suggested information, most of whom were concentrated in Akkar.

Among those who did not wish to receive information - 39% of whom were residents of Beirut (39%) - most said that they do not need aid. Results also showed that those who report not needing information rely mostly on family and friends (inside Lebanon and abroad) for support. Most respondents who said they wanted "other" information, also reported wanting information about the affiliations of aid organizations and their sources of funding.
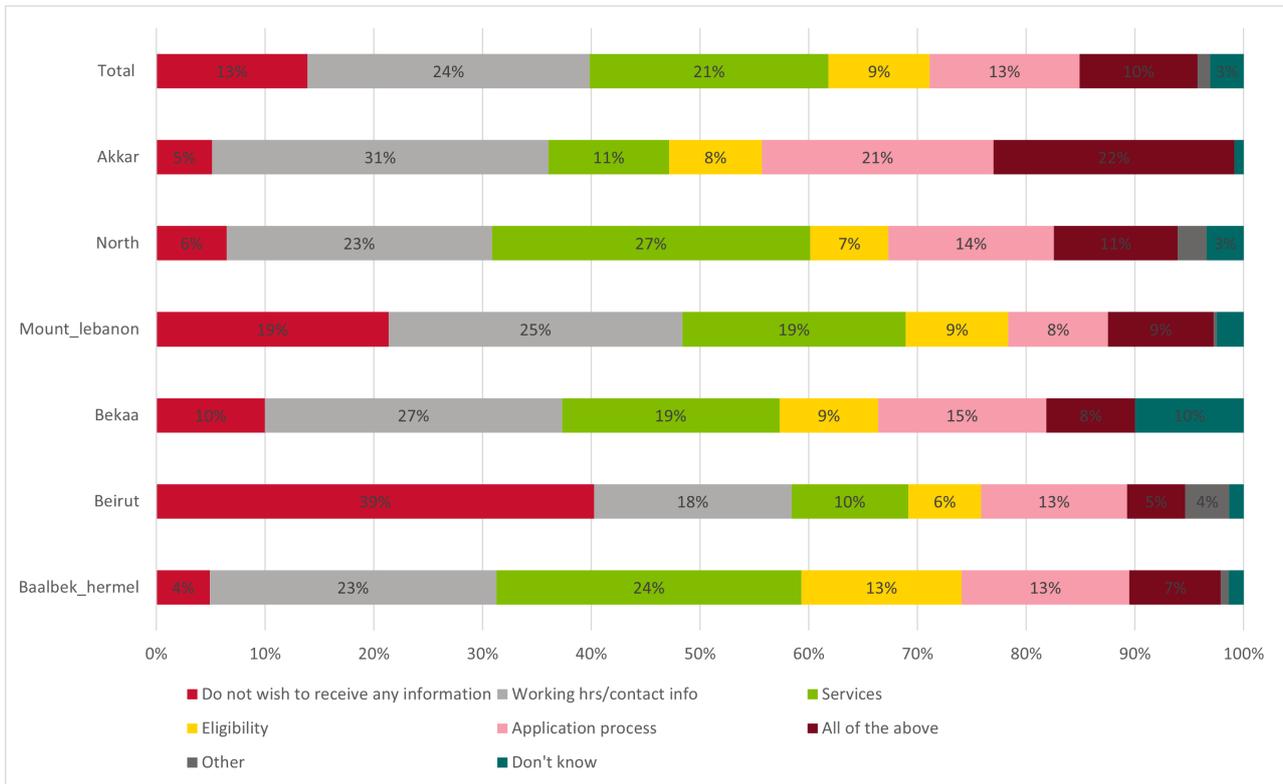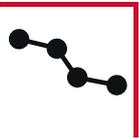
Figure 11: *What type of information would you like to receive from / about aid organizations? By governorate.*

1.2 Perceptions on Fairness of Aid and Assistance

Generally, respondents seemed to perceive aid distribution as unfair. As the figure below shows, 47% disagreed that aid distribution is fair and only 12% agreed that aid is fairly distributed. The share of those who believed aid is not fair was highest in the Bekaa (64%). Respondents in the North had the highest share of those believing aid was fair (25% agreed). Interestingly, a high rate of respondents in all regions felt neutral and did not have a strong opinion on the matter.
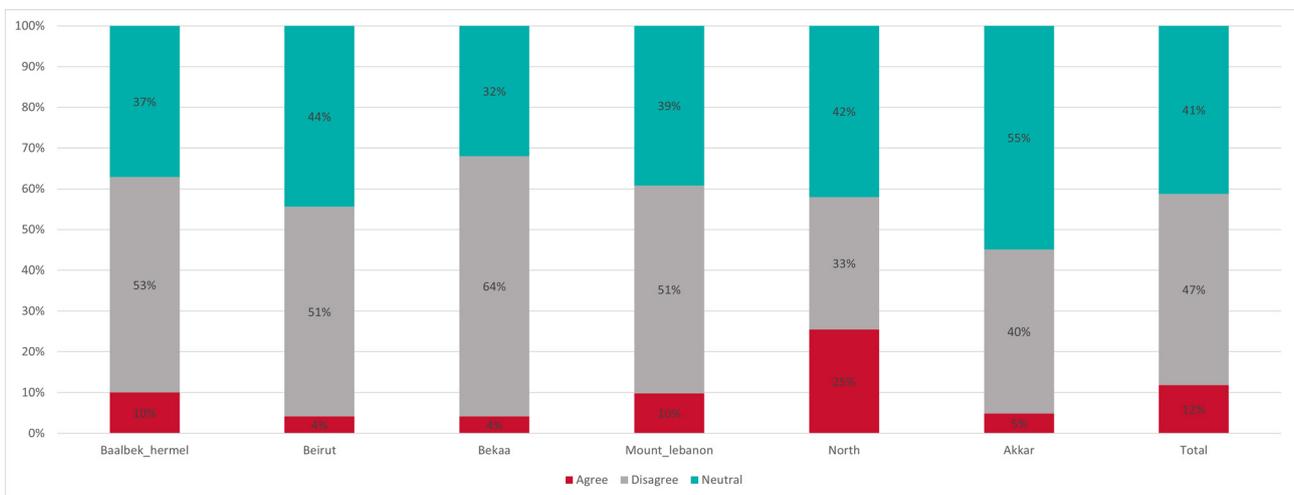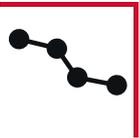

Figure 12: *Do you agree that the aid distribution is fair? By region*

Respondents who considered themselves not well informed about aid and who believed that they were not receiving sufficient aid were more prone to believing that aid distribution is not fair. Additional analysis of the results shows that the share of those who believed aid distribution is not fair was highest among those who said that they were not informed or did not know about aid and assistance in their regions. The highest share of those who believed aid distribution is fair stated that they are informed about aid.
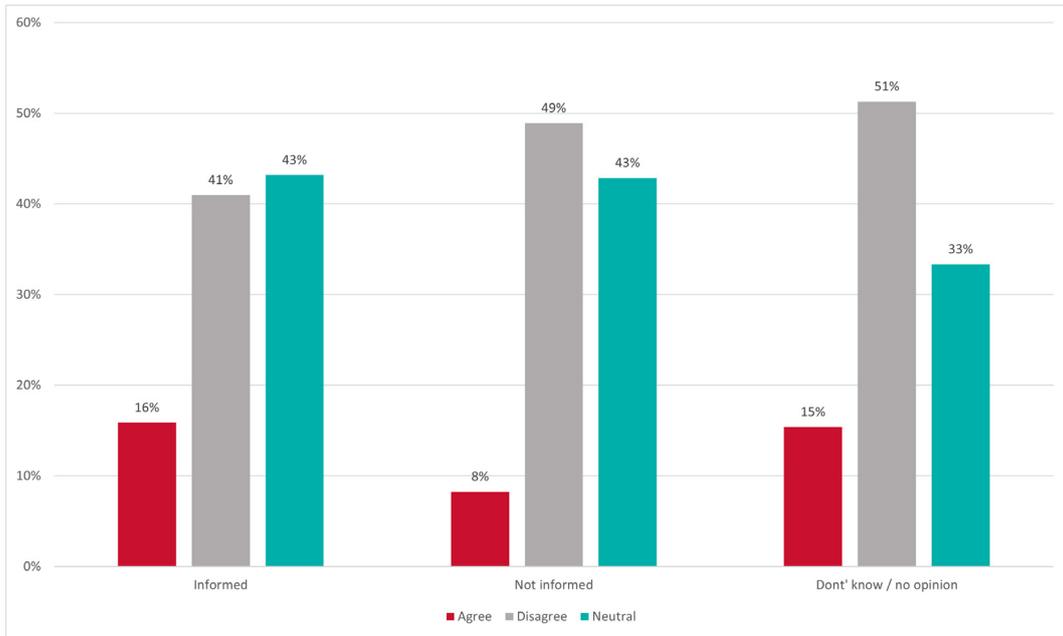

Figure 13: *Being informed about aid vs. perceptions about fairness of aid.*

Similarly, results were crossed between views on sufficiency of aid in a community and perceptions of fairness. The results, presented in the figure below, show that those who believed enough support is coming to their communities or those who reported not needing any support, were more likely to believe aid distribution is fair (22% and 44% respectively). Conversely, 56% of those who believed support is not sufficient also believed that aid is not being fairly distributed. Therefore, perceptions about the fairness of distribution can often be driven by disinformation, and grievances about not receiving aid.
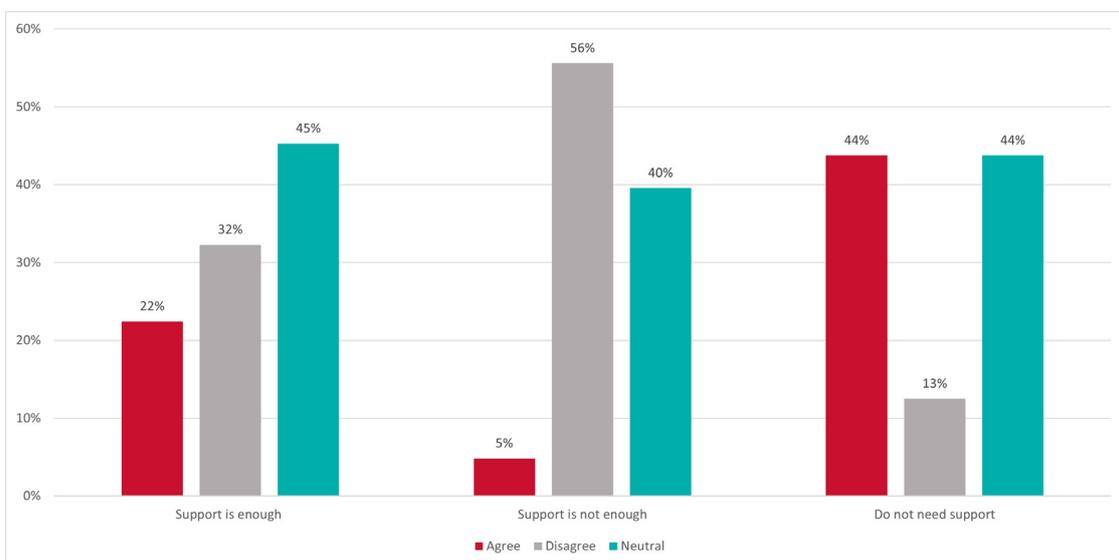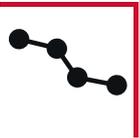

Figure 14: *Receiving enough support vs. perceptions about fairness of aid .*

Conclusion

This report examines the results of a household survey conducted with Lebanese families in six governorates, in an effort to understand the main challenges people face as a result of the economic crisis, as well as their knowledge and perception of international aid organizations. The results were corroborated and cross-checked with other more recent datasets and national figures including CAS, MSNA, and RIMS datasets.

The economic crisis has affected almost everyone in Lebanon. Families are reporting daily challenges in dealing with high levels of inflation, a lack of medicine and medical services, and insufficient electricity and fuel provision, among other challenges. The majority of respondents did not feel informed about the assistance offered by international aid organizations, with some regional differences. A majority also reported not knowing how to contact an international aid organization to seek assistance, particularly seniors over the age of 65. Consequently, a majority also reported that they have not reached out to international aid organizations. Most people expressed a desire to know more about the services provided by international aid organizations and the ways to reach them. They reported that they prefer to obtain this information mostly through phone calls and in-person visits, as opposed to mass messaging.

This study reiterates the importance of international aid actors improving communication with the Lebanese population about the provision of assistance. Communication with refugee populations was not within the scope of this study. Perceptions about unfair aid delivery remain high, with the Lebanese media, politicians, and population often perceiving that aid is unfairly focused on non-Lebanese communities. This is partly the result of the long-running nature of the Syrian response in Lebanon, juxtaposed against the more recent dependence on assistance experienced by the broader Lebanese population over the last three years. This also reflects challenges stemming from a pivot in response planning toward needs in a complex and evolving crisis. In this context, international aid actors should double their efforts to engage with and inform Lebanese communities. This includes a more nuanced and regionalised understanding of how these communities have coped with the crisis and how they understand where to seek help. This also entails developing a better understanding of the networks and modalities by which these communities, especially elderly populations, share information about assistance.
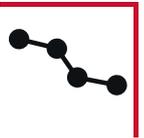
Methodology

2.1 Quantitative Survey

The Danish Refugee Council conducted a survey of 759 individuals in late 2021, which was distributed over six Lebanese governorates to inquire about the main challenges facing Lebanese families amid the financial and economic crisis; their relationship with aid organizations, both local and international; and barriers to accessing aid. The survey was implemented by B.O.T and the results were shared with Mercy Corps' LCAT team for analysis. Recognising that the B.O.T data is now over one year old, a number of key informant interviews were conducted with humanitarian stakeholders. Data analysis from the 2022 Lebanon Multi-Sector Needs Analysis (MSNA) as well as from DRCs referral information management system (RIMS) for the period 2021 – 2022 was also incorporated.

2.1.1 Questionnaire
The questionnaire has five main sections: (1) respondent information, (2) main challenges and their impact, (3) support networks, (4) knowledge about aid and assistance, (5) attitudes towards aid and assistance.

2.1.2 Sample
The dataset, when received, comprised 57 variables and a sample of 759 responses. The dataset was shared in Microsoft Excel format with responses recorded in both English and Arabic (including informal Arabic).

The dataset was cleaned for empty cases, non-responses, double responses, and the final dataset comprised 746 respondents distributed as shown in the table below.

| Governorate	Frequency	Valid Percent
Baalbek-Hermel	79	11%
Beirut	73	10%
Bekaa	75	10%
Mount Lebanon	260	35%
North	176	24%
Akkar	83	11%
Total	**746**	**100%**

Table 1: Sample distribution by governorate.
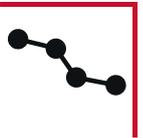
2.1.3 Variable Treatment

The dataset includes several challenging aspects that needed to be addressed before generating results. In addition to the overall cleaning of variables - including recoding of missing responses, correcting for responses wrongly categorized as "other", and transforming string format variables to numeric format when needed - the LCAT team performed the following actions:

1. Labeling and naming variables: None of the variables were labeled adequately, which was needed to generate readable results.

2. Translation of variables to English: Answers to open-ended questions were all in Arabic and needed to be translated into English to be able to re-code them into close-ended quantitative variables.

3. Re-coding open-ended questions into close-ended categorical questions: This step required the longest time and the most effort. The LCAT team reviewed all the responses to select keywords representing the majority of responses for each variable. Then, the team re-coded the variables based on these keywords. For example, when asked about their most important challenges, survey participants responded in many different ways. The team identified and collected responses regarding key challenges related to inflation, lack of medicine, and difficulty providing basic needs, among others, and re-coded the statements into quantitative variables. The new variables are a series of binary variables with a value of 1 if the respondent mentioned the given keyword (such as inflation, medicine, education etc.) and 0 if not.
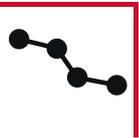
Respondent Profile

This section presents an overview of the sample respondents.

Overall, respondents were equally divided between males and females. As the figure below shows, male and female respondent distribution within each governorate varied slightly.
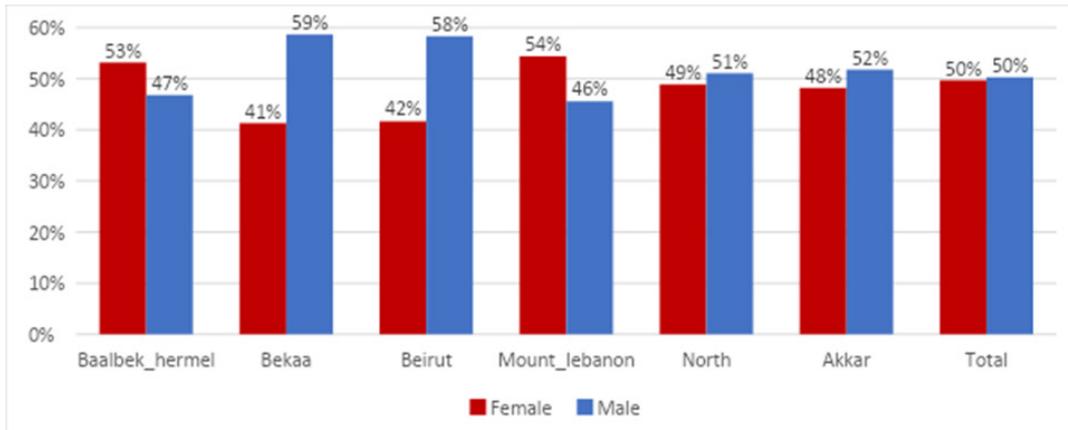

Figure 15: *Gender distribution of respondents by governorate.*

Survey respondents were aged 18 and above. As the table below shows, about half of the sample (45%) consists of adults aged 41 to 64 years.

| Age	Frequency	Valid Percent
Youth (18 to 24)	79	11%
Young adults (25 to 40)	224	30%
Adults (41 to 64)	337	45%
Seniors (65+)	106	14%
Total	**746**	**100%**

Table 2: *Age distribution of sample respondents.*

The average household size for the sample is 4.22, which is higher than the national average of 3.8. Regarding the share of elderly members in households, the average is 0.59, indicating that not all households had a member above the age of 65. In fact, the result shows that 69% of households did not have any member over the age of 65 and 22% had one member. The average number of children is 0.86 but increases to 1.92 when only considering households that had children. Seven percent of households had one person with a disability[2] and 1% had two members, rendering an average of 0.09 members with disabilities.

	Number of HH Members including head of household	Number of HH members above the age of 65	Number of children in HH (below 18)	Number of individuals with disability in the HH
Mean	4.22	0.59	0.86	0.09
Median	4	0	0	0
Minimum	1	0	0	0
Maximum	14	5	7	3

Table 3: *Descriptive statistics on households including children, elderly, and individuals with disability.*

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[2] Data on disability were based on self-declaration and not on Washington Group Questions.
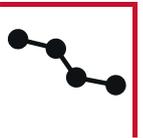
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Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.