

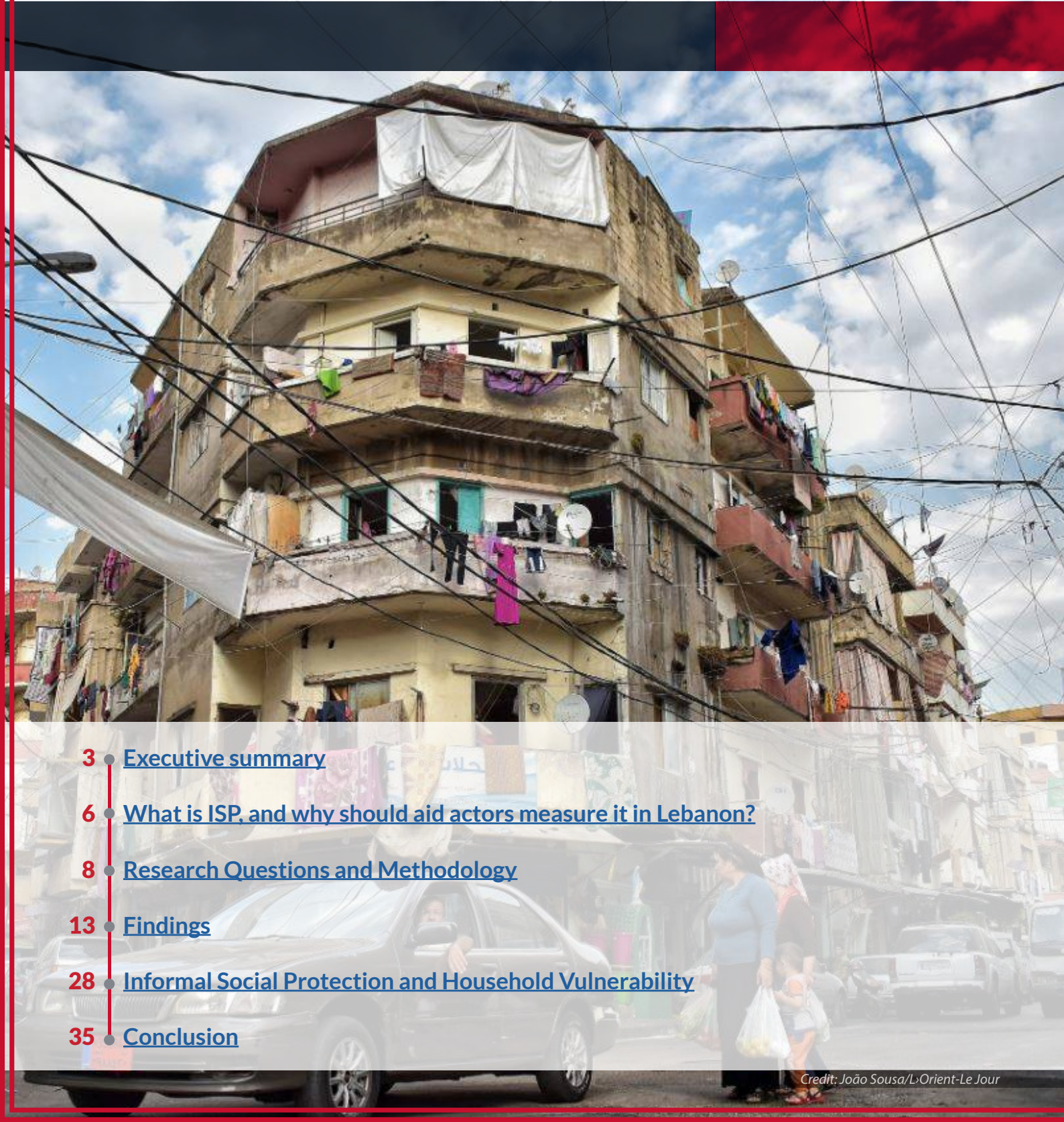
Special



# Thematic Report

## Monitoring Informal Social Protection in Lebanon - Round Two

August 2024



- 3 ● [Executive summary](#)
- 6 ● [What is ISP, and why should aid actors measure it in Lebanon?](#)
- 8 ● [Research Questions and Methodology](#)
- 13 ● [Findings](#)
- 28 ● [Informal Social Protection and Household Vulnerability](#)
- 35 ● [Conclusion](#)

Credit: João Sousa/L'Orient-Le Jour



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

*This study/report is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and European Union Humanitarian Aid. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the LCAT and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the United States Government, or the European Union.*



Credit: Hassan Ammar/AP

## Executive summary

During and in the aftermath of crises, communities are often their own first responders. Informal support shared between family, friends, neighbors, and other groups is frequently more essential to households' coping and survival than formal support from aid actors and governments. Mercy Corps research has shown that access to informally shared support directly impacts household food security, access to economic opportunities, safety, and psychosocial wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> However, protracted crises can exhaust informal support systems, as resources become increasingly scarce and households' capacities to share material support with one another erode. When informal support networks become strained it may signal worsening humanitarian conditions, as households are left without a crucial source of resilience and become increasingly reliant upon external assistance.

However, quantifying this type of support – also known as informal social protection (ISP) – can be difficult. Previous efforts to quantify ISP have tended to focus on exclusively measuring economic resources mobilized during times of hardship through households' social networks. However, this narrow definition does not capture other types of tangible and intangible assistance, from market knowledge to equipment lending, debt forgiveness, and psychosocial services.

This brief is the second in a series presenting findings from Mercy Corps' ongoing initiative to monitor ISP for improved humanitarian diagnostics in Lebanon. With this initiative, we seek to help aid actors complement conventional approaches to vulnerability assessment by offering practicable guidance on measuring and evaluating ISP. When monitored regularly, ISP may be able to efficiently identify shifts in patterns of need, and changes in household' capacity to cope during humanitarian crises. This information has the potential to enable humanitarian actors to more effectively anticipate needs, respond more quickly, and more effectively target assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Kim, et al. (2020); Kim et al. (2022); Humphrey, et al. (2024).



This brief presents findings from a second round of data collection completed in two municipalities between February and April 2024. We build on cross-sectional results detailed in a previous brief from this initiative, and leverage innovative qualitative data collection methods, to explore the ways in which ISP networks are changing over time, what factors are driving these changes, and the implications of these changes for household vulnerability. We also unpack the linkages between ISP and various food security and essential needs indicators over time, to identify the ways in which operationalizing ISP as a vulnerability indicator has the potential to uncover “hidden” aspects of household vulnerability.

## Key Findings and Implications for Aid Actors

The key findings summarized below point towards the promise of measuring ISP as a measure of household vulnerability in Lebanon. The next, and final report in this series will draw on a third round of data collection to expand on these findings and offer humanitarian actors concrete guidance on how to measure, interpret, and integrate ISP analysis into existing vulnerability assessment frameworks.

**Households’ informal social protection networks are eroding as Lebanon’s protracted crisis persists.** This is highlighted by a substantial downwards shift in median ISP Index Scores between the first two survey rounds. LCAT’s ISP Index (see Box 1) aggregates information about six distinct dimensions of households’ informal support networks. Between the two survey rounds, we observed an especially significant decline in three dimensions of ISP:

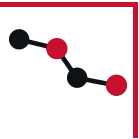
- Resources: The variety of tangible and intangible resources households are able to receive from members of its social network
- Reliability: The household’s confidence in its ability to continue to rely on its network for future support
- Reciprocity: The household’s capacity to provide support to others

**While ISP scores declined across our sample, the extent of this decline varied according to select household and community-level factors.** For example, employment status, geography, nationality, and gender of household head were significant in explaining differences in ISP scores. This suggests that certain household categories are especially likely to experience heightened humanitarian need as a result of weakening ISP networks, with important implications for the targeting of humanitarian assistance, and the design of interventions that seek to bolster informal support systems.

**The ISP Index is capable of identifying aspects of household vulnerability which are not captured by typical approaches to needs assessment.** We assessed the degree of overlap between ISP vulnerability and four vulnerability indicators widely used by humanitarian actors in Lebanon (rCSI, FCS, MDDI, and LCS-EN). We found significant differences in terms of households identified as vulnerable according to the various indicators. This suggests that by accounting for both tangible and intangible determinants of household wellbeing, and by measuring aspects of the informal systems on which households depend during crises, the ISP Index sheds light on aspects of household vulnerability that are obscured by typical food security and essential needs indicators. The ISP Index is therefore a promising tool for improving the accuracy and rigor of vulnerability assessment activities.



**ISP plays an important role in allowing households to diversify diets and meet their consumption and essential needs.** While ISP measures a distinct arena of vulnerability, statistically significant associations between ISP vulnerability and select food security and essential needs indicators highlight that ISP is nonetheless an important underlying contributor to traditional measures of vulnerability. For example, ISP vulnerable households are nearly twice as likely to be vulnerable according to FCS and LCS-EN indicators. This suggests that measuring ISP is not only an opportunity for humanitarian actors to more holistically assess household vulnerability; doing so can also help aid actors predict needs according to traditional consumption-based measures.



Credit: Mercy Corps

## What is **ISP**, and why should aid actors measure it in **Lebanon**?

Mercy Corps research on informal social protection (ISP) from Lebanon, Yemen, and South Sudan, demonstrates that communities are often their own first responders during and following crises.<sup>2</sup> This work has shown that ISP directly impacts household food security, access to economic opportunities, safety, and psychosocial wellbeing. Compared to formal assistance, ISP networks are often mobilized faster in response to shocks, including economic crises, pandemics, and conflict. The first [report](#) in this series, for example, showed that households are coping with the protracted crisis in Lebanon by relying on family members, friends, shopkeepers, religious institutions and members of the diaspora, for a wide variety of tangible and intangible support. This ranges from food and cash to information, advice, and emotional counsel.

However, protracted crises can exhaust ISP networks, as resources become increasingly scarce and households' capacities to share material support with one another erode. When ISP networks become strained it may signal worsening humanitarian conditions, as households are left without a crucial source of resilience and become increasingly reliant upon external assistance.<sup>3</sup> The risk of a collapse in ISP may be growing in Lebanon, where the socio-economic landscape is steadily deteriorating, impacting both Lebanese and refugee households alike. The Lebanese pound has plummeted by 98% compared to its pre-crisis value, with an annual inflation rate surpassing 220% in 2023.<sup>4</sup> This drastic depreciation has severely eroded purchasing power, as evidenced by the staggering increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) that remained positive throughout the crisis. Year-on-year CPI increase surpassed 190% by December 2023 before gradually dropping to 51% by May 2024.<sup>5</sup> With essential commodity prices continuing to soar and substantive reforms remaining elusive, the risk of further social instability and increasing strain on ISP networks looms large.

<sup>2</sup> Kim, et al. (2020); Kim et al. (2022); Humphrey, et al. (2024).

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell, D. and Majid, N. (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), [Annual Inflation Rate](#)

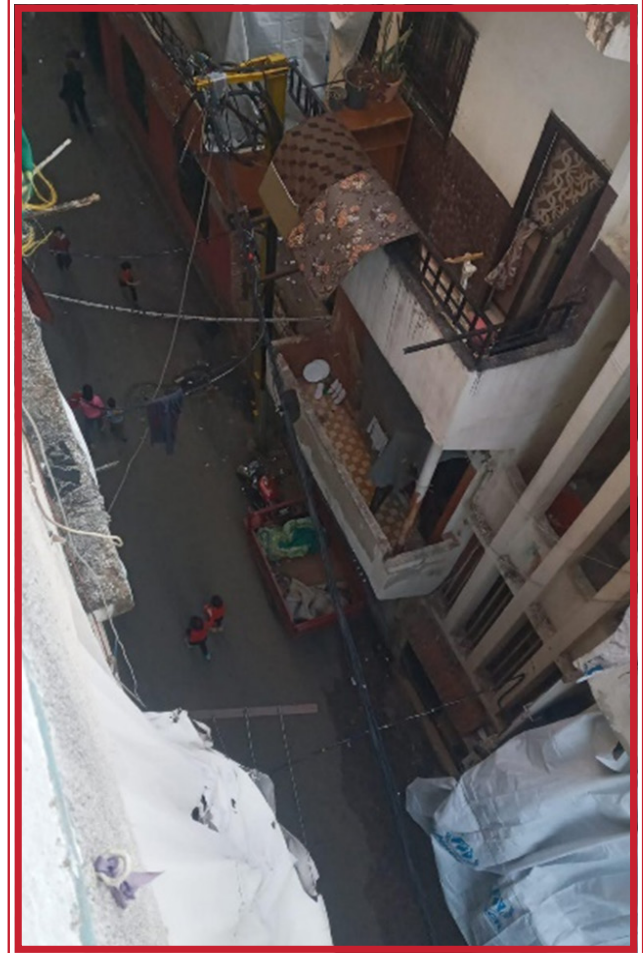
<sup>5</sup> Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), [December 2023 CPI statistics](#)

Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), [May 2024 CPI statistics](#)



Importantly, not all groups have equal access to ISP. Exclusion from informal support networks, whether based on socioeconomic, geographic, or political factors, can imply particular vulnerability for some groups. This may be especially pertinent in Lebanon, where membership in social networks built along political, sectarian, and familial lines often play important roles in enabling access to resources and services. This is tied to the deeply rooted sectarian system that shapes the very structure of the Lebanese welfare regime as well as societal relations. For example, sectarian parties are often involved in the direct provision of benefits and services, and their modes of allocating welfare can be discriminatory, notably along partisan and religious lines.<sup>6</sup> Exclusivity of ISP networks may also be tied to nationalistic political rhetoric and resulting social tensions. In Lebanon, negative rhetoric towards Syrian nationals has been on the upswing since October for example, culminating in a push for policies advocating their return, the imposition of curfews, and demands that Syrians vacate certain areas, jeopardizing their access to some support networks.<sup>7</sup>

Under the backdrop of growing resource scarcity and social exclusion, ISP may be especially relevant to household vulnerability in Lebanon. Measuring ISP seeks to identify patterns that have current and future implications for multiple dimensions of household need. For example, characteristics of a household's current informal support system may be associated with multiple aspects of vulnerability during crises, including its food security status, ability to access essential needs, and psychosocial wellbeing, among others. A household's access to ISP may also be associated with their ability to build and protect their future welfare. However, ISP remains largely absent from humanitarian information systems. Instead, aid actors tend to rely on standardized measures of vulnerability that typically focus on individual- or household-level consumption, coping strategies, or access to essential needs, and which may fail to account for relational and locally-led approaches to coping and survival.



*"Because of the crisis in the south, there has been a significant and large population increase in Bourj Hammoud and Nabaa. Also, there are Syrian and Lebanese families from the south living in single homes"*  
Photovoice participant, March 2024, Bourj Hammoud.

By measuring informal social protection and its dynamics as part of assessments and monitoring activities, aid actors may be able to efficiently identify shifts in patterns of need, uncover "hidden" vulnerabilities, and identify changes in humanitarian crisis trajectories. This information would potentially enable humanitarian actors to more effectively anticipate need, to respond more quickly, and to more effectively target assistance to those in greatest need.

<sup>6</sup> Cammett, M. (2015).

<sup>7</sup> Mercy Corps Lebanon, [April Crisis Update](#) May 10, 2024.



# Research Questions and Methodology

To evaluate the utility of measuring and monitoring ISP in humanitarian information systems, we employ a mixed-methods approach to understand the nature and function of ISP in Lebanon. This report is the second in a series of studies on ISP, addressing the following research questions in two municipalities in Lebanon, Barouk and Bourj Hammoud:

- *How are households' ISP networks changing over time, for whom, and why?*
- *Can monitoring ISP help aid actors more accurately identify household vulnerability, including for currently overlooked populations?*
- *To what extent are changes in households' ISP networks associated with changes in traditional vulnerability indicators?*





## Research Sites

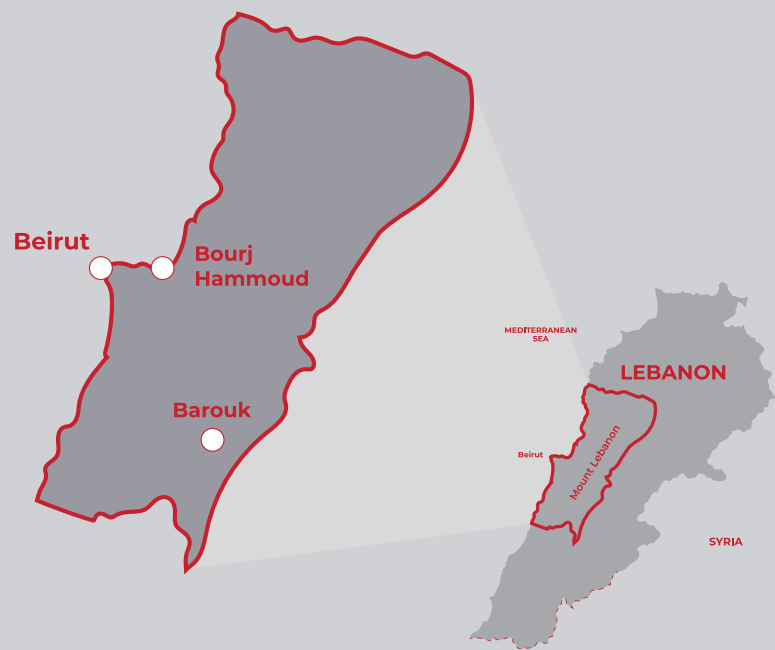
This project is being implemented in two Lebanese municipalities, selected using a ranking process designed to ensure that sites varied in ways relevant to the key research questions. This included a consideration of socioeconomic status and diversity in terms of nationality.

### Barouk

Barouk is a small town in the Chouf district with approximately 5,000 inhabitants. It was chosen as a research site for this report due to its high number of middle income households which would not typically be included in official aid targeting or the government's social protection programmes. It is also more representative of the many rural towns outside of Lebanon's more urban areas, such as along the coastal highway. Tourism represents a key part of the local economy, thanks to its proximity to the Cedar Reserve. Barouk also has a wide informal economy, with many residents employed in agriculture, small businesses, and construction.

### Bourj Hammoud

This urban municipality in the Metn district contrasts significantly with Barouk on many levels. Very close to Beirut, Bourj Hammoud has a high number of migrant workers, with a much more diverse and vulnerable population compared to Barouk. It is also a municipality where many NGOs and other aid projects are active. Bourj Hammoud's economy reflects a mix of formal and informal sectors, encompassing established businesses, informal markets, and recent migrant businesses. This allows for an assessment of how households adapt to changing economic realities and provide essential assistance to other vulnerable individuals and families.



Research Site Distribution Map

## Methodology

This project employs a sequential mixed methods approach. Two rounds of data collection have occurred so far. Round One (conducted in September-October 2023) resulted in descriptive quantitative analysis and complementary qualitative discussion, summarizing cross sectional characteristics of households' ISP networks. This brief focuses on a second round of data (collected between February and April 2024), and entails longitudinal analysis, exploring the ways in which ISP is changing over time, for whom, and associations between ISP and other vulnerability indicators.



For both rounds of data collection, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions were conducted immediately following household survey rounds, in the same geographies, though with comparable yet distinct respondents (to avoid survey fatigue). Qualitative approaches explore the same themes which feature in the quantitative instrument, and are used to contextualize survey responses and quantitative findings. A third round of data collection is anticipated in September 2024, which will enable additional longitudinal analysis, as well as a specific consideration of the extent to which changes in ISP is predictive of subsequent changes in household vulnerability.

### **Quantitative method**

This project uses a quantitative panel survey to monitor changes in households' informal social protection networks over time, using Mercy Corps' ISP Index (Box 1). In addition to the ISP Index, the survey includes four vulnerability modules to enable comparisons with ISP Index results (Multi-Dimensional Deprivation Index, Livelihood Coping Score for Essential Needs, Food Consumption Score, and reduced Coping Strategy Index). To select these comparison modules, we reviewed the most commonly collected vulnerability indicators in Lebanon (e.g., by the VASyR, MSNA, and WFP monitoring surveys) to ensure that our analysis is of relevance to humanitarian stakeholders. Various sociodemographic indicators were also included in the survey that other research has shown to be important to account for in ISP evaluations.

A random sample of households was drawn for Barouk and Bourj Hammoud from a database of residential single and multi-family housing units provided by Mercy Corps' data collection partner. The sample was statistically representative within a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, resulting in a Round One sample size of 240 households for Barouk and 346 households for Bourj Hammoud, with surveys conducted in person between September and October 2023. Round Two was conducted by telephone with the same respondents, between February and April 2024. While attrition was considerable, at 13%, the sample remained statistically representative thanks to the inclusion of a buffer in the original sample size.



### Box 1: Informal Social Protection Index

Mercy Corps's Informal Social Protection Index captures six distinct dimensions of households' support networks:



**Support Network Size:** The number of people the household can turn to for help.



**Support Network Resources:** The variety of tangible and intangible resources households are able to receive members of its social network.



**Reciprocity:** The household's capacity to provide support to others.



**Diversity:** The different types of connections a household can rely on for support.



**Reliability:** The household's confidence in its ability to continue to rely on its network for future support.



**Dynamics:** Changes to a household's ability to get and provide help to its social network.

ISP Index Scores are calculated by summing households' scores for the six dimensions, such that higher Index scores imply stronger ISP networks. Each dimension is equally weighted with a maximum score of one, resulting in a maximum possible index score of six. Further, indicators within each dimension all have the same weight (for example 1/4 if there are four indicators in a dimension).

### Qualitative method

To help capture narratives that showcased the changes, challenges, and reach of households' ISP networks, the research team developed a two-pronged approach to qualitative data collection and analysis. This included a temporal approach that aims to understand how ISP networks operate in the Lebanese context and how they have evolved over time. To do this, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with Lebanese, Syrian, and Armenian households where we explored the six dimensions of ISP networks with participants. In total, we spoke with 10 households in Bourj Hammoud and six households in Barouk, along with key informant interviews (KIs) with local leaders at both sites.



Given that Lebanon is contending with an ever changing array of crises, we also implemented a deep-dive approach to ensure that we prioritized iteration in our data collection so that we were better equipped to respond to new areas of inquiry as they emerged. We adapted the Photovoice methodology (Box 2) and utilized focus group discussions (FGDs) to delve into enablers and challenges to people’s networks in real time. Participants for Photovoice and FGDs were selected based on referrals from community-based contacts in Bourj Hammoud and Barouk. Participants were sent prompts via WhatsApp and asked to take two to three photos with short accompanying captions based on questions and areas of further inquiry that emerged in the IDIs and KIs. The photos and captions were then reviewed and grouped based on the themes that emerged during analysis, with these insights used to identify areas of further inquiry and develop a topic list to help guide the focus group discussion. These photos were then used in focus group discussions (divided up by gender and nationality) to guide conversation, with participants encouraged to ask questions and respond to insights from other group members. In total, there were four cohorts in Bourj Hammoud (one each of Lebanese and Syrian men and women) and two cohorts in Barouk (one each of Lebanese men and women).

## Box 2: Photovoice

*Photovoice is a participatory research methodology that “puts cameras into the participants’ hands to help them to document, reflect upon, and communicate issues of concern, while stimulating social change.”<sup>8</sup> Through the photovoice methodology, participants are encouraged to document their communities strengths and challenges and engage in dialogue on the pressing issues that dominate day-to-day life.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, the photographers are encouraged to use these photos and the discussion they ignite to reach decision-makers and enact change.*



*Photovoice participation, March 2024, Barouk.*

<sup>8</sup> Budig, K. et al. (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Wang, C. et al. (1997).



Credit: S.F

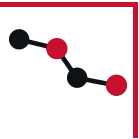
## Findings

### How is ISP changing in Lebanon, and for whom?

Households' ability to rely on informal social protection networks appears to be eroding as Lebanon's protracted crisis persists. This is highlighted by a downwards shift in median ISP Index Scores between the first two survey rounds. Median ISP Index Scores, which capture six equally weighted dimensions of household support networks, decreased from 2.06 at Round One to 1.82 at Round Two (-11%). While ISP Index scores consistently declined across our sample, statistically significant differences in the extent of this deterioration were found, according to select household and community-level characteristics. These differences are briefly summarized in Box 1, and discussed in more detail in the following sections of the report.



*"There are very few to no cars at the entrance of these restaurants...they have been severely affected by the economic crisis as well as the events in South Lebanon. My income has been significantly reduced, and people with reduced incomes are no longer able to help others."  
Photovoice participant, March 2024, Barouk.*



### Box 3: Erosion of ISP Index Scores, disaggregated by household and community-level factors



**Geography:** In Barouk, the median ISP Index score dropped by 29% between the two survey rounds, contrasted with a less pronounced reduction in Bourj Hammoud, which was not found to be statistically significant.



**Employment status:** Households experiencing unemployment saw a more pronounced reduction in median scores (-15%), compared to those with employed household heads (-9%).



**Receipt of Humanitarian Assistance:** Households that did not report receiving any form of assistance experienced a 9% decrease in median ISP Index scores, compared to a less pronounced reduction among households that did receive humanitarian assistance.



**Nationality:** While Lebanese households' ISP Index Scores decreased by 13% between the two survey rounds, the decline was less pronounced for non-Lebanese households (of whom 97% identified as Syrian), whose median ISP Index score decreased by 8%.



**Gender:** Marginal, though statistically significant differences in ISP Index Scores were found based on the gender of household head, with median scores decreasing slightly more for female headed households (-13%) compared to male headed households (-10%).



Indicator	Category	ISP Index Score - Round 1	ISP Index Score - Round 2	(%)
Research Site	Barouk	2.07	1.48	-29% *
	Bourj Hammoud	2.05	1.98	-4%
Employment	Unemployed	2.02	1.72	-15% *
	Employed	2.07	1.89	-9% *
Receipt of Humanitarian assistance	No	1.97	1.80	-9% *
	Yes	2.18	2.04	-7%
Nationality	Lebanese	2.04	1.77	-13% *
	Non-Lebanese	2.08	1.91	-8% *
Gender of Household Head	Female	2.05	1.77	-13% *
	Male	2.06	1.85	-10% *
Total		2.06	1.82	-11%

**Table 1:** ISP score across HH characteristics (mean values, %).

While Index-level results are discussed in more detail later this brief, we now turn to an analysis of changes in select dimensions of ISP to gain a more nuanced picture of how ISP is changing, for whom, and why. While each dimension of the Index is conceptually linked, they measure distinct aspects of ISP networks, and therefore may change in varying or divergent ways. We highlight four of the six Index dimensions based on a consideration of which have changed most significantly between the two survey rounds, and which have the most pronounced effect on overall ISP Index scores. An analysis of changes in the median scores for each dimension of ISP shows especially pronounced shifts in terms of the Resources, Reciprocity and Dynamics<sup>10</sup> dimensions (figure 1). The same dimensions, in addition to Reliability and Network size, have the most significant effect on overall ISP index scores (figure 2).

<sup>10</sup> The “Dynamics” dimension is based on a series of survey questions that ask households to self-report perceived changes in terms of their ISP networks in a given recall period. Analysis of the Dynamics dimension is especially useful when analyzing a single round of data. Because this brief presents longitudinal findings over two survey rounds, we are able to consider changes in each dimension over time, and therefore omit a specific discussion of the Dynamics dimension in this section of the brief, in order to avoid redundancy.

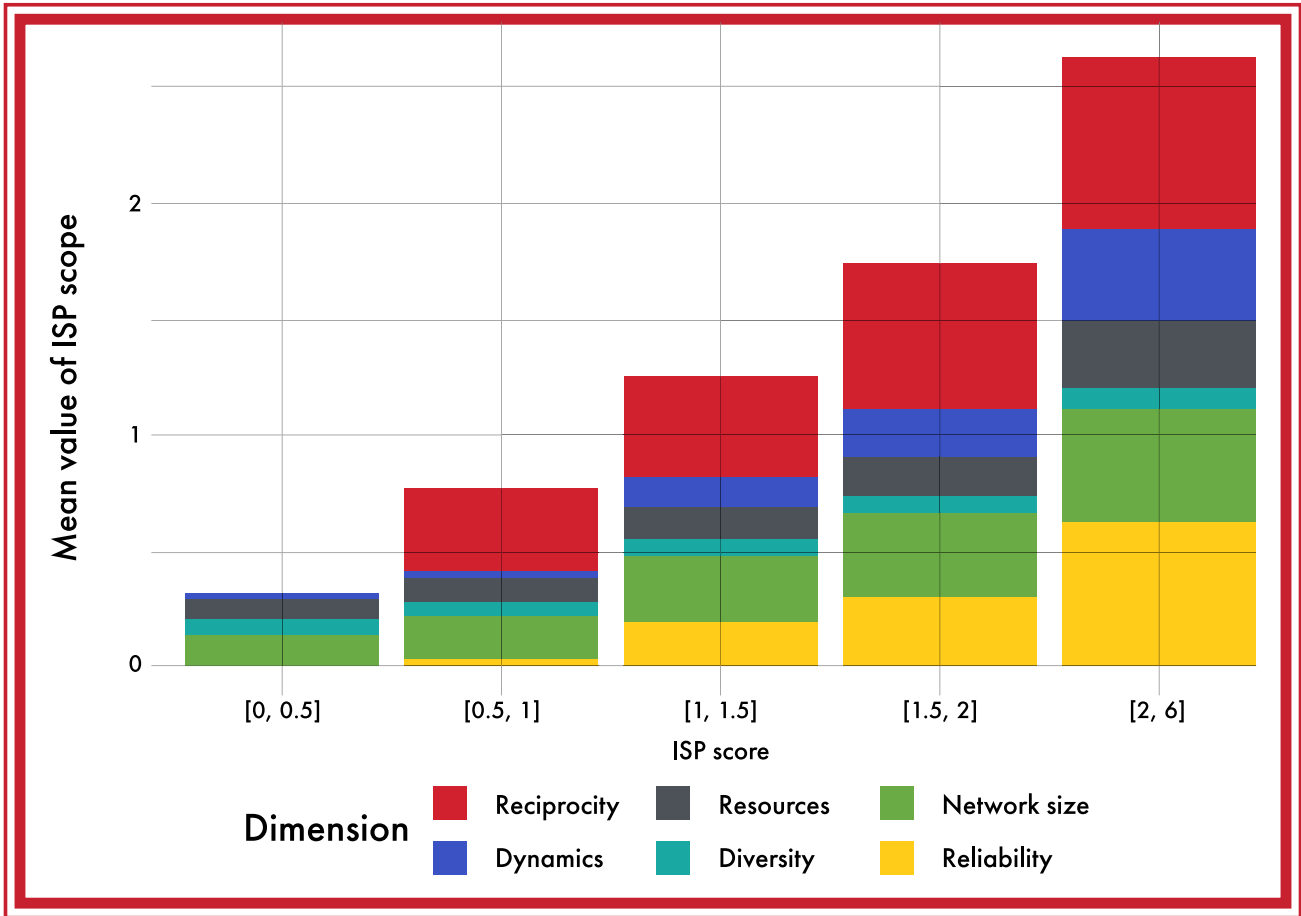


Figure 1: Contribution of dimensions to ISP score - round 2.

Dimension-specific results vary according to select household-level characteristics. Unpacking these variations reveals important insights into potential bases of household vulnerability. An understanding of which household characteristics are significantly associated with specific dimensions of ISP may help humanitarian actors design more effective interventions that strengthen existing local support systems. Table 2 summarizes the ways in which dimension scores vary by select household characteristics, and will be discussed in more detail below.

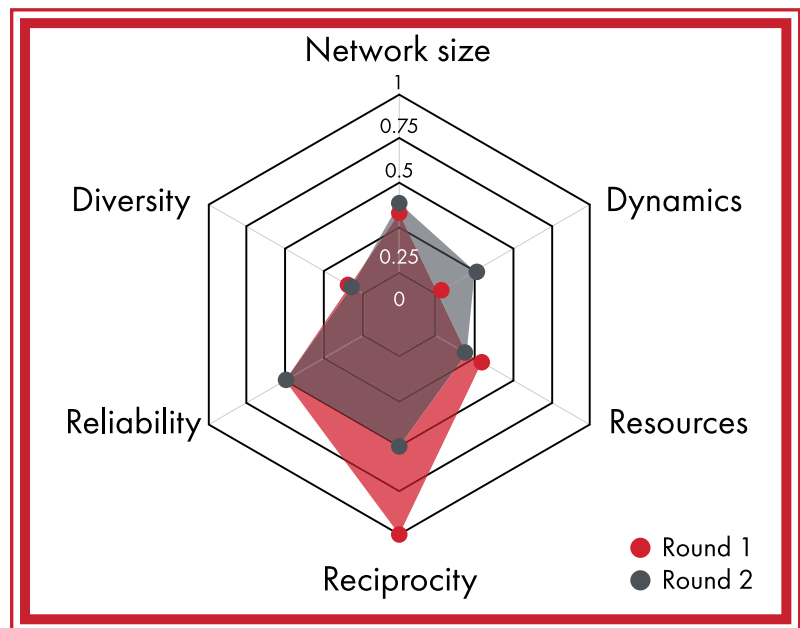
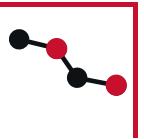


Figure 2: Spider web of median values for each round.





	$\Delta$ Network Size	$\Delta$ Reliability	$\Delta$ Resources	$\Delta$ Reciprocity
<b>HH characteristics controls</b>				
Gender HoHH - Male (ref: Female)	▲		▼	▲
Nationality HoHH - Non-Lebanese (ref: Lebanese)	▼			▲
Location at round 1 - Barouk (ref: Bourj Hammoud)	▼		▼	▼
$\Delta$ Hum. Assistance <0 (ref: 0, no change)			▼	
$\Delta$ Hum. Assistance >0 (ref: 0, no change)		▲		
Education HoHH - Advanced (ref: int. education)				
Education HoHH - No education (ref: int. education)				
HH size at round 1 ->6 pers (ref <4 persons)				
$\Delta$ Dependence ratio		▲		
<b>ISP dimensions</b>				
$\Delta$ Diversity			▲	▼
$\Delta$ Reliability	▲		▲	
$\Delta$ Dynamics	▲		▲	▲
$\Delta$ Resources	▲	▲		▲
$\Delta$ Network Size		▲	▲	
$\Delta$ Reciprocity			▲	

**Table 2:** Influence of household characteristics on ISP dimensions.\*

\* A first difference model is estimated, testing for the influence of the different dimensions and controlled by household characteristics.



## **Resources:**

### **Key findings:**

- The number of distinct types of support being shared within ISP networks decreased by over a third between the two data collection rounds.
  - Nonetheless, there was an increase in households' receipt of select resource categories, including loans and cash gifts in Barouk, and food and advice/counseling in Bourj Hammoud.
- Participants unanimously emphasized the critical role that intangible resources play during
- crises, especially emotional and psychosocial support.

The “Resources” dimension accounts for the distinct goods and services that households report having shared and received through their ISP networks. The indicators in this dimension account for both tangible resources, such as food, cash, and livelihood inputs, and intangible resources such as market information, and psychosocial support, each of which have direct implications for households' abilities to cope with and adapt to crises (see: Table 3).

Research on social networks has underscored that households are strategic in deciding how much, when, and with whom they share resources during crises. During periods of scarcity, this capacity to mobilize resources—tangible resources especially—can carry significant implications for households' ability to maintain diverse connections, the diversity of resources they can access, and abide by the sharing norms that underpin their support networks. Understanding the factors dictating household strategy when it comes to resources can help aid actors gain insight into how formal assistance can be leveraged to mitigate the impacts of scarcity and strengthen ISP networks.

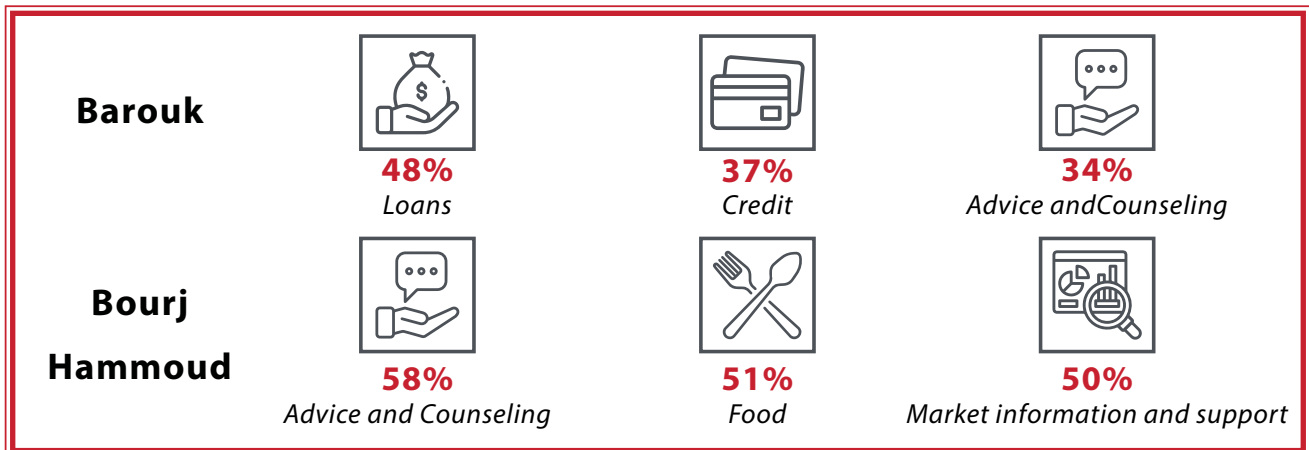


Resources		Barouk				Bourj Hammoud			
		provided		received		provided		received	
		R1	R2	R1	R2	R1	R2	R1	R2
Tangibles	Food	45%	8%	35%	30%	46%	35%	41%	51%
	Sell on credit	19%	3%	46%	37%	17%	12%	57%	48%
	Loans	9%	1%	18%	48%	13%	4%	53%	46%
	Non-food household commodities, in kind	38%	2%	6%	15%	47%	30%	17%	19%
	Cash assistance	22%	5%	22%	28%	35%	8%	17%	14%
	Social function support	18%	0%	5%	0%	19%	18%	7%	14%
	Direct payment for an educational/healthcare institutions	6%	0%	11%	9%	11%	2%	12%	6%
	Discounted or free accommodation	9%	0%	6%	1%	17%	7%	13%	5%
	Fuel	15%	1%	8%	15%	7%	2%	4%	1%
Intangibles	Advice and Counseling (Emotional support)	68%	35%	63%	34%	51%	60%	45%	58%
	Market information and support	56%	11%	53%	15%	58%	50%	58%	50%
	Discounted or free services	17%	2%	13%	6%	45%	33%	24%	22%
	Help with transportation	42%	6%	27%	8%	38%	26%	24%	21%
	Help finding a job	24%	3%	11%	3%	45%	23%	28%	11%
	Facilitating access to a generator	5%	1%	4%	12%	16%	5%	12%	7%
Tools or information to start or complete a business		10%	0%	2%	2%	19%	3%	14%	1%

Notes : the percentage corresponds to the share of people in a given round and location that mentioned having received or provided this type of resource. For instance, 45% of respondents in Barouk in round 1 reported having provided food to an individual not living in their household in the past 6 months.

**Table 3:** Resources provided and received, total percentage by round location.

## Most commonly received resources (round 2):



Overall, the average Resource dimension scores for households in Barouk and Bourj Hammoud decreased by over a third between the two survey rounds, indicating a significant reduction in the number of distinct types of support being shared within ISP networks. Figure 3 provides an aggregated view of the average number of tangible and intangible resources provided and received per round and location. It reveals that on average respondents reported receiving more resources than they were providing to others. In Barouk, the average resources provided by respondent households dropped by 80% between round 1 and round 2 while the average resources received decreased by 20%. In Bourj Hammoud, resources provided decreased by 34% and received dropped by 13% on average.



Figure 3: Aggregation of resource provision and receipt.

Qualitative participants in Barouk described particular difficulty obtaining resources through their ISP networks, especially during the winter months. Round Two data was collected between February and April, during a period when fuel is one of the most vital resources that households need to cope with the cold winter weather. Many of our participants stressed that the amount received fell far short of the amount that was needed, which they attributed to a decrease in support that would typically have been provided by wealthy families in the area. Instead, these wealthy residents who previously provided community assistance were now saving resources or prioritizing sharing among their immediate relatives.

Despite the overall decline in the average number of resource types received through ISP networks, households reported an increase in their receipt of select resource categories. In Barouk, for example, there was a significant uptick in the receipt of loans and cash gifts between survey rounds, while respondents in Bourj Hammoud received more psychosocial support and food from their support networks. Qualitative respondents attributed this in large part to the holiday period which occurred during this survey period (including Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Easter), which is generally marked by a distribution of food and gifts, sometimes financed in part by diaspora connections.

When discussing the relative importance of the different resources shared within ISP networks, participants unanimously emphasized the critical role that various forms of intangible support play during crises. In Bourj Hammoud, for example, they described receiving market information from their support networks, which they used to locate food and medications at lower prices, as well as potential employment opportunities. One respondent said, "During my job search, I utilized my network to secure a new position. Throughout this process, I assisted several individuals in finding employment by forwarding them job offers that weren't suitable for me."<sup>11</sup> Participants also emphasized the importance of emotional support and counseling during the crisis.

<sup>11</sup> In-depth interview with Lebanese male, Bourj Hammoud, March 2024



A participant from Barouk mentioned, “[I use] my cell phone to provide moral and psychological support to families from the South who have relocated to safer areas, [as] it is a crucial communication tool during distressing times.”<sup>12</sup>

**“Having good connections goes beyond mere material benefit; it involves effective communication and psychological support.”**

*Lebanese male, Bourj Hammoud*

This is particularly crucial in the current crisis, which encompasses not only financial challenges but also psychological ones. In such times, mental wellbeing holds greater significance than financial stability; losing the latter renders the former insignificant.”<sup>13</sup>

## “Suffering in silence”:<sup>14</sup>

### Challenges to psychosocial wellbeing and ISP networks in Lebanon

When Photovoice participants were asked to share images capturing the challenges faced by them and their networks during the preceding months, many showed photos demonstrating the far-reaching impacts of war, economic crises, and uncertainty on their psychosocial wellbeing. As devastating images emerge from Gaza and the threat of war in southern Lebanon looms, nearly all of our participants spoke of increased psychological distress, including nightmares, insomnia, hypervigilance, and anxiety over the future. These recent events have only compounded the pre-existing strain on people’s psychosocial well-being. One focus group participant in Bourj Hammoud stressed that news from Gaza and South Lebanon was “triggering traumas from the Beirut blast and fear of homelessness or loss of loved ones,”<sup>15</sup> with the “fear of potential war and the sounds of airplanes or thunderstorms provoking panic attacks.”<sup>16</sup>

While many typically would have turned to their social networks for emotional support in the face of limited access to formal mental health services, these very networks are struggling under the weight of these same crises. In Barouk, one woman lamented that she “was no longer able to sustain my own family,”<sup>17</sup> and had not “received any material or even moral and mental support because everyone is suffering in silence in Barouk during these hard times.”<sup>18</sup> Some noted how unreliable their networks had become in light of people’s eroding capacity to provide support, forcing them to withdraw from social engagements and leading to increased social isolation. This has only further exacerbated declines in their psychosocial wellbeing, undercutting a capacity that is critical to individual and household resilience during a period of acute crisis. As economic challenges and insecurity continue, there is growing urgency as well as ample opportunity for aid actors to invest in social networks as a way to bolster both the economic and psychosocial wellbeing of households.

<sup>12</sup> Focus group discussion with Lebanese females, Barouk, March 2024

<sup>13</sup> In-depth interview with Lebanese male, Bourj Hammoud, March 2024

<sup>14</sup> In-depth interview with Lebanese female, Barouk, March 2024

<sup>15</sup> Syrian female, focus group discussion with Syrian women refugees, Bourj Hammoud, March 2024

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> In-depth interview with Lebanese female, Barouk, March 2024

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



## Reciprocity:

### Key findings:

- Most households are providing less support to others in their ISP networks over time, which they often attribute to growing resource scarcity, increasing costs and decreasing formal assistance, resulting in the need to prioritize household consumption over sharing.
- Changes in households' reciprocity scores vary by nationality and gender, with decreases in being more pronounced among Lebanese households and female headed households.

The “Reciprocity” dimension of the ISP Index considers the extent to which households are able to provide support to members of their support networks. This dimension is closely related to, yet distinct from the Resources dimension. While the resources dimension score is based on a simple accounting of the number of types of support provided and received by a household, the reciprocity dimension score is based on the relative amount of intangible and tangible support provided compared to the amount received. A higher score means that a household provides at least as much as the resources it received.

Specific reciprocity norms vary across contexts, but a household's capacity to provide support plays a crucial role in a household's strategy when engaging with their networks. Often households will leverage and share their resources to form new social connections or strengthen existing ones, with the knowledge and expectation that it will be reciprocated in the future. Reciprocity, as a result, helps to create a system of mutual, reinforcing support that households can rely upon and turn to during periods of crisis.

Overall, households' reciprocity scores decreased by 16% between the two survey rounds (0.71 to 0.59). This erosion is a reflection of the fact that most households are providing less support to others in their ISP networks over time, both in absolute terms and in comparison to the amount they receive from others in their support networks. In particular, respondents have tended to experience a drop of reciprocity in tangible items (-52% of tangible reciprocity in Barouk and -24% in Bourj Hammoud). In both Barouk and Bourj Hammoud, reciprocity appears to be confined primarily to religious holidays, though with less frequency than in previous years. What came through most clearly in conversations with participants was the extent to which ongoing economic challenges had made it difficult—and in some cases, nearly impossible—to engage in reciprocity norms surrounding social engagements. Many in Barouk spoke of an increased sense of isolation and disappointment in the reduced capacity of networks, perceiving their networks to be more exclusionary and less reciprocal.

Changes in households' reciprocity scores vary significantly according to nationality. In both survey locations, decreases in reciprocity scores have been more pronounced among Lebanese (-21%) than non-Lebanese (-8%) households (figure 4). Lebanese participants, specifically those in Barouk, attributed declining reciprocity to growing resource constraints as the costs of goods increased and the amount of formal assistance decreased, making it increasingly difficult for households to share support with others. Many of those interviewed highlighted that they and others in their network had stopped receiving formal assistance between the two survey rounds.



Indeed, 25% of survey respondents reported receiving support from international organizations at Round 1 compared to only 12% in Round 2. Participants emphasized that this decline in formal assistance had a considerable impact on households' capacity to provide support to others, with many reducing the amount of tangible resources they shared with those outside of their immediate household or family.

Higher reciprocity scores among non-Lebanese households may be in part due to especially strong in-group social solidarity within Syrian communities. In qualitative interviews, Syrian participants frequently emphasized the strong connections formed as a result of their protracted displacement, relying on one another to share housing costs and non-food items like clothing and school supplies. However, economic hardships have pushed some Syrian households to the limits of their coping capacities. Increasing anti-refugee rhetoric appears to have resulted in decreased reciprocation between Lebanese and non-Lebanese households, particularly as Syrians have withdrawn from public life due to curfews, checkpoints, and attacks by nationalist gangs. Furthermore, many spoke of a resentment on the part of Lebanese households towards Syrians, noting that landlords and employers preferred Syrians because they could charge higher rent prices, avoid formal rental contracts, and pay lower wages. This has continued to fuel tensions between both communities, particularly in Bourj Hammoud where competition for affordable housing remains fierce.

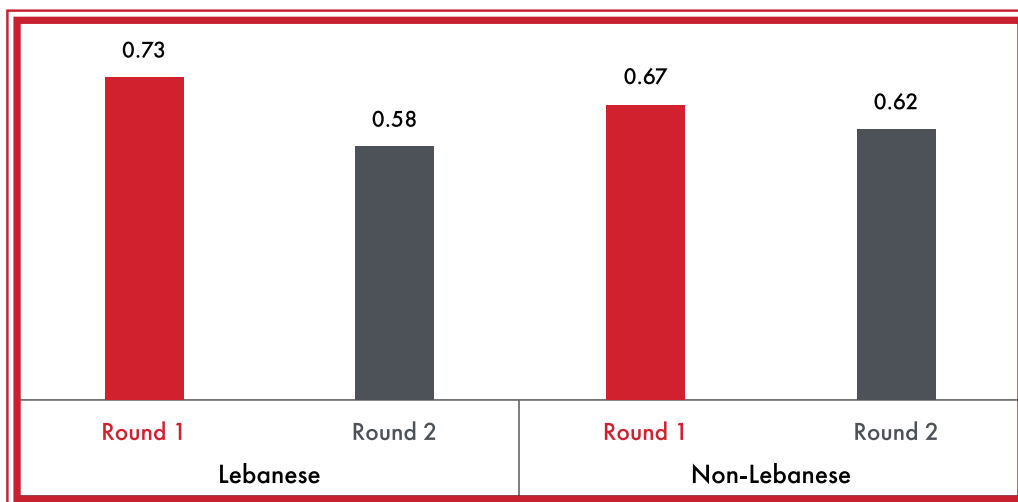


Figure 4: Reciprocity score by nationality.

Gender is also instrumental in determining household reciprocity, with female headed households experiencing more substantial erosion in reciprocity scores between the two survey rounds than households with male heads. This is especially pronounced when considering the lesser frequency with which female-headed households report sharing tangible support with others in their social networks, including cash and other in-kind resources. This finding is aligned with other research, which demonstrates that gender norms in Lebanon influence the relationships households can form and the types of resources that they share with and receive from one another.<sup>19</sup> In Lebanon, men traditionally hold authority over decisions related to cash and other valuable property, including whether and with whom to share these resources. It is likely that these norms persist, even when women are the de facto heads of their households. Women's limited autonomy with respect to decisions about sharing may be especially isolating given the critical role that reciprocity plays in establishing and maintaining informal support networks.

<sup>19</sup> Diab, J. (2024).



## **Reliability:**

### **Key findings:**

- The perceived reliability of ISP networks is declining, with a 47% decrease in the number of households expressing confidence in their ability to continue receiving support from their networks in the coming 12 months.
- Declining reliability of ISP networks was linked to households' inability to abide by social norms governing sharing. The diminished capacity to share resources is leading some households to intentionally cut themselves off from their social networks, undermining the reliability of their informal support systems.
- Declining confidence in ISP networks as a source of support may foreshadow increasing humanitarian need, as it may signal the erosion of a critical source of coping for crisis-affected households.

The reliability dimension of the ISP Index accounts for the extent to which households are confident in their ability to continue to receive support from their support networks in the next 12 months.

Reliability is an important dimension of ISP because the degree of confidence a household has in its ability to receive sustained support has particular implications for psychosocial well being, and may also influence important decisions about resource allocation and consumption. For example, households that are more confident in their ability to receive support in the future may feel empowered to invest limited resources in productive livelihood strategies with more sustainable and longer-term implications for household wellbeing. Conversely, households who lack confidence in the reliability of their support networks may instead prioritize immediate term consumption and suffer from especially acute psychosocial stress, driven by the precariousness of their circumstances.

Overall, the reliability dimension has experienced a -17% decrease on average at round 2 compared to round 1 (0.43 to 0.36). There is a substantial drop in the share of respondents confident in their ability to get support in the next 12 months (-47%), and a corresponding increase in the number of respondents who were uncertain (+26%) or not at all confident (+9%) in their ability to continue to receive support (see Table 4).

Participants often attributed their declining confidence in ISP networks to their own inability to fulfill social obligations when it came to gifting and sharing. For some, the diminished capacity to share resources resulted in cutting themselves off from their broader networks by reducing social engagements and interactions. In a focus group with Syrian women, one participant attributed a decrease in her social interaction to the "inability of people to host events or entertain guests at their homes as they did before the economic crisis,"<sup>20</sup> while another woman expressed that the strain of the crisis meant that she "no longer feels the will or passion to engage or socialize with others."<sup>21</sup> In turn, participants have become less confident that they can rely on support from their networks now or in the future.

<sup>20</sup> Syrian female, focus group discussion with Syrian women refugees, Bourj Hammoud, March 2024

<sup>21</sup> Syrian female, focus group discussion with Syrian women refugees, Bourj Hammoud, March 2024





	Round 1	Round 2	Δ
Not at all confident	37%	40%	9%
Somewhat confident	35%	44%	26%
Very confident	25%	14%	-47%
Do not know	3%	2%	-6%

**Table 4:** Confidence in ability to get help in the next 12 months.

The decline in confidence has been exacerbated by decreased support from well-off families and remittances from the diaspora due to rising global prices. Wealthier prominent families in Barouk, who were previously responsible for supporting winterization efforts and organizing and funding village-wide social gatherings, scaled back their support as they too began to experience resource constraints amid rising costs. One woman in Barouk described these shifting priorities, noting that



**“no one is helping because they think it’s better to keep the money for [their households].”<sup>22</sup>**

*Lebanese female, Barouk*

Where once these critical connections would have served as some sort of safety net, continuing economic insecurity and widespread resource limitations have reduced households’ confidence that others in their networks can adequately mobilize resources to meet their increasing needs.

Some participants also linked the declining reliability of ISP networks to diminished access to assistance from informal, community-run initiatives, such as those organized by youth or religious organizations to provide food and school supplies to vulnerable households. Participants explained that these initiatives are becoming increasingly unreliable, as support is being consolidated within increasingly exclusive social networks which are often based on political and religious affiliation. In Barouk and Bourj Hammoud, participants expressed concerns about perceived unfairness in the distribution of this assistance and community initiatives run by local religious institutions. These entities, themselves impacted by the crises, prioritize specific communities based on religious and political affiliations and nationality, often focusing aid on food donations around religious holidays like Ramadan and Easter. Similarly, in Barouk, some respondents described a continued reliance on specific political parties for support, while others held that those opposed to these parties are excluded from receiving any aid. Increasingly limited resources have resulted in networks that are more exclusive and that determine support not on the basis of need or vulnerability but on efforts to consolidate influence, leaving households uncertain about the reliability of these critical sources of support.

<sup>22</sup> In-depth interview with Lebanese female, Barouk, March 2024



## Network Size:

### Key findings:

- Network Size scores increased by 11% on average, indicating that despite the erosion of other dimensions of ISP, some households are managing to maintain or even expand the number of people in their informal support networks.
- Results varied dramatically by geography. In Barouk, economic hardship, harsh winter weather, and heightened levels of anxiety due to the escalating violence in the region limited social interactions and reduced community engagement, resulting in a reduction in network size.
- These results should be interpreted with caution, as improvements in network size alone mean little absent corresponding gains in reliability, resource availability, and reciprocity – all of which declined on average, during the samea period.

The “Network Size” dimension of the ISP index measures the number of people outside the immediate household that can be turned to for help.

Contrary to the dimensions described above, the average network size score measured at round 2 showed an increase by 11% on average (from 0.33 to 0.37). This is driven by overall growth in the average number of people beyond immediate household members, that respondents reported being able to turn to for support (+22%). This corresponded with a decrease in the proportion of respondents reporting having no support network, and an increase in those reporting having 2-5 people in their networks (figure 5).

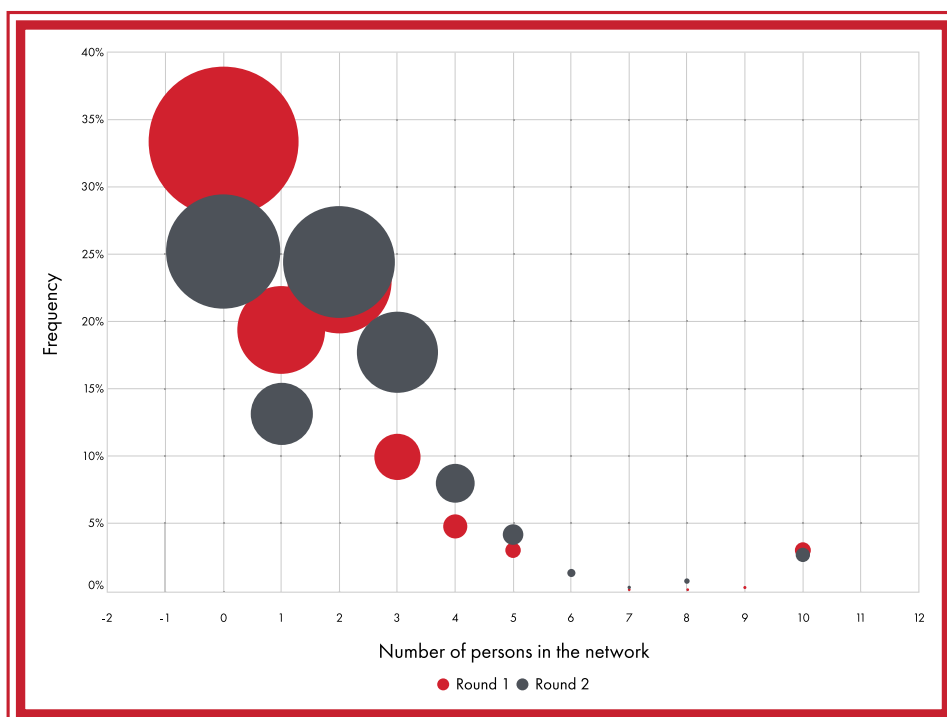


Figure 5: Number of people in the network beyond immediate family.



However, results differed considerably between research sites. This is especially evident when considering a perception-based indicator in this dimension which asks respondents to assess the size of their networks as either large, average, small, or non-existent. While Bourj Hammoud saw a decrease in respondents reporting non-existent networks (-11%) and a corresponding increase in those reporting large networks (+4%), the opposite was true in Barouk, where there was an increase in those reporting non-existent (+5%) and small (+5%) networks (figure 6 ). While the average network size appears to be increasing across our sample, this masks significant disparities between locations and a trend of network depletion in Barouk. This is further highlighted in the interviews and FGDs conducted with participants.

In Barouk, economic hardship, harsh winter weather, and heightened levels of anxiety due to the escalating violence in the region has limited social interactions and reduced community engagement. In particular, participants linked the shrinking size of their networks to continued resource constraints that made it difficult to engage in the typical social engagements and visitations that help them maintain and strengthen connections to their networks. One male resident noted that many members of his community were now “avoid[ing] visiting one another so as to not force others to spend money they could not afford...visits have become a luxury.”<sup>23</sup> In contrast, many participants in Bourj Hammoud described intentionally seeking out opportunities to expand their networks and find additional sources of support. Many noted that in Bourj Hammoud, which is urban and more demographically diverse, friends and casual connections were the primary connections that made up people’s networks. These connections were, to a certain extent, less subject to the norms around gifting and visitations and facilitated the sharing of intangible resources like market information and job opportunities. Expanding networks and making new connections was especially crucial when it came to accessing resources and services that could typically only be provided by connections to local officials, community organizations, or the municipality, such as getting official documents stamped or notarized.

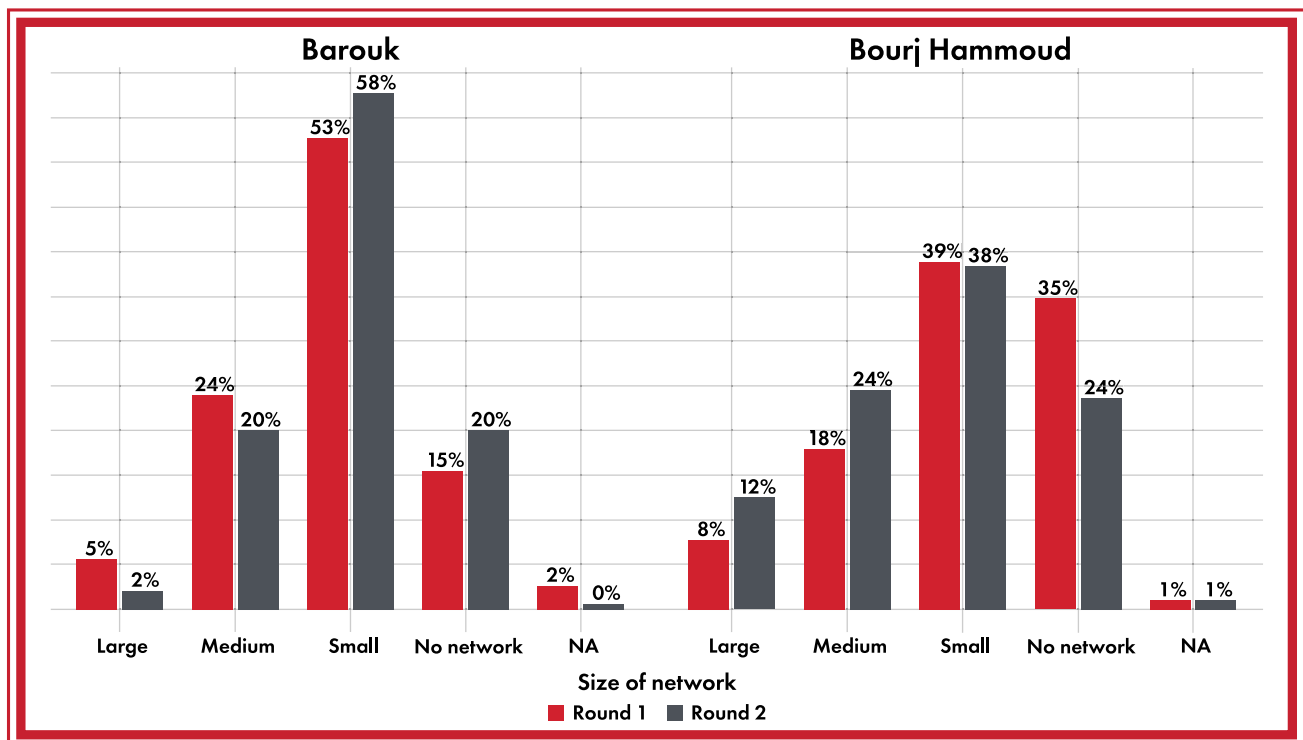


Figure 6: Network size perception per location (% of respondents).

<sup>23</sup> In-depth interview with Lebanese male, Barouk, March 2024



# Informal **Social** Protection and Household **Vulnerability**

How can measuring ISP shed light on “hidden” dimensions of household vulnerability, which typical approaches to assessing humanitarian need overlook? In this section, we answer this question by exploring the extent to which the ISP index, when operationalized as a vulnerability indicator,<sup>24</sup> can complement typical approaches to assessing humanitarian need, which use household behavior and consumption as proxies for food security and well being. While consumption-based indicators are useful for understanding certain, primarily economic aspects of vulnerability, they omit any consideration of the informal systems on which households rely for a wide variety of tangible and intangible support. In doing so, they risk presenting an incomplete, and at worst, a misleading picture of household vulnerability during crises. The ISP index has the potential to help address this gap, by allowing aid actors to more holistically account for shifting patterns of humanitarian need.



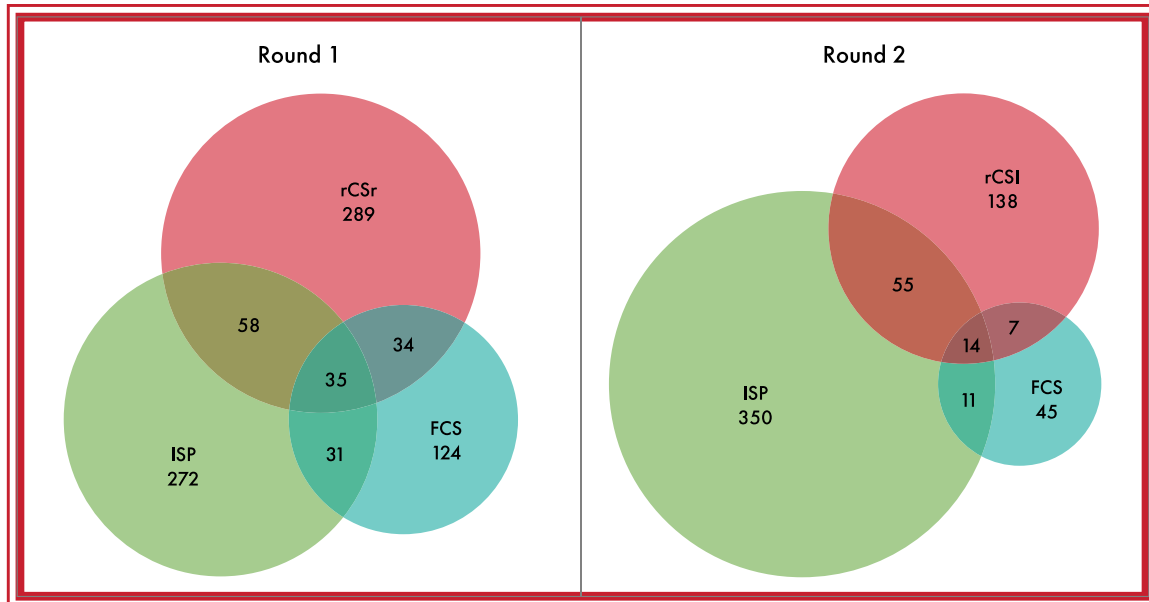
*“This is a place where there are seven families, and we will talk about it.”  
Photovoice participant, March 2024, Bourj Hammoud.*

<sup>24</sup> To operationalize the ISP Index as a vulnerability indicator, a threshold score was selected, below which households are deemed “ISP vulnerable”. To do so, we plotted households’ food security and essential needs scores against binned ISP scores. An ISP score of 1.8 was selected as a vulnerability threshold based on the local extrema identified at this value (see Annex). Consistent with the findings discussed in the previous sections, the share of households falling into the ISP vulnerable category (i.e., households with an ISP Index score below 1.8) has increased over time, from 21% at Round One to 27% at Round Two. This increase in ISP-based vulnerability is driven by a 79% increase in Barouk and a 7% increase in Bourj Hammoud.



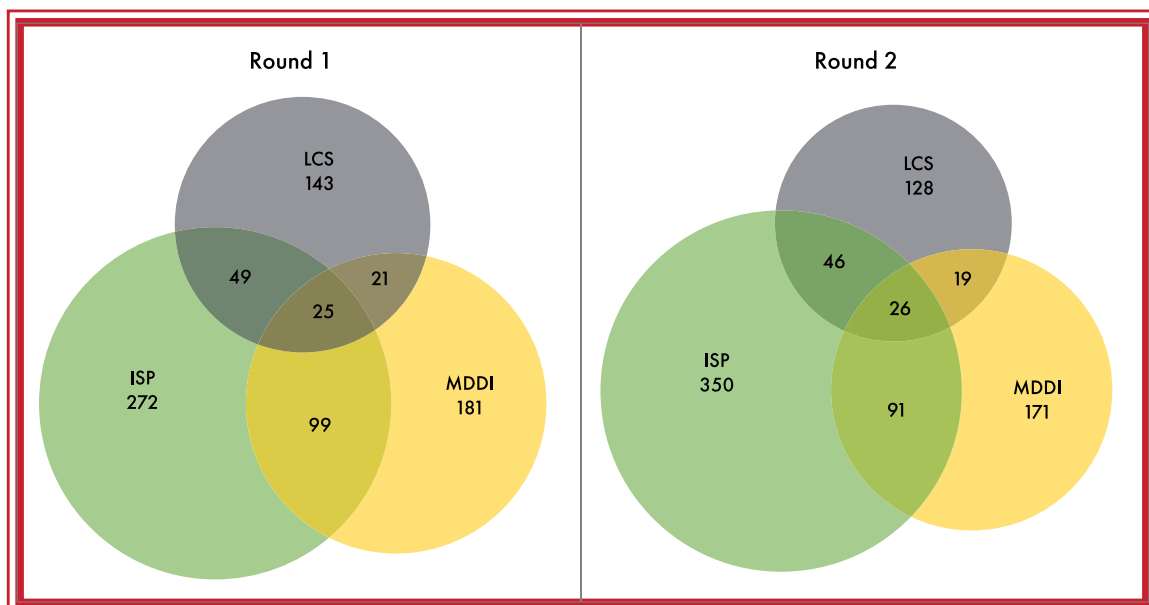
## Unpacking the interaction between vulnerability indicators

In order to determine the extent to which the ISP Index is capable of measuring novel, or “hidden” aspects of household vulnerability, we assessed the degree of overlap between ISP vulnerability and four vulnerability indicators widely used by humanitarian actors in Lebanon. These include two food security indicators – Reduced coping strategy index (rCSI) and Food Consumption Score (FCS), and two essential needs indicators – Multidimensional Deprivation Index (MDDI), and Livelihood Coping Strategy Index for Essential Needs (LCS-EN). Figures 7 and 8 illustrate the intersections between the various vulnerability indicators, at both survey rounds.



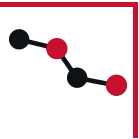
**Figure 7:** Intersection between ISP vulnerability and food security by round.

**Notes:** The ISP circle represents the number of households with an ISP score  $\leq 1.8$ . FCS stands for households experiencing poor FCS and rCSI households with high consumption coping strategies.



**Figure 8:** Intersection between ISP vulnerability and wellbeing by round.

**Notes:** The ISP circle represents the number of households with an ISP score  $\leq 1.8$ . MDDI stands for households experiencing poor MDDI and LCS refers to households having a crisis or emergency level of livelihood coping strategies.



## ISP and Food Security

We collected data on Food Consumption Scores (FCS) and food coping strategies (rCSI) in order to compare the ways in which food security indicators perform against the ISP Index. The intersection between ISP and the two food security indicators has tended to decrease over time. At Round One, 23% of ISP vulnerable households were also considered vulnerable according to at least one of the food security indicators. By Round Two, this number had decreased to 12%. This trend is driven by significant improvements in household food security scores between the two survey rounds, and coinciding declines in households' ISP Index scores, as described in previous sections of this report.

## Evolution of Food Security Indicators

Food security status markedly improved between the two survey rounds. Indeed, a significant increase in Food Consumption Scores (FCS) was observed among respondents, especially in Bourj Hammoud, with a +48% increase in respondents having acceptable FCS compared to Round One, compared to a +4% increase in Barouk (figure 9). In addition, the share of households who reported using consumption coping strategies to access food, as measured by rCSI, has drastically decreased at round 2 (figure 9). Faced with the ongoing crisis, these households might have shifted their food consumption patterns. They could have increasingly opted for cheaper substitute food products in their diet, since such alternatives became more prevalent in the markets. Inflation has slowed through the beginning of 2024 as well, leading to relatively stable price increases, which would have turned households conscious of their consumption to better organize and budget for their food purchases.

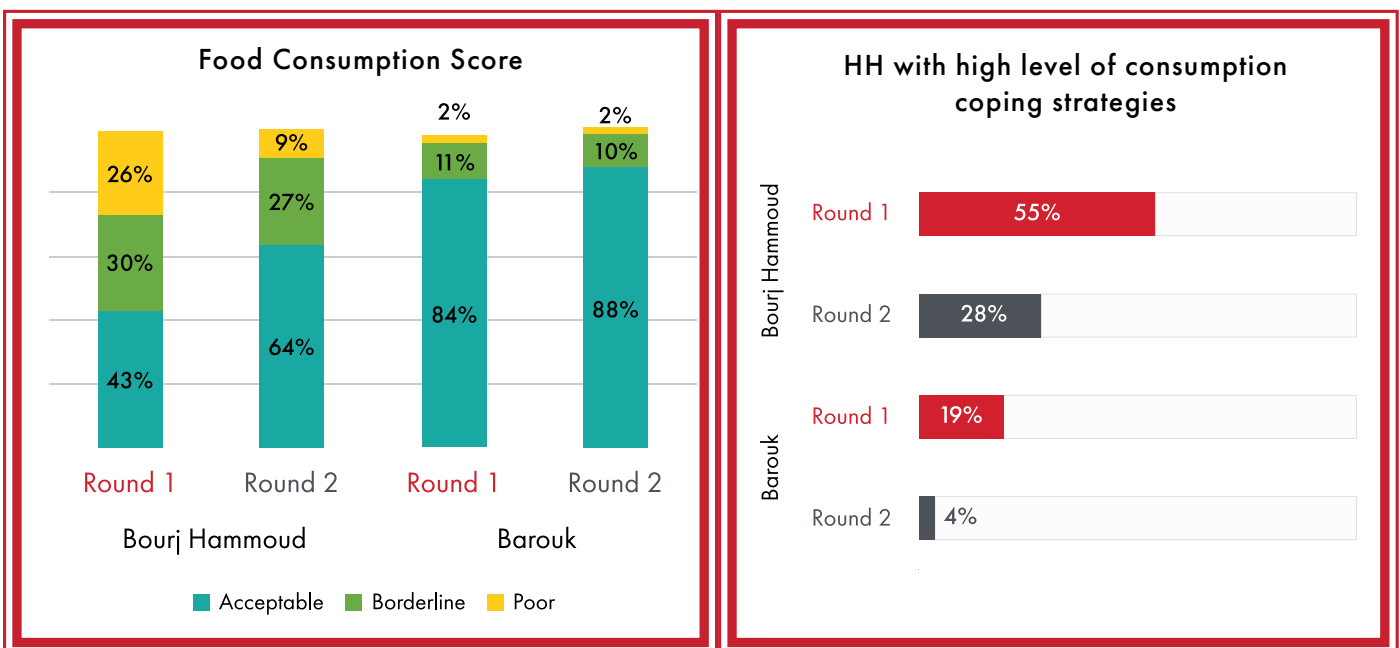


Figure 9: Food Security indicators.



These findings indicate that when households experience improvements in their food security status, this does not necessarily imply an improvement in the strength of their informal support networks. The ISP Index therefore appears to be illuminating a dimension of household vulnerability that is distinct from those identified by typical food security measures. This is likely driven by the fact that the food security indicators are exclusively concerned with household consumption (FCS) and food-related coping strategies (rCSI). On the other hand, the ISP index is more encompassing in its definition of vulnerability, accounting for tangible as well as intangible aspects of household wellbeing, for example access to psychosocial support, information, and livelihood opportunities.

### ISP and Essential Needs

We also compared households' ISP Index scores with their status as measured by two Essential Needs indices: the multidimensional deprivation index (MDDI) and Livelihood Coping Strategies – Essential Needs index (LCS-EN).<sup>25</sup> Compared to the food security indicators discussed above, the essential needs indices are more holistic in their approach to assessing vulnerability, accounting for access to “goods and services required...to ensure survival and minimum living standards, without resorting to negative coping mechanisms or compromising their health, dignity and essential livelihood assets.”<sup>26</sup>

Compared to the two food security indicators, the interaction between ISP vulnerability and essential needs indicators has been more stable over time, despite the slight decrease in the number of MDDI-vulnerable households and households experiencing crisis or emergency livelihood coping strategies. At Round One, 26.2% of ISP vulnerable households were also considered vulnerable according to at least one of the essential needs indicators. By Round Two, this number decreased slightly, to 24.7%.

<sup>25</sup> The MDDI measures households' non-monetary poverty based on deprivations in the six essential needs dimensions: food, health, education, shelter, WASH and safety. LCS-EN measures households' “medium and longer-term coping capacities...and their ability to overcome challenges in meeting their essential needs in the future.” (WFP, 2023).

<sup>26</sup> WFP (2023).



## Evolution of Essential Needs Indicators

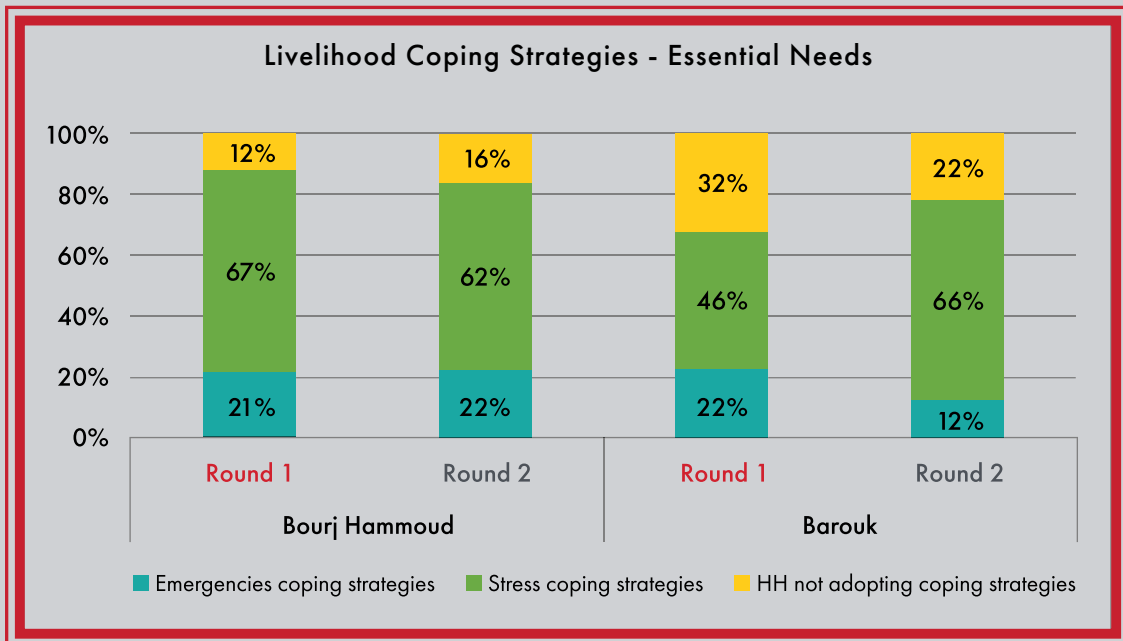


Figure 10: Livelihood Coping Strategies - Essential Needs (LCS-EN) by location.

	Round 1	Round 2	Variation
Barouk	10%	10%	0%
Bourj Hammoud	60%	46%	-23%

Figure 11: Percentage of respondents who are deprived according to multidimensional measures of vulnerability.

The MDDI results varied dramatically by research site. In Bourj Hammoud, the incidence of multidimensional deprivation decreased by 23% between rounds, yet remained significantly elevated at Round Two (46%). In Barouk, incidence was consistent across rounds, and much lower, with only 10% of households multidimensional deprived. On the other hand, the number of different deprivations experienced by households (i.e., the intensity) decreased in both locations. LCS-EN results were similarly mixed. The proportion of households employing extreme coping strategies to obtain essential needs remained similar between rounds (22%). In Barouk, this number decreased (to 12% at Round Two), yet so did the proportion of households who reported using no distress coping strategies. As a result, there was a dramatic increase in the prevalence of stress-level coping strategies.





Compared to the food security indicators discussed above, we see greater overlap between households deemed vulnerable by the ISP and essential needs indices, and a more stable interaction between these indicators over time. This is driven by the fact that while food security improved dramatically between the two rounds, changes in the essential needs indicators were less pronounced. While average MDDI scores improved, LCS-EN scores remained largely unchanged. The relatively greater stability in the essential needs indicators is likely due to the fact that they measure aspects of household vulnerability that are less dynamic, particularly in the relatively short time frame between survey rounds (e.g., shelter status, access to WASH services).

### Investigating longitudinal relationships between vulnerability indicators

Next, we conducted panel regression analyses<sup>27</sup> to examine the association between changes in households' ISP vulnerability and their food security and wellbeing over time. While the ISP Index appears to be measuring a distinct dimension of household vulnerability, as suggested by the cross sectional divergence between the indicators, ISP is nonetheless conceptually linked to food security and access to essential needs. As discussed in the previous section, households rely heavily on their informal social protection networks to access a wide range of resources that are of direct relevance to their food security and economic well being. With this in mind, we investigated whether households that are ISP vulnerable have an increased likelihood of also experiencing economic and food insecurity. To do so, we conducted mixed effects panel analyses to examine associations between households' ISP vulnerability and their food security and wellbeing.

The analysis identifies a significant positive correlation between ISP vulnerability and both poor food consumption scores (FCS) and households reliance on crisis or emergency livelihood coping strategies (LCS-EN). This means that ISP vulnerable households are more likely to experience food insecurity and to resort to severe coping strategies. This finding underscores the critical role of ISP vulnerability in affecting these dimensions of household wellbeing.<sup>28</sup>

	FCS poor	LCS crisis
ISP vulnerable	0.69** (0.24)	0.44** (0.16)
Controls	Yes	Yes
N	1311	1311
N (unique individuals)	658	658
R2 (total)	0.82	0.27

**Table 5:** Summarized regression results, comparing ISP Index vulnerability with FCS and LCS-EN vulnerability.<sup>29</sup>

We can see in the regression table (table 5) that the variable identifying ISP vulnerable households has a significant coefficient of +0.69 in the FCS regression. This means that households with a vulnerable ISP score are nearly twice<sup>30</sup> as likely to have a poor food consumption score compared to those without a vulnerable ISP score, assuming all other factors are controlled for.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> To account for the time-structure of the data and leverage the cross-sectional analysis, a Generalized Linear Mixed-Effects Model with random individual effects was chosen for estimation (glmer package). The model is particularly well-suited for this purpose as it distinguishes between within-individual variation (changes over time within the same individual) and between-individual variation (differences across individuals). This model captures within-individual effects by controlling for unobserved, individual-specific characteristics that remain constant over time, thus providing a clearer picture of how changes within each individual impact the outcome variables. See annex 1 for full regression results.

<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, regression results indicate that the ISP vulnerable variable is not statistically significant in predicting vulnerability as measured by rCSI and MDDI indicators. This lack of significance suggests that, after controlling for other variables such as income, education, gender of the household head, and receipt of humanitarian assistance, the vulnerable ISP score does not have a substantial independent impact on these two particular measures of vulnerability. See annex 2 for full regression results.

<sup>29</sup> For full regression results, see Annex 2.

<sup>30</sup> The regression table shows the estimated impact on the log-odds of the dependent variables (rCSI, FCS, MDDI, LCS). For a more intuitive understanding, it is helpful to interpret the odds ratios, which are the exponentials of the point estimates in the regression table. This allows for an interpretation in terms of probability, making the effects easier to comprehend.

<sup>31</sup> The controls used in these regressions are the same as those included in the previous ISP-specific analysis, and include household income, education, gender, nationality, geography, receipt of humanitarian assistance, and employment status.



This coefficient is primarily capturing the within-household effect over time. In other words, it shows how changes within the same household from one time period to another (e.g., from not being ISP vulnerable to being ISP vulnerable) are associated with changes in their food consumption score. When looking at the LCS regression, the impact of ISP vulnerability is estimated at +0.44, corresponding to an increased probability of 1.5 times to be in a crisis or emergency LCS compared to those without a vulnerable ISP score, assuming all other factors are controlled for.

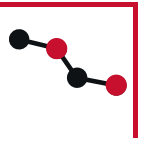
The regression results indicate that the ISP vulnerable variable is not statistically significant in predicting vulnerability as measured by rCSI and MDDI indicators. This lack of significance suggests that, after controlling for other variables such as income, education, gender of the household head, and receipt of humanitarian assistance, the vulnerable ISP score does not have a substantial independent impact on these two particular measures of vulnerability.



***“This picture also affected me a lot. Families cannot take their children to breath the air so they all go to Bourj Hammoud Park because it is free, but unfortunately the games are broken and there are just 3 games for a clan of children! My daughter, instead of being happy, becomes depressed and doesn’t get to play at all.”***

*Photovoice participant, March 2024, Bourj Hammoud.*

These findings underscore the important role that ISP plays in allowing households to diversify diets and meet their consumption and essential needs. While ISP allows us to measure a distinct arena of vulnerability, the significant associations between ISP vulnerability and FCS/LCS highlight that ISP is nonetheless an important underlying contributor to traditional measures of vulnerability. Indeed, additional analyses that assessed the lagged associations between the vulnerability indicators found that ISP vulnerability at Round One was significantly associated with rCSI vulnerability at Round 2. This suggests that changes in ISP may be predictive of future changes in other vulnerability indicators. Looking ahead to Round 3 where we will be equipped with another round of household survey data to assess changes in household measures for a one-year recall period, we will be better equipped to explore the predictive potential of ISP. In other words, we will assess the opportunity for aid actors to leverage ISP measures from previous rounds to predict or estimate future vulnerability. We will present these findings in the next and final brief in this series.



# Conclusion

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To end this brief, we return to a question we began with: “Can measuring ISP help aid actors to more holistically account for household vulnerability during crises?” The analysis in this report makes a strong case that the answer to this question is ‘yes’. By accounting for both tangible and intangible determinants of household wellbeing, and by measuring aspects of the informal systems on which households depend during crises, the ISP Index sheds light on features of household vulnerability that are obscured by typical food security and essential needs indicators. Nonetheless, ISP has strong conceptual linkages with these indicators, as demonstrated by the Index’s ability to predict vulnerability according to FCS and LCS-EN.

The longitudinal results in this brief also clearly demonstrate that informal social protection systems in Lebanon are eroding over time. Many households are, in other words, finding it increasingly difficult to depend on their own informal networks for support, as the protracted economic crisis drags on. Disaggregation and dimension specific findings show variation in terms of nature and extent of this deterioration, and indicate that some households are likely to experience the consequences of eroding support systems more acutely than others. An understanding of which dimensions of ISP are most fragile, and for whom, has important implications for the targeting of humanitarian assistance, and the design of interventions that seek to bolster informal support systems. Results from this brief, for example, suggest that among others, unemployed households, and those with female heads of household, are especially susceptible to the deterioration of ISP, and therefore may require additional targeted support from formal humanitarian actors. Specific recommendations related to targeting and program design will be discussed in detail in subsequent reports in this series.

More broadly, identifying erosion of informal social protection systems may enable aid actors to better anticipate future degradation in humanitarian conditions. In other words, there may be a lagged relationship between changes in a households’ ISP networks and their vulnerability as measured by food security and essential needs indicators. Research from other contexts supports this hypothesis. For example in Somalia, retrospective analysis demonstrated that a collapse in informal support systems marked the country’s tipping point into famine in 2011.<sup>32</sup> While initial analysis for this project demonstrates that households’ ISP scores at round one were predictive of select measures of food security at round two, additional rounds of longitudinal data are required to further test this theory. The next brief in this series will consider the predictive power of ISP, and its potential early warning applications for the humanitarian sector.

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<sup>32</sup> Maxwell, D. and Majid, N. (2016).



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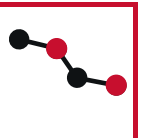
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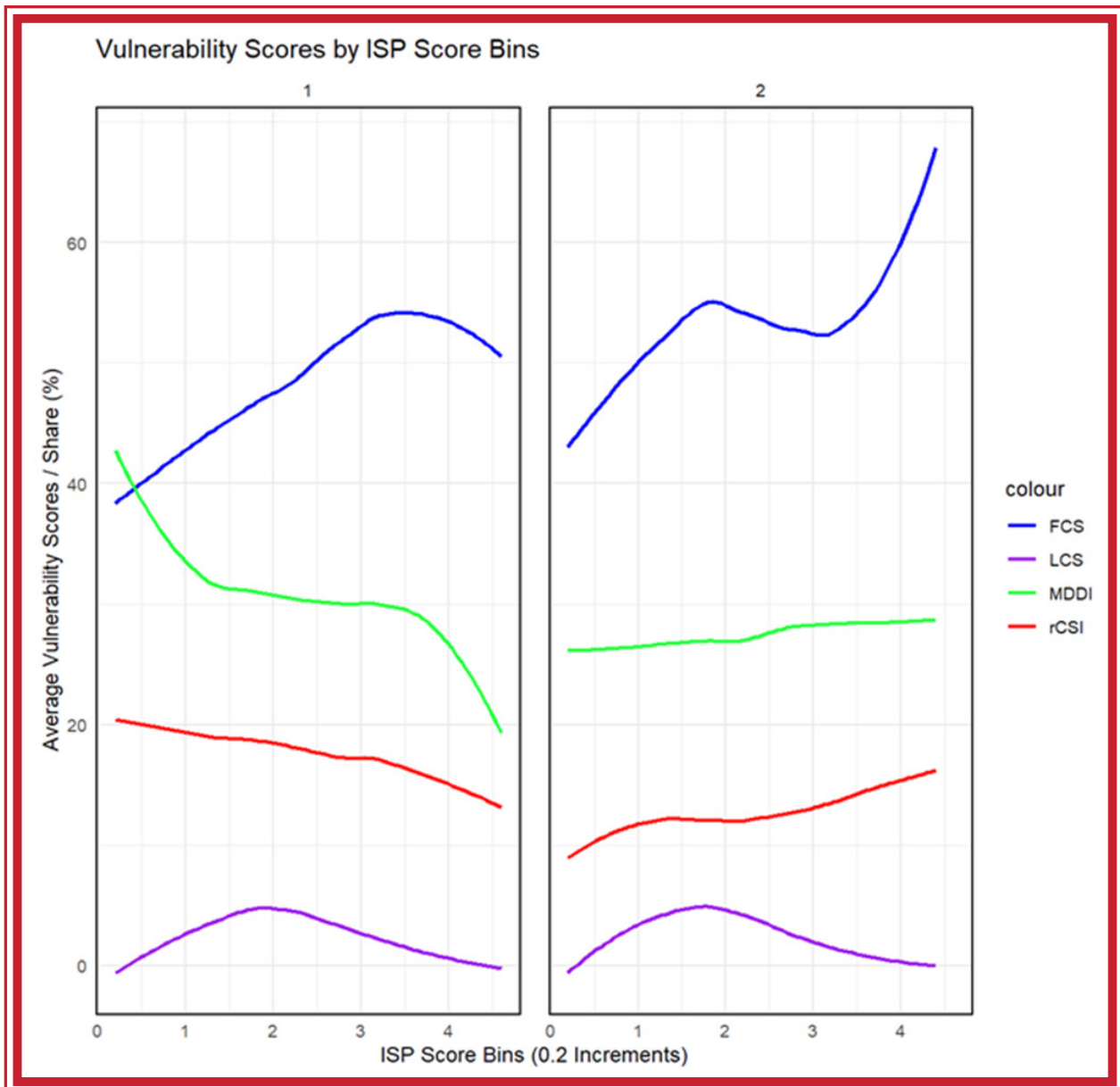
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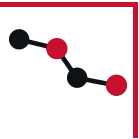


## Annexes

### Annex 1: Selection of ISP Index vulnerability threshold

Based on the score calculation, an ISP vulnerability threshold was looked for to investigate more thoroughly how vulnerabilities in food security and well-being intersect with ISP. After looking at the ISP score distribution, the food security and well-being indicators were plotted against the binned ISP score. The threshold of 1.8 was then selected based on the local extrema identified at this value.





## Annex 2: Panel Regression Data

To account for the time-structure of the data and leverage the cross-sectional analysis, a Generalized Linear Mixed-Effects Model with random individual effects was chosen for estimation (glmer package). The model is particularly well-suited for this purpose as it distinguishes between within-individual variation (changes over time within the same individual) and between-individual variation (differences across individuals). This model captures within-individual effects by controlling for unobserved, individual-specific characteristics that remain constant over time, thus providing a clearer picture of how changes within each individual impact the outcome variables.

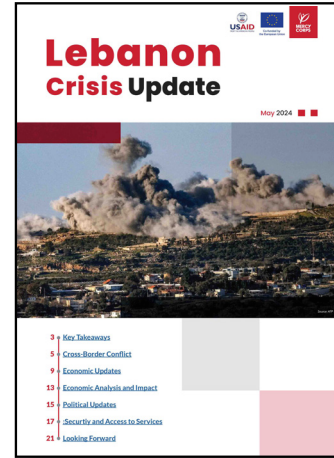
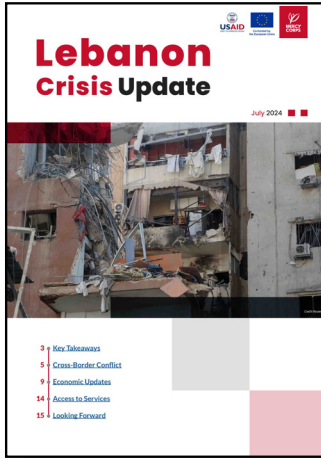
The regression table shows the estimated impact on the log-odds of the dependent variables (rCSI, FCS, MDDI, LCS). For a more intuitive understanding, it is helpful to interpret the odds ratios, which are the exponentials of the point estimates in the regression table. This allows for an interpretation in terms of probability, making the effects easier to comprehend.

		rCSI high	FCS poor	MDDI poor	LCS crisis
Intercept		-0.92 *** (0.27)	-2.58 *** (0.40)	-1.77 *** (0.34)	-1.16 *** (0.27)
Round 2		-1.31 *** (0.19)	-1.36 *** (0.27)	-0.49 * (0.20)	-0.2 (0.17)
Income	Refused/don't know	-2.11 ** (0.65)	-1.54 (1.34)	-1.11 * (0.48)	-0.68 (0.43)
Income	No income	-0.90 ** (0.33)	0.4 (0.43)	-0.65 (0.37)	1.11 *** (0.26)
Income	Less than \$ 100	0.54 ** (0.21)	1.21 *** (0.28)	0.34 (0.25)	0.31 (0.21)
Income	\$ 300- \$ 500	0 (0.23)	-0.34 (0.38)	-0.06 (0.27)	0.37 (0.24)
Income	\$ 500 - \$ 1000	0.98 ** (0.33)	-0.2 (0.57)	0.68 (0.39)	0.79 * (0.34)
Income	More than 1000\$	0.42 (0.89)	-29.99 (1016)	-0.4 (1.42)	0.63 (0.76)
Education HHH	Advanced education	-0.47 (0.36)	-0.19 (0.57)	-0.27 (0.43)	-0.93 * (0.38)
Education HHH	No education	0.2 (0.22)	-0.21 (0.32)	0.43 (0.28)	0.18 (0.22)
Gender HHH	Male headed HH (ref=Female)	0.16 (0.19)	-0.39 (0.28)	0.23 (0.24)	-0.17 (0.18)
Nationality	Non lebanese	1.20 *** (0.19)	1.26 *** (0.27)	2.98 *** (0.30)	-1.32 *** (0.20)
Region	Barouk	-1.49 *** (0.24)	-2.43 *** (0.52)	-2.24 *** (0.32)	-0.74 *** (0.20)
Hum. assistance	1 program	0.38 * (0.19)	-0.42 (0.27)	0.78 *** (0.23)	-0.07 (0.20)
HHH employment	not working (ref: working)	0.16 (0.20)	0.38 (0.29)	0.17 (0.23)	0.18 (0.19)
<b>ISP vulnerable</b>		<b>0.24 (0.16)</b>	<b>0.69 ** (0.24)</b>	<b>0.35 (0.19)</b>	<b>0.44 ** (0.16)</b>
N		1311	1311	1311	1311
N (id)		658	658	658	658
AIC		1331.06	834.37	1182.03	1224.06
BIC		1419.1	922.4	1270.07	1312.09
R2 (fixed)		0.4	0.7	0.52	0.19
R2 (total)		0.53	0.82	0.7	0.27

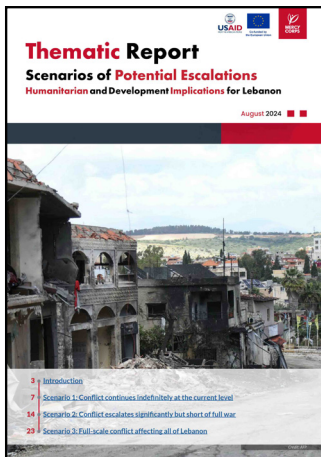
Standard errors are heteroskedasticity robust. \*\*\* p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05.



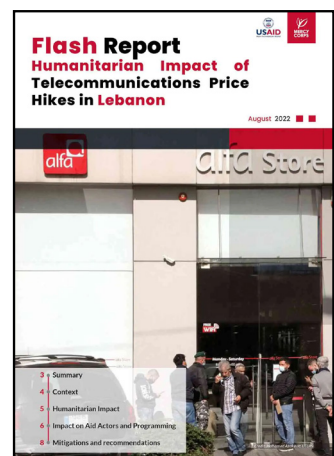
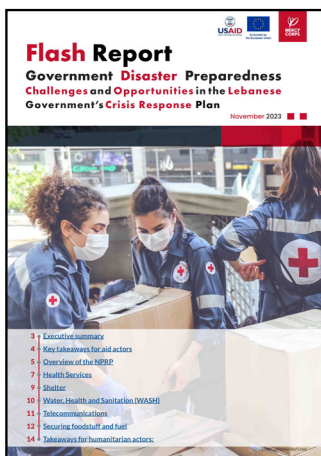
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