



# Input Note on the Right of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Lebanon to Participate in the 2026 Parliamentary Elections

## 1. Introduction

The right of all citizens to participate in public affairs, vote, and be elected without discrimination is guaranteed under Article 25 of the ICCPR<sup>1</sup> and reaffirmed in international human rights jurisprudence. Internally displaced persons fully retain these rights, and displacement cannot be used as a basis to curtail political participation.

Lebanon enters the 2026 electoral cycle with one of the largest internal displacement situations in its modern history, peaking at nearly 900,000 IDPs in late 2024 and stabilizing to 82,632 IDPs monitored as of May 2026<sup>2</sup>. This dynamic poses both practical challenges and democratic risks if not addressed through rights-based and inclusive electoral measures. The displacement was due to the Israeli assault that took place between October 8, 2023, and November 27, 2024<sup>3</sup>. It was rapid and multi-phased, creating administrative barriers for voter registration, access to polling stations, documentation renewal, and information flow.

The NHRC-CPT submits this input to emphasize the State's obligation to guarantee equal, safe, and meaningful participation of all IDPs and returnees, consistent with international human rights and electoral standards.

## 2. International Perspective on IDP Enfranchisement

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<sup>1</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted 16 December 1966 by UN GA Res. 2200A (XXI), 999 U.N.T.S. 171 (entered into force 23 March 1976) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

<sup>2</sup> International Organization for Migration, Displacement Tracking Matrix, "Lebanon," accessed December 6, 2025, <https://dtm.iom.int/lebanon>

<sup>3</sup> National Human Rights Commission – Lebanon, "Challenges to the Rule of Law and Respect for Human Rights During the Israeli War on Lebanon", (Report, 22 May 2025). <https://nhrcib.org/en/archives/3131>

International experience shows that States often need to adopt exceptional electoral arrangements to ensure that internally displaced persons can meaningfully exercise their political rights. According to the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and its Electoral Assistance Division, IDPs retain full suffrage rights regardless of displacement, and their inability to vote should never result from administrative obstacles or conflict-induced mobility constraints. Such measures are understood not as optional improvements to an electoral process but as necessary protections in contexts where large portions of the population have been uprooted from their constituencies and face heightened vulnerability. Ensuring their participation is therefore integral to democratic legitimacy and to preventing the political exclusion of affected communities.

### **3. Electoral System Characteristics and the Need for Adaptation**

The extent to which a State must modify voting procedures depends greatly on the structure of its electoral system, the number and size of constituencies, and the relationship between voter registration and geographic origin. In countries like Lebanon, where constituency-based voting is central to political representation, displacement can create severe obstacles to participation, particularly when large numbers of voters cannot return to their areas of registration.

Comparative experiences from Ethiopia, Ukraine, Iraq, Nigeria, and Georgia demonstrate that electoral management bodies, when provided with sufficient resources and political backing, are capable of designing alternative voting procedures that enable IDPs to participate either in their current place of residence or in their constituency of origin. These examples highlight that, when implemented transparently and with broad consensus, special procedures for IDPs can strengthen the credibility of elections and foster national cohesion.

### **4. Operational Complexities and Administrative Requirements**

The feasibility of special voting arrangements for internally displaced persons cannot be understood without examining the broader operational landscape in which Lebanon's electoral system functions. Displacement on the scale witnessed since late 2023 has reshaped demographic realities in ways that significantly complicate voter access, registration procedures, and polling logistics. In this context, the traditional model that requires voters to return to their area of registration has become increasingly unworkable for tens of thousands of citizens who have fled devastated or militarized towns in South Lebanon and other affected regions. As a result, electoral authorities must confront not only the fluidity of population movements and the

widespread loss of civil documentation, but also the structural limits of a system that ties representation to static, locality-based registration.

The introduction of mega-voting centers, large, centralized polling hubs that allow citizens to vote from their place of displacement, emerges in this environment as one of the most significant operational reforms available under the amended 2022 electoral law. These centers are designed to accommodate high turnout, integrate modern identification methods, and reduce the logistical and security burdens associated with transporting voters back to their hometowns. Their potential lies in offering a safe, accessible, and credible alternative for IDPs who cannot return to their electoral district because of ongoing insecurity, destroyed infrastructure, or prohibitive financial costs. The model has already been tested by the Lebanese diaspora during the 2018 and 2022 parliamentary elections, where embassies and consulates across France, Germany, and various African states successfully established high-capacity voting spaces that grouped voters by region of origin. This experience demonstrated that Lebanese administrative bodies, when properly resourced, can manage large multi-district polling environments while preserving ballot secrecy and procedural integrity.

The operationalization of mega-centers inside Lebanon, however, carries significant legal, administrative, and political weight. Legally, enabling voters to cast their ballots outside their home constituency challenges long-standing provisions linking voter registration to geographic representation. Such a shift requires safeguards against double voting, clear rules for ballot transfer, and a credible identification system capable of authenticating voters from multiple regions. Administratively, the burden is equally demanding. Authorities must identify facilities that are accessible, spacious, and secure enough to accommodate thousands of voters from different constituencies. These centers require trained staff capable of managing complex, multi-district workflows; reliable connectivity to verify identities in real time; and meticulous procedures for organizing ballot boxes, transporting materials, and consolidating results. The vote-counting process itself must be adapted to handle a centralized influx of ballots, often with the assistance of automated or semi-automated systems to prevent bottlenecks and preserve transparency.

These operational factors unfold in a politically charged environment. Mega-voting centers are not merely technical innovations; they intersect directly with delicate electoral balances. Some political actors have expressed their opposition to these centers. In contrast, an increasing segment of political forces views mega-voting centers as essential, not only to protect the rights of displaced citizens but also to reduce political intimidation, curtail patronage networks, and modernize Lebanon's electoral infrastructure. This tension underscores that operational planning cannot be separated from political understandings; every implementation must be grounded in a broad national consensus to avoid perceptions of manipulation or partisan engineering.

From a logistical perspective, the experience of 2022 revealed the scale of the challenge. An interministerial committee concluded that implementing mega-voting centers would require at least five months of preparatory work following an amendment to the law, and a budget of nearly six million dollars. This includes technology procurement, staff training, voter education, physical

preparation of sites, and the rollout of strong security protocols. Although the Council of Ministers ultimately deferred the reform at the time, the urgency created by the mass displacement of 2024–2025 has reintroduced the debate with new force. The question today is no longer whether mega-centers are desirable in principle, but whether Lebanon can conduct credible and inclusive elections without them, given the unprecedented challenges IDPs face in accessing their polling stations.

Ensuring that IDPs can participate meaningfully in the 2026 elections, therefore, demands a multi-layered approach. Mega-centers cannot be viewed in isolation: they must be paired with mobile registration units to reach IDPs lacking documentation, alternative identity verification methods for those who lost papers during displacement, and clear coordination among the electoral management body, municipalities, civil registry authorities, security forces, and humanitarian actors. Only through such comprehensive planning can the system accommodate the reality that hundreds of thousands of citizens no longer reside where the electoral law expects them to vote. In this sense, the adoption of mega-voting centers represents not only a logistical solution but a broader commitment to electoral fairness, democratic inclusion, and the protection of fundamental political rights under conditions of national crisis.

## **5. Security Conditions and Their Impact on Participation**

Following the ceasefire of 27 October 2024, Lebanon has nevertheless endured near-daily Israeli attacks throughout the subsequent period up to December 2025. This persistent pattern of violations has generated a climate of continuous fear and instability, severely constraining the ability of internally displaced persons to participate meaningfully and safely in the 2026 electoral process. Despite the formal cessation of large-scale hostilities, the ongoing strikes, drone incursions, and targeted bombardments have caused repeated waves of displacement, widespread damage to civilian infrastructure, and significant disruption to transportation networks and essential services.

Under these conditions, movement to polling locations becomes hazardous, particularly for IDPs originating from or residing in the border villages of the South and the Bekaa, where attacks remain frequent. Fear of sudden escalation, exposure to shelling, flying checkpoints, and the unpredictability of military activity acts as a powerful deterrent for displaced voters who may be required to return to their original constituencies or navigate insecure routes to access designated polling stations.

The UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) notes that in conflict-affected environments, electoral arrangements must be specifically designed to minimize physical movement, safeguard the secrecy and integrity of the ballot, and ensure safe, predictable access through coordinated security and logistical mechanisms. These considerations become even more urgent when IDPs are living under continuous threat, where intimidation, fear of reprisals, and heightened political tensions may further suppress turnout or distort voter choice.

The ongoing security violations also amplify political sensitivities surrounding displacement and electoral geography. Adjusting voting procedures for displaced persons, such as through special polling centers, facilitated absentee voting, or constituency reassignment, may be perceived by stakeholders as formalizing demographic changes that occurred under conditions of conflict and forced displacement. This makes broad political dialogue, transparency, and consultation essential components of any decision-making process affecting IDP electoral participation, to preserve public trust and uphold the credibility of the 2026 parliamentary elections.

## **6. Consultation With IDPs and Civil Society**

An essential component of effective IDP enfranchisement is the meaningful consultation of displaced communities themselves. IDPs possess the most accurate understanding of the barriers they face, the risks associated with movement, and the types of arrangements that would enable their safe participation. Their involvement, along with that of civil society organizations, women's groups, disability rights advocates, and community representatives, strengthens the design of voting procedures and enhances trust in the electoral process. When such consultations are institutionalized, electoral arrangements reflect lived realities rather than assumptions about displacement.

## **7. The Importance of Data, Monitoring, and Transparency**

Reliable, disaggregated, and continuously updated data form the backbone of any credible electoral process, and its importance becomes even more pronounced in contexts marked by displacement, insecurity, and political fragmentation. In the Lebanese landscape leading up to the 2026 parliamentary elections, the ability to collect, verify, and publish accurate information about internally displaced persons, including their numbers, current locations, demographic characteristics, and documentation status, is indispensable for ensuring inclusive participation. Such data enables authorities to make informed decisions about where polling centers should be located, how they should be staffed, and what specific accessibility adjustments may be required to accommodate vulnerable groups. It also assists in determining the feasibility of extraordinary arrangements such as mega-voting centers, mobile registration units, and alternative identification methods. Without trustworthy data, these interventions risk being misaligned with actual needs or may inadvertently exclude the very populations they are intended to support.

The NHRC-CPT stresses that a rights-based electoral process requires robust monitoring throughout all phases of the cycle, pre-electoral, electoral, and post-electoral, to assess whether citizens can exercise their rights without intimidation, discrimination, or undue administrative obstacles.

Monitoring generates its own form of critical data: reports of violations, incidents of intimidation, patterns of restricted movement, misuse of public resources, electoral violence, and unequal access to media or campaigning opportunities. Each category of observation contributes to a fuller picture of the electoral environment and supports early warning analysis, enabling the Commission to advocate for immediate corrective measures with the Ministry of Interior, the Supervisory Commission for Elections, and relevant security agencies. The NHRC-CPT's deployment of fixed and mobile monitors, regional focal points, hotline mechanisms, structured interviews, and coordinated field visits all serve to create a multi-layered and evidence-based monitoring system that feeds directly into transparency and accountability structures.

Transparency is equally essential, not only in the publication of voter rolls and polling station information, but also in the disclosure of human rights findings, incident reports, and assessments of legal and administrative frameworks. Making such information publicly accessible enhances trust in a political environment characterized by widespread skepticism toward state institutions. The timely release of monitoring statements, preliminary assessments, and periodic reports, each aligned with Paris Principles requirements, is crucial for countering misinformation, reducing the space for manipulation, and ensuring that the electorate is fully informed. The NHRC-CPT concept note highlights that public communication and openness to scrutiny are indispensable tools for combating institutional distrust and countering narratives of partiality.

Effective complaint and dispute resolution mechanisms form another cornerstone of transparency and human rights protection. Ensuring that citizens have accessible and safe channels to report violations, whether related to intimidation, electoral violence, discrimination against vulnerable groups, or irregularities in the voting process, allows grievances to be addressed promptly and fairly. According to the NHRC-CPT's monitoring framework, electoral justice mechanisms must be able to respond to complaints in a timely, impartial, and legally grounded manner, especially during the volatile post-electoral period, when tensions may escalate, and violations may intensify. The Commission's role in documenting abuses, following up on judicial remedies, and assessing the integrity of dispute resolution procedures will be crucial determinants of public confidence in the outcome of the elections.

Finally, data, monitoring, and transparency cannot be sustained without meaningful cooperation and coordination. This will improve the quality and reliability of data and reinforce the independence and credibility of the monitoring process. When actors operate cohesively, with shared methodologies, data-sharing protocols, and mutual reinforcement, electoral transparency becomes a collective endeavor that protects the integrity of the vote and upholds the rights of all participants, especially the most marginalized.

