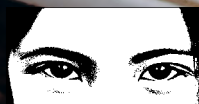


Terre des hommes' Magazine Courage

Lebanon
**Blue Skies
and Bombs**

N° 94 | September 2026



Terre des hommes
Helping children worldwide.



Blue Skies and Bombs Over Lebanon

In Lebanon, the war is turning the lives of thousands of children upside down. In the face of this emergency, Terre des hommes is providing them with protection, psychological support and essential guidance to help them regain a sense of normality.



A word with

Walaa Kassem, child protection case worker in the Bekaa Valley, eastern Lebanon.



♥ Thank you for acting alongside us!

Thank you for your solidarity with children around the world, throughout the year! Thanks to every donation, every bequest, every hour of volunteering and every partnership, millions of children can look forward to a better future. Because every child in the world has the right to be a child. It's that simple.

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“The extent of the destruction is beyond anything we’ve ever seen before.”

I often think back on my trip to southern Lebanon to visit the families we support. It was barely seven months ago: I can still picture the villages nestled in beautiful rolling hills where olive trees once thrived. The scars of the 2024 war were evident: destroyed houses, abandoned by families who had been unable to return. But the villages were still alive: the land was being cultivated, children were going to school, services were functioning... Yet the truce was short-lived. Since the resumption of the war in March 2026, nothing remains in some villages. This image of devastation haunts me and fills me with profound sadness. The scale of destruction is beyond anything we have ever seen before.

1 million people fled their homes in fear: that is one in every 5 people living in Lebanon, and 250,000 people have no homes to return to in the south of the country. Imagine: it’s as if the entire population of Geneva were suddenly left homeless overnight, crammed into makeshift shelters in schools, or living in cars and tents, with no prospects for the future. There is a shortage of food and basic household and hygiene items, and living and sanitary conditions are appalling... And children are suffering: some have been deprived of schooling for two years—it’s unthinkable. Above all, they have no future. How can you plan for the future when your home and village are gone?

I’m struck by how the Lebanese people are holding on, despite all the wounds they’ve endured. Because we must remember: no, you don’t get used to crises, even when they come one after another. The Lebanese are strong, but above all, they need help and solidarity. When I visit families, I’m deeply moved by the bond and kindness between the children and our staff. These connections are real, and they’re one of the reasons to keep fighting—as illustrated by the story of Ghazal and Amar, two sisters whose journey you’ll discover in the following pages. When I see how these little girls have grown after everything they’ve been through, I realize just how urgent our mission is. It is your commitment to our cause that allows these children to hold on to their childhood. So no, we cannot give up.


Elizabeth Cossor
Tdh Country Director in Lebanon

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Blue Skies and Bombs Over Lebanon

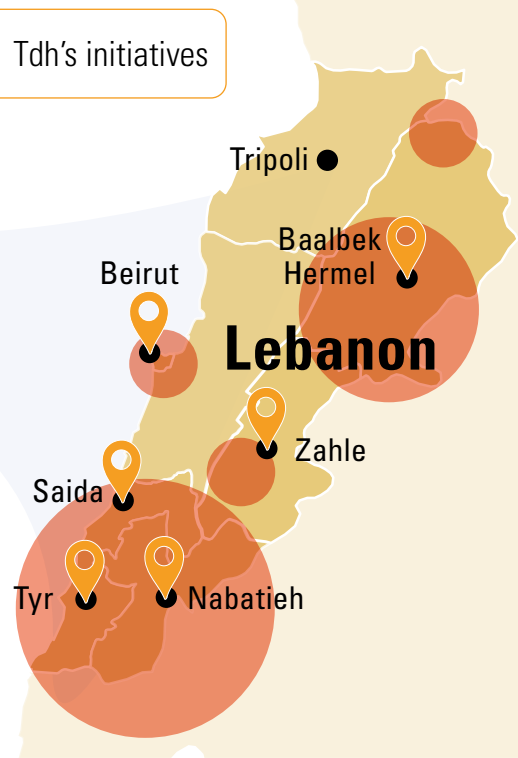
Behind the statistics of the war in Lebanon lie heart-wrenching realities: children uprooted, deprived of schooling, forced to work, homeless, and suffering from profound psychological distress... Terre des hommes (Tdh) refuses to abandon them to this daily reality, which is as unjust as it is brutal. Our teams carry out emergency interventions to reassure them and, through simple gestures, restore a little normalcy and comfort to their lives.



Areas hit by bombing



Tdh's initiatives

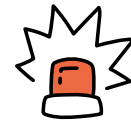


One quiet morning in March 2026, at dawn, Ghazal's peaceful life was turned upside down. The 10-year-old girl, who was sleeping in her family's apartment in the suburbs of Saida, was jolted awake by an explosion that sent her crashing from the 5th floor of the building down to the street. The neighboring building was hit by a missile, and her own building, in a domino effect, collapsed as well. Ghazal and her little sister Amar, two and a half years old, survived by a miracle. But their mother died instantly, and their brother Adnan, who was transferred to intensive care, could not be saved. *"They put a rod in my thigh, and my back was also lacerated,"* says Ghazal, who still receives treatment along with her sister.

At the time of the tragedy, their father, Alaa, had already left for work at the supermarket where he is employed. When a customer told him that his neighborhood had just been targeted, he raced home on his motorcycle. *"I drove as fast as I could; I was like a madman. Then I arrived at the foot of the building—only to see that nothing was left. Everything had collapsed, and I thought to myself, 'That's it—my whole family has just died.'"* With a heavy heart, Alaa frantically raced back to the hospital. Information trickled in slowly. He finally learned that only his two daughters had survived. This Palestinian man, who had been a refugee in Lebanon for several years, was devastated. *"I try to be strong for my daughters; I work to provide them with everything they need,*

to give them warmth, and to make up for what they've lost. But Amar, who used to sleep right next to her mother, no longer sleeps through the night. Because nothing can replace her mother's tenderness."

Did you know?



4300

people, and at least

250 children, have been killed in Lebanon since the war resumed in March 2026

This tragedy is part of the latest episode of chaos plaguing Lebanon. Civilians are once again the primary victims. As we write this, the situation remains unstable despite ceasefires and peace agreements. The feeling that everything could erupt again at any moment is compounded by a grim reality: peace agreement or not, southern Lebanon is already destroyed, and many internally displaced people will not be able to return home, as the territory is now under Israeli control. Hundreds of thousands of them are seeing their life savings go up in smoke or are dependent on humanitarian aid. Their needs are basic: simply buying enough to eat and getting by day to day. Just to survive.



Little Amar in her dad Alaa's arms, in the courtyard of their small rental apartment.



From left to right: Ghazal shows us a photo of her late mother. Ghazal gently combs her sister Amar's hair. Hanan, a case worker, visits the family.

Some rent housing at exorbitant prices; others sleep on the streets or in makeshift shelters, hastily set up in schools, religious sites, or any public building that can accommodate people. This is the case at the former courthouse in Saida, where you can see a little girl on a tricycle, children running, and others wandering across cracked tile floors with electrical wires hanging overhead. The walls are moldy from the dampness. Mattresses are piled up in the hallways or rooms, where people sleep or simply watch time go by. These are degrading living conditions where the fear of an uncertain future is as strong as the fear of death.

Rediscovering tenderness and Carefreeness

Alaa could have been housed in one of these shelters, but with financial assistance from Tdh, he found a rental where he lives with his daughters and their grandparents. It is here that the family is trying to rebuild their lives after the tragedy. We find them in their concrete courtyard, shaded by a few trees.

Amar still has that chubby face of early childhood. But while her round cheeks now light up with a broad smile, her big brown eyes seem sad. She stays glued to her sister. Ghazal takes great care of her to give their father some relief: every day, she dresses and combs her little sister's hair, with the same tenderness their mother used to show. Under their grandmother's watchful eye, we see them playing together, but Ghazal is especially looking forward to the arrival of the social workers

from Tdh. Among them is Hanan, who has become her ray of light. She provides psychosocial care to help the children cope with their ordeal. A board game, a drawing, and above all, smiles: Ghazal needs this connection. *"We play, draw, and color,"* says the little girl. *"Sometimes she brings me toys. I open up to her completely; it makes me stronger and gives me confidence in myself and in others."*

In this little house, life is getting back on track. Thanks to the grandfather's kindness—he serves tea or fruit juice—and the

grandmother's tenderness—she cooks and prepares the bath every evening before helping the girls put on their pajamas and go to bed. Thanks to an aunt who brings clothes and basic necessities, purchased with Tdh's help. Between family support and humanitarian aid, a new routine is taking shape for Amar and Ghazal. This support is invaluable to Alaa, who quickly returned to work to provide for the family. *"Thanks to the social workers, Ghazal is doing better emotionally. She was sad and upset for a long time, but today she feels safer."*

The lack of privacy for women and girls

"In times of war, girls have a crucial need for privacy." Maysaa Shamy, a Psycho-Social Support (PSS) Facilitator at Tdh, specializes in providing support for girls and women who have experienced violence. A displaced Lebanese herself, she was forced to flee southern Lebanon in March 2026. Raising awareness, facilitating group-based activities to help women and girls cope with their experiences, and providing direct psychological support when they need it ... Maysa strives to ensure *"that every woman and every girl knows her rights, can express her emotions, manage her stress, and ask for help"*. Thanks to this initiative, Maysa has noted that many women and girls have *"gained essential knowledge and felt truly valued by our willingness to listen. They've learned to solve problems on their own, which is one of the main goals of our work."*



Feeling safe is difficult for Mohamed, 10, who sleeps every night in a utility vehicle given to his parents by a young man.



"I hear the sound of bombing in the distance, and it makes me tremble. At night, when stray dogs approach the car howling, I'm very scared."

Mohamed, 10 years old

The utility vehicle is covered with sheets to provide shade from the sun, and plastic chairs are set up around it to serve as an outdoor living room. This is the new scene along the old Saïda promenade. The South Gate is no longer a promenade where people go jogging or enjoy ice cream on a summer evening. Instead, it's a scene of desolation—a succession of mattresses and makeshift shelters, facing a Mediterranean Sea that no longer warms the heart. The smell of piling trash reinforces this sense of chaos. Here, one encounters nothing but worried glances. And for good reason—one need only look up to witness the horror. The blue, partly cloudy sky is deceptive. It never stays clear for long: regularly, a fighter jet pierces the silence. Or worse, the detonation of a bomb dropped nearby. It's been far too long since we've heard the wind rustling or the lapping of waves against the old Saïda sea wall.

Mohamed squeezes into the van with his parents and his five brothers and sisters. The family relies on humanitarian aid to survive. Without it, they would have no means of support, even though Mohamed tries to help his parents as best he can. Every morning, the boy goes fishing with a homemade rod, balancing precariously on the slippery rocks, his sneakers soaked. He then sells his catch to a local fishmonger to supplement the family's income. It's an enormous burden for Mohamed, who can no longer attend school. *"At first, I followed the lessons on my phone, but there's no signal anymore."*

Did you know?

350'000

**people are still
displaced
in Lebanon**



↪ **Mohamed, balancing on the slippery rocks, goes fishing every morning to help his family.**





 **The Fun Bus on the Saida sea wall: a true break filled with laughter and color for displaced children!**

While waiting to return to school, Tdh helps Mohamed regain a sense of normalcy thanks to the regular visits of the fun bus. This colorful bus has been converted into a mobile, safe space for play, learning and psycho-social support, run by our case workers and PSS facilitators which also allows trained staff to identify those children suffering from deeper psychological distress or harm who need specialised support. The idea is simple: since the children no longer have a safe, child-friendly space, the space comes to them! As soon as the bus approaches the Corniche, Mohamed smiles from ear to ear: *"I'm there almost every day. It arrives full of games; we do activities—it makes me feel good. Manar, the social worker, also teaches us practical things, like spotting dangers or crossing the street safely. She really reassures me, and I'm less afraid."* During the fun bus sessions, Mohamed finds his smile again. He plays with the other children and, little by little, regains his confidence. And when the bus drives away, one image stays with us: Mohamed, between fishing sessions, kicking a worn-out soccer ball on the old Corniche, amid mattresses and debris. A ball that still bounces—just like Lebanese society, which refuses to give up.



When children have to work

Aziz, 9, comes from a Syrian family displaced to Lebanon. He and his father sleep in a tent on the Saida corniche. His mother and sisters, meanwhile, live in a women-only shelter. He works from late morning until midnight at a bicycle repair and rental shop. Since his father faces discrimination in the job market as a Syrian, Aziz is the family's sole source of income, in addition to humanitarian aid. *"One day, a man punched me in the stomach and in the eye because he didn't want to return his bike at the end of his rental period. That made me anxious. Now, I'm scared at the slightest scream, and I don't want to go to the bathroom alone at night anymore."* Maher, a social worker with Tdh, began working with him. *"He taught me to take fewer risks at work by protecting my hands or showing me proper lifting techniques. He also talked to me a lot to reassure me and told me it's important to talk to adults when I have a problem. His presence helped me feel better and safer."* This support is essential to protect Aziz from the dangers associated with his work. It marks the beginning of a long journey that will allow him to return to school as soon as possible.

Did you know?

Tdh and partners have been supporting more than



500

families in 22
collective shelters
and other sites
in Lebanon

Returning to School, One Step at a Time

From Saida, we head back up to the Bekaa Valley, east of Beirut, to visit one of the many refugee informal settlements for Syrians — it is ironic that Syrian refugees fled a war in their own country 15 years ago, but have been caught up in new conflict inside Lebanon. There we meet Alya, a 12-year-old Syrian girl who has come a long way: six months ago, when Tdh began working with her, she was suffering from post-traumatic stress due to the bombings. Yet she had to pretend everything was fine go to work in the agricultural fields every morning with her aunt. Alya was facing multiple hardships: abandoned by her parents, worn down by household chores and

caring for her cousins, and unable to read or write, the little girl had no prospects. Tdh's arrival changed everything. Walaa, the case worker whose story you'll read in the following pages, supported her. *"She helped me practice breathing techniques and gave me notebooks and coloring supplies so I could draw the people with whom I feel safe and supported."*



"I've really learned to love reading and writing. One day, I'd like to write a magazine!"

Alya, 12 years old

Walaa became one of her role models. *"She listens to me without interrupting, and when I talk to her, I feel a sense of calm."* While the individual sessions have had a very positive impact on Alya, the group sessions have also helped her gain confidence around other children. Her aunt attended child labor awareness sessions led by Tdh. Now, she no longer takes her to the fields, and most importantly, Alya has been able to return to school: *"Miss Walaa helped me catch up by putting me in an accelerated literacy program. I've really learned to love reading and writing. One day, I'd like to write a magazine!"* Until she's ready to write an issue of Courage, Alya can once again be a child her own age: she's learning, playing, and dreaming of a future.

A future where the blue would finally banish the bombs from Lebanon's skies.

Marc Nouaux

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provide emergency financial assistance to a vulnerable family for one month

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distribute an essential hygiene kit to a family (soap, toothpaste, sanitary pads, etc.)

A word with

Walaa Kassem, Child Protection Case Worker



A native of the Bekaa Valley in the east of Lebanon, where she has been working for Tdh since October 2024, Walaa is a case worker specialized in child protection. Having witnessed the horrors of war as a child, she is deeply attuned to the trauma experienced by the most vulnerable people she supports, whom she assists with her enthusiasm and strength.



“I experienced war when I was a child: I understand and empathize with what these children go through every day.”

On a personal level, how are you experiencing the war in Lebanon?

Twenty years ago, I too experienced war when I was just a little girl—with all the fears, uncertainties, and emotional strain... So I understand what these children are feeling, and above all, I share their daily lives. I tell them that their emotions are valid and that they are not alone. I live in a “red zone”*: the sound of bombs sets the rhythm of my days. I also feel a lot of fear and anxiety, which is why I’m undergoing personal therapy to help me cope and find the strength to help the children. This conflict affects absolutely everyone.

**In Lebanon, “red zones” referred to neighborhoods where the threat of bombing during the peak of the war was real.*

What is daily life like in the Bekaa Valley?

Everyone is on edge because of the noise. When we’re working with displaced families to ease their fears and stress, and then—boom—a bomb falls! Immediately, the fear returns. And the cycle starts all over again—again and again and again. As soon as we manage to make psychological or emotional progress, the resumption of violence shatters that positive momentum. This prevents any sense of recovery from taking hold. More broadly, with routines disrupted, children eagerly await the arrival

of NGOs so they can play or take part in our activities. We’ve been working with some families since 2024. At that time, they needed short-term emergency aid; now, they face chronic financial difficulties because they have no resources left. Deep-seated trauma is mounting, and many children’s education has been permanently disrupted.

How do these fears and anxieties manifest themselves?

Fear of noise, aggression, isolation, and addiction to cell phones. The children can’t come to terms with reality, so they escape into their phones. Many watch TikTok on repeat or play war video games. The content isn’t appropriate for children, but parents have neither the time nor the energy to monitor it—they just hand them a phone. Many children are having nightmares and are beginning to show signs of developmental regression: for example, some who used to speak very well now have trouble expressing themselves. This is linked to the fear of war and explosions. As for the parents, they’re either overprotective or much more aggressive toward their children—because they themselves live in fear of dying and anxiety over money. When this stress becomes overwhelming, it sometimes spills over onto the children, even leading to physical abuse.

Has a child's story made a particular impression on you recently?

I'm thinking of a child who would hit his brothers and sisters in the privacy of his home. Outside, alone in the camp, he was the one being hit and mocked. He built up a lot of anger because of the displacement, the stress, and the abuse he endured. And he took it out on his family by hitting them because he knew they wouldn't fight back. We worked on understanding what triggered these outbursts and how he could defend himself against others—for example, by asking adults for help or by talking things out calmly. Now, he's no longer aggressive at home, and he even goes out of his way to protect his little brother. We're happy with the result, but it was a long process that took more than six months!

And then, generally speaking, every visit to these families touches me deeply and reminds me just how much I love my job. When I arrive at the refugee camps, the children run toward my car, and when I leave, they give me flowers they've picked around the tents. The time spent with these families is warm and filled with Lebanese hospitality: they always insist that I have tea or coffee, and they regularly give me a basket of fruit when I leave. And I'd better take it—otherwise they'll be offended [smiles]!

In the Bekaa Valley, do the displaced people live with the hope of returning to the South?

For some families, this is already their second displacement since 2024. But this time, the Bekaa Valley was affected, so many families were displaced as far as Mount Lebanon, further north. There are so many people who have lost their homes or a loved one. We're often asked the same questions: *"When the war starts up again, will we have to be displaced once more?"* or *"Is this a real ceasefire?"* Fear is everywhere; it dictates the rhythm of our lives. People are looking for information that might calm them down—for reassuring answers. But we can't promise anything—we know just as much as they do.

Don't we get discouraged from living with constant instability?

We go through crises every 4–5 years. Economic collapse, the coronavirus, revolution, the war of 2024, the war of 2026... Whether we're Lebanese or refugees, we're very tired of the instability. Everyone is affected, but we don't get used to it—there's no resignation. When I see conflicts repeating themselves, of course it frustrates me, because I can't control the political context. But I'm very happy when I see children developing coping mechanisms and learning to manage their emotions—that gives me strength. Above all, it gives meaning to what I do, despite the setbacks some may face. I love child protection; I love this work, and even the smallest impact I can make gives me enough hope. It's in those moments that I realize I'm helping to make a difference—even if it's just a little, it's huge.

Interview by Marc Nouaux





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