



POLICY BRIEF

WATER UNDER FIRE: SUPPORTING LEBANON'S WATER SERVICES AMID ESCALATING CONFLICT

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OXFAM
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INTRODUCTION

Lebanon faces yet another devastating war, and the country's already overstretched institutions are struggling to maintain the essential services that millions depend on every day, including water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) services.

As Israeli attacks in Lebanon expand and the socioeconomic situation deteriorates further, inadequate WASH services would mean a range of grim consequences. Deteriorating access to hygiene, loss of livelihoods, loss of green areas, and health outbreaks are some of the many repercussions that Lebanon will face if its water facilities are not supported and water services swiftly delivered.

Oxfam reached out to water establishments across three highly impacted regions in the country, namely coordinators for the South Lebanon Water Establishment, the Bekaa Water Establishment, and the Beirut-Mount Lebanon Water Establishment, to get a better idea of water services during the escalation. Water establishments are regional public utilities responsible for water supply and wastewater management in Lebanon.

CONTEXT

Israel has launched a devastating bombing campaign across Lebanon, heavily targeting areas in southern Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, and the Bekaa and Baalbek el-Hermel governorates, as well as conducting a range of attacks in areas all over the country, many of which took place in dense residential areas.

Since March 2, these attacks have killed 912 individuals and injured 2,221 others, whereas over one million individuals have been displaced and are now either in collective shelters and ad hoc arrangements, or stranded in the streets.

The state of vital infrastructure, access to safe water, sanitation facilities and hygiene supplies, and access to general services remains a key concern. In late 2024, Israeli attacks damaged over 45 water networks in Lebanon, impacting nearly 497,000 residents¹.

In this round of conflict, concerns are equally high, given the ongoing impunity that has allowed violence in the region and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) to continue. As a focal point explained the unpredictability and lack of accountability governing the situation: "I'm more afraid of this war than the last one".

¹ <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/lebanon/lebanon-flash-update-56-escalation-hostilities-lebanon-23-january-2025>

Oxfam's research with Insecurity Insight and Action Against Hunger in 2025² revealed significant damages to water infrastructure in Lebanon. In many cases, the damages of Israeli attacks were long-term, impacting water services across a range of levels: from the killing of several water establishment workers³, to the destruction and damaging of water facilities, networks, and infrastructure, the destruction of solar panels and energy facilities, all the way to damaging green areas and overall economic activity, which hinder long-term recovery prospects for local communities.

While a ceasefire agreement had been signed in November 2024, Israeli attacks had continued, with over 15,400 violations recorded by United Nations Peacekeeping forces and the Lebanese government and 370 individuals killed by late February 2026⁴ before the current escalation began. Today, as Lebanon remains unable to recover from the previous war and its aftermath, the expanding Israeli attacks are once again pushing entire communities into danger.

WATER INSTITUTIONS AND SERVICES UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

International humanitarian law (IHL) and related international legal frameworks establish clear obligations to protect water resources and infrastructure during armed conflict. Although there is no single treaty governing water in war, a combination of customary IHL, the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and relevant UN Security Council resolutions provide a robust legal framework safeguarding civilians' access to water. These rules prohibit attacks on water installations and other objects indispensable to civilian survival, ban the use of starvation or deprivation of water as a method of warfare, and require parties to allow humanitarian assistance necessary to sustain civilian populations. Under the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute, intentionally depriving civilians of water or obstructing relief supplies may constitute a war crime.

*Customary IHL further reinforces these protections through core principles such as distinction, proportionality, and precaution in attack, which require armed actors to target only military objectives and minimize harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure, including water systems. International legal norms also extend to environmental protection and the safeguarding of water ecosystems during conflict. Complementing these obligations, the Berlin Rules on Water Resources affirm the human right to sufficient, safe and accessible water, including during armed conflict, while UN Security Council Resolutions 2417 and 2573 condemn the use of starvation of civilians and attacks on infrastructure essential to basic services such as water. Together, these norms establish clear limits on military conduct and provide a basis for accountability where water and sanitation infrastructure is damaged, destroyed, or rendered unusable, or where humanitarian efforts to restore civilian access to water are obstructed. Much of the analysis presented here draws on Oxfam's report *Water War Crimes: How Israel has weaponised water in its military campaign in Gaza (2024)*⁵.*

² <https://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/PUBLIC1.pdf>

³ <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1430147/lebanese-energy-minister-condemns-israeli-strikes-honors-fallen-workers.html>

⁴ <https://prezly.msf.org.uk/msf-update-southern-lebanon-where-is-the-ceasefire>

⁵ <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/water-war-crimes-how-israel-has-weaponised-water-in-its-military-campaign-in-ga-621609/>

This report outlines the main findings of key informant interviews Oxfam conducted with focal points from regional Water Establishments and observations from ongoing programmes across southern Lebanon and the Bekaa, Beirut, and Mount Lebanon governorates. The report focuses on needs identified in relation to water services across the country.

SOUTHERN LEBANON

In the south of the country, Israeli forces continue to launch heavy attacks and blanket forced displacement orders, which have led to the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, amid relentless bombardment, an ongoing ground invasion and occupation. Despite the severe safety and security risks, many households have remained in these areas, making it urgent to ensure adequate water supply for both the short term and the long term.

THERE HAVE BEEN ZERO ASSESSMENTS OF WATER SERVICES IN SOUTHERN LEBANESE AREAS NEAR THE BORDER DUE TO THE INTENSITY OF ATTACKS

Access: Water establishment staff are unable to access areas in southern Lebanon. This includes the inability to conduct basic assessments, given the gravity of the security situation. In 2024, Israeli attacks killed several water establishment staff, as well as over 200 health workers and three aid workers.

Needs: Water service facilities operating in areas further north but within the realm of southern Lebanon water establishments are in dire need of infrastructure and item support, such as spare parts and energy provision.

Contextual Compounding Matters: Even prior to the war on Lebanon, water services in Southern Lebanon were generally more expensive than other areas in the country, due to the topography of the area and its geography. Most services depend on underground wells with heightened depth, which require larger energy installations and higher operating costs.

Prior to the current escalation, Oxfam was working on reconstructing, rehabilitating, and assessing eight pumping systems, three water networks, four reservoirs, and four water filtration systems, serving an estimated 50,000–60,000 individuals in the South and

Nabatieh governorates. As a result of the relentless bombardment and the forced displacement orders, Oxfam can no longer access those facilities essential to maintain water supply to people remaining in those villages. It is expected that much of the progress Oxfam has made thus far to support the reconstruction and recovery efforts will be lost.

DUE TO THE RATE OF ISRAELI ATTACKS, OXFAM NO LONGER HAS ACCESS TO 19 WATER FACILITIES IT WAS WORKING ON IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, WITH PROGRESS MADE AND RECOVERY PROSPECTS AT RISK OF BEING DECIMATED.

BEIRUT AND MOUNT LEBANON:

Beirut and Mount Lebanon saw the concentration of a large portion of collective shelters across the country, as well as a high rate of displacement. This in turn has led to increased pressures on water services and consequently a greater need for support to WASH services in the regions. Around half of identified shelters are in Beirut or Mount Lebanon, and it is likely that they are more crowded than those in the North.

Needs: Water establishment focal points have highlighted extensive stresses on water quantity and support related to energy provision for water services. Establishments expressed the need for support on logistical and infrastructural fronts, such as the need for spare parts. The high stress on water systems is expected to lead to a more rapid deterioration in facility items and usability.

Contextual Compounding Matters: While Beirut and Mount Lebanon have easier topography, largely reliant on surface-level water, water services in the area have suffered on the governance front, with issues in distribution planning, network structures, and investment.

THE BEKAA GOVERNORATE

The Bekaa has also been significantly impacted by recurrent Israeli attacks, impacting water establishments, the areas surrounding them, and the activities that depend on water access, such as agriculture.

IN THE SPAN OF ONLY FOUR DAYS, AT LEAST SEVEN WATER FACILITIES REPORTED DAMAGE DUE TO ISRAELI STRIKES IN THE BEKAA GOVERNORATE ALONE

At least seven water facilities were reported damaged between March 6 and 9, 2026 due to Israeli attacks, including damage to valves, distribution lines, and other facilities according to a live monitoring by the WASH Sector coordination group, impacting around 6,800 individuals.

In 2024, Israeli attacks damaged or destroyed ten water-related facilities counting only those supported by Oxfam, showcasing how water infrastructure has repeatedly been a victim of the war.

Access: Several major towns in the Bekaa region, particularly northern Bekaa, have received forced displacement orders and remain under heavy bombardment. Oxfam and other organizations operating in the areas have had to suspend activities and limit inter-city movements, leaving major regions without access to services.

Needs: A Bekaa water establishment focal point expressed that support in this round of conflict has been minimal compared to the 2024 escalations. They expressed urgent needs at the level of infrastructure and facility rehabilitation in light of significant damages to water networks.

Contextual Compounding Matters: The Bekaa is a region that is highly reliant on agricultural activities, and it is expected that damages to water services will also impact a range of other sectors, from agriculture to general economic activity in the governorate.

INTERSECTING CRISES

Since 2019, Lebanon has been suffering from one of the worst economic crises in recent history, which saw the Lebanese pound lose over 98% of its value and humanitarian needs increase across the country.

With the expansion of the conflict and the closure of the Hormuz strait, international fuel and gasoline prices have skyrocketed, directly impacting fuel and gasoline prices in Lebanon and, subsequently, services across sectors. Prices of gasoline in Lebanon immediately soared and continued fluctuating drastically:

- Gasoline 95 octane prices: from 1,424,000 LBP in mid-February to 2,216,000 LBP on March 17.
 - Over 55% increase.
 - Equivalent to around an \$8.80 USD increase.
- Gasoline 98 octane prices: from 1,467,000 LBP to 2,257,000 LBP.
 - Over 53% increase.
 - Equivalent to around an \$8.78 USD increase.
- Diesel prices: from 1,354,000 LBP to 2,051,000 LBP.
 - Over 51% increase.
 - Equivalent to around a \$7.74 USD increase.
- Gas canister prices: from 1,371,000 LBP to 1,745,000 LBP.
 - Over 27% increase.
 - Equivalent to around a \$4.16 USD increase.

Lebanon's poverty rates had already tripled in 2024⁶, and now, it is disproportionately impacted by the global fuel crisis. The country was ranked 5th among countries impacted by an increase in Diesel prices after February 23 (35.2% increase), and 18th for countries impacted by an increase in gasoline prices, among 170 countries and territories in a trend analysis by the data platform Global Petrol Prices⁷.

WHAT WERE PREVIOUSLY ROUTINE WASH OPERATIONS, SUCH AS WATER TRUCKING, ARE BEING AVOIDED DUE TO THE FUEL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

Coordinators in all three regional water establishments expressed that fuel and energy are major concerns for adequate responses. In southern Lebanon, water trucking has become much less accessible, and focus has greatly shifted toward spare part provision and infrastructural maintenance.

Furthermore, with the deterioration in water services as a result of the war and the crisis, risks of health hazards have risen extremely high. In Beirut and Mount Lebanon, the provision of chlorine-related supplies was noted as an extreme concern. In 2022, Lebanon saw a cholera outbreak which prompted an immediate response from the state and

⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/05/23/lebanon-poverty-more-than-triples-over-the-last-decade-reaching-44-under-a-protracted-crisis>

⁷ https://www.globalpetrolprices.com/fuel_price_trend.php

international actors. Without adequate support, the current conflict and compounding crises risk making an appropriate response unworkable.

WHAT IS NEEDED?

Since the escalation of fighting on March 2, 2026, humanitarian organizations, including Oxfam and partners, have mobilized emergency assistance across Lebanon, providing emergency WASH services such as water trucking and the distribution of hygiene kits and bottled water as displacement rises and essential services come under strain.

But the needs are overwhelming. Without an end to this war, civilians will continue to suffer. All parties to the conflict must immediately end the fighting and international actors need to invest all efforts to stop the ongoing hostilities.

Hundreds of thousands of people urgently require support, and without immediate action, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate.

WASH services must be prioritized in appeals and funding for the response. Adequate funding for WASH interventions is essential to meet urgent needs through emergency water provision and hygiene support, while also enabling longer-term investments in infrastructure rehabilitation and the resilience of Lebanon's water systems.

The government, NGOs, and international actors must implement temporary solutions in areas hosting a high number of forcibly displaced people. This includes funding for energy supplies, streamlined procurement of spare parts for damaged infrastructure, rehabilitation of damaged facilities, and logistical support to maintain water distribution networks. Additional technical and staffing support may also be required to help establishments cope with the increased demand caused by large-scale displacement. These structural adjustments would help ensure water institutions have strengthened core capacities and are less dependent on ad hoc and often inaccessible measures such as water trucking.

Ensure unimpeded humanitarian access and protection of civilian infrastructure.

All parties must ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, including water facilities and networks. Humanitarian actors, national responders, and water utility staff must be able to safely access affected areas to conduct assessments, repairs, and maintenance operations, and must be protected from harm while carrying out their duties.

To the Lebanese government, the international community, and relevant international accountability mechanisms: **Ensure investigations and accountability for violations.**

Alleged attacks on infrastructure indispensable to civilian survival, obstruction of

humanitarian access, and harm to responders must be independently investigated and those responsible must be held accountable in line with international law.