



# Piece of misinformation

## CASH AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE (CVA) IS GIVEN BASED ON LUCK

### When it was most prevalent

Following the Beirut port explosion in August 2020 and the economic distress, both Lebanese and Syrian people felt a lack of accountability and expressed frustrations over the perceived failure of local and international bodies to provide the necessary aid to the most vulnerable populations.

### Social cohesion

Misinformation about CVA targeting, with many believing that access to assistance was based on luck rather than needs, impacted social cohesion. This perception, combined with the reality that some individuals within the same neighbourhoods received CVA while others with similar needs did not, fuelled tensions and mistrust between CVA and non-CVA recipients. There was a sense that people's needs were not being adequately met, further contributing to discord within the community.

### Local Effort

**UNHCR and its partners: Together We Give Warmth**

The "[Together We Give Warmth](#)" campaign, launched by UNHCR and its partners in 2019, aimed to provide CVA for winter assistance to thousands of vulnerable Lebanese and refugee families in Lebanon. As the economic crisis worsened, UNHCR collaborated with local authorities, NGOs and religious institutions to identify and assist those most in need to scale up the assistance.

The campaign effectively used simple messages in a timely manner, while partnering with trusted local organisations to create a sense of community involvement. Emotional appeals were emphasised through stories like that of Jeanette, an 83-year-old Lebanese woman struggling with winter expenses, which humanised the assistance and resonated with the public on an emotional level.

By framing the assistance as essential to survival in harsh conditions, the campaign not only highlighted the urgency of the situation, but also fostered empathy and solidarity, encouraging broader support based on needs. By consistently emphasising the well-defined criteria used to target aid and sharing the authentic accounts of those in need, the campaign effectively addressed misconceptions. By fostering empathy for individual experiences and clarifying the criteria for aid distribution, perceptions can be shifted from that of a random approach to a focused response based on need. This approach not only builds trust within the community, but also limits the spread of misinformation.

PRIMARY CAUSAL PATHWAY

### Humanitarian Worker

A field worker arrives in a neighbourhood, and local residents inquire about how to receive aid. The worker provides vague or inaccurate information, triggering confusion, which leads to misinformation on the targeting criteria.



### Word of Mouth

Misinformation spreads within the neighbourhood community.



### Echo Chambers

The misinformation circulates in local offline echo chambers, where it is repeatedly discussed, reinforcing misperceptions.



### The Messenger Effect

Humanitarian workers, viewed as trusted figures, may unintentionally validate the notion that CVA is given based on luck by sharing anecdotes about individual cases without clarifying the selection criteria. This can lead community members to accept the idea without question.

### Availability Bias

Community members tend to focus on easily recalled stories of neighbours receiving aid, leading them to overestimate the frequency and scale of CVA distribution. This reinforces frustrations among those who do not receive assistance, fuelling the belief that aid is distributed randomly.

### Confirmation Bias

Once misinformation spreads, individuals seek out or believe information that aligns with their existing views. If someone hears stories supporting the idea that CVA is given randomly, they are likely to accept this as evidence of inequitable distribution, reinforcing their beliefs.

### Anchoring Bias

Vague or inaccurate initial information about CVA distribution creates a lasting "anchor" in perceptions. Despite attempts to clarify the structured process, individuals may cling to their initial notion that aid is based on luck, making it harder to rectify this misconception.

SECONDARY CAUSAL PATHWAY

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# Piece of misinformation

## CVA CIRCULATES IN US DOLLARS, DISADVANTAGING NON-CVA RECIPIENTS IN RENTING A HOME

### When it was most prevalent

False rumours have been circulating that displaced Syrians were receiving CVA in dollars, while Lebanese nationals were receiving CVA in lira. The economic crisis and the fluctuating exchange rate were most prevalent between 2022 and June 2023. Due to the scarcity of dollars in Lebanon and the fluctuating exchange rate, many landlords and sellers prefer to receive payments in dollars.

### Social cohesion

Misinformation suggesting that CVA for housing was provided in dollars fuelled perceptions that Syrian CVA recipients were financially privileged, enabling them to secure better housing. This created resentment among non-CVA recipients, who often work multiple jobs to afford rent. As a result, feelings of inequality and frustration have intensified, undermining social cohesion. Simultaneously, discussions on social media have reflected growing discontent regarding local currency devaluation and a lack of trust in both national and international bodies managing CVA.

### Local Effort

**UN Women and UNDP:**  
*Dealing with the Past: Fostering Dialogue and Reconciliation for a Peaceful Future in Lebanon*

To address the wounds of violence in Lebanon, the programme "[Dealing with the Past: Memory for the Future](#)," supported by UN Women and UNDP, aims to foster cross community dialogue and peace. The initiative seeks to promote reconciliation, re-establish the dignity of war victims, and restore peace by encouraging open discussions and healing from past conflicts. Through these efforts, the programme hopes to build a more cohesive and peaceful future for all communities affected by violence.

- Dialogue and Storytelling: Facilitating cross-community exchanges to share personal experiences and promote mutual understanding.
- Commemorative Events: Honouring victims of war to acknowledge past suffering and provide closure.
- Workshops and Capacity-Building: Training individuals in conflict resolution and peace advocacy.
- Media and Arts: Using creative platforms like theatre and media campaigns to spread messages of unity.
- Policy Advocacy: Engaging policymakers to integrate peacebuilding into national development frameworks.

### Initial Triggering Event

A specific incident in which a landlord refused to rent to Lebanese non-CVA recipients. This decision was amplified by reports that a Syrian family was selected to rent this same apartment, creating feelings of exclusion among those not receiving assistance.

### Online and Offline Echo Chambers

Frustration and perceived injustice fuel the rapid spread of misinformation that Syrians receive CVA in dollars. Both online and offline echo chambers amplify this rumour, reinforcing the belief that landlords favour Syrians. This false narrative intensifies divisions between Lebanese families and Syrian families receiving assistance, deepening the sense of inequality and resentment within the community.

### Availability Bias

Community members see Syrians moving into better housing, leading to the false belief that Syrians receive CVA in dollars. This visibility contributes to the misconception that different levels of assistance exist and fosters resentment among Lebanese families who feel neglected.

### Confirmation Bias

Those with negative views of aid distribution and of Syrians focus on instances that support their beliefs, such as claims that CVA recipients have preferential access to housing. This selective attention deepens negative perceptions of Syrians and exacerbates social divisions

### Relative Feeling of Deprivation

Lebanese families not receiving CVA feel deprived when comparing themselves to Syrian CVA recipients. The belief that CVA is provided in dollars heightens feelings of unfairness, as disparities in support become more evident, widening the divide between these groups and increasing community tension.

PRIMARY CAUSAL PATHWAY

SECONDARY CAUSAL PATHWAY

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# Piece of misinformation

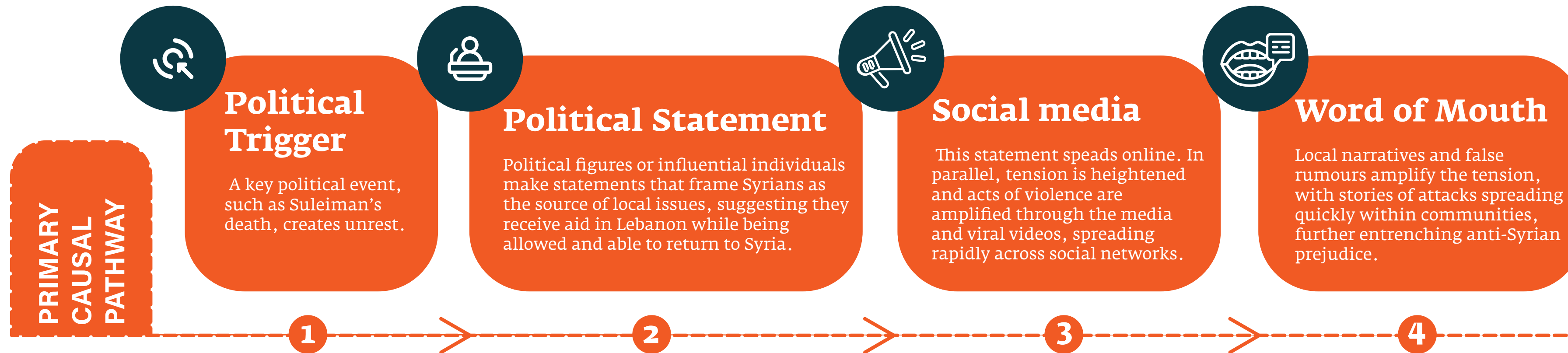
## DISPLACED SYRIANS RECEIVE CVA IN LEBANON AND THEN GO BACK TO SYRIA

### When it was most prevalent

In April 2024, Pascal Suleiman, a political member of the Lebanese Forces Party, was murdered, with official judicial sources attributing the crime to a car theft gang. However, the Lebanese Forces and allied parties claimed it was a political assassination. The gang believed to be Syrians hiding in a Shiite village. This has heightened tensions and worsened social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrians. Amidst this, Lebanon's interim Interior Minister, Bassam Mawlawi, reported an increase in crimes involving Syrians and called for stricter enforcement of the laws concerning displaced Syrians. These incidents have paved the way for the rise and development of the misinformation that displaced Syrians receive CVA in Lebanon and then return to Syria. Syrians are perceived as able to move between the two countries, using aid resources while allegedly engaging in criminal activities in Lebanon.

### Social cohesion

Social cohesion in Lebanon has been affected by misinformation surrounding CVA received by displaced Syrians. Following the assassination of Pascal Suleiman, anti Syrian sentiment has surged with many Lebanese blaming refugees for their problems. Misinformation suggesting that displaced Syrians receive CVA in Lebanon and then return to Syria has fuelled resentment, leading to increased discrimination and violence against them. Viral videos of Lebanese locals assaulting Syrians and vandalising vehicles with Syrian number plates reflect the rising hostility. These incidents not only exacerbate social tensions but also threaten social stability and cohesion among its diverse communities.



### SECONDARY CAUSAL PATHWAY

#### Confirmation Bias

Some Lebanese citizens hold pre-existing negative views about Syrians, influenced by historical, political, or economic factors. When violent incidents or crimes involving Syrians occur and, in this case, at the border between Lebanon and Syria, these individuals perceive them as "proof" that their negative beliefs are justified, while ignoring positive interactions or contributions made by the Syrian community. This bias reinforces the misinformation that displaced Syrians receive CVA in Lebanon and then return to Syria.

#### Anchoring Bias

The initial incident, such as a political leader's statement or a violent crime involving Syrians, creates a strong anchor that shapes perceptions. This reference point influences how individuals interpret future encounters with Syrians, reinforcing the belief that CVA recipients misuse resources and return to Syria, as people view all subsequent interactions through this negative lens.

#### Selective Perception and Experience

Individuals with prior negative experiences or exposure to anti-Syrian sentiments interpret interactions with Syrians through a biased lens. They are more likely to circulate negative portrayals in viral media, while disregarding positive narratives. This selective perception perpetuates the misinformation that displaced Syrians exploit aid, making it challenging to shift public opinion, as existing prejudices are further entrenched.

### Local Effort

**UNDP: Empowering Communities and Youth to Combat Misinformation and Promote Stability**

[Dawaer Foundation](#), under UNDP's "Mechanisms for Stability and Resilience" (MSR) programme, launched a two-phase [initiative](#) to reduce tensions between host and refugee communities. In phase 1, 40 local actors in 10 villages were trained to combat misinformation and promote conflict resolution. Phase 2 trained 51 journalism students to counter hate speech and fake news through campaigns. A [toolkit](#) was also developed to enhance critical thinking and media literacy among youth and communities. Faced with multifaceted manifestations of disinformation, [Sawab](#), a United Nations development programme, funded a platform specialising in the fight against disinformation in Lebanon, and launched training courses in schools and universities to equip students with best practices on how to spot disinformation.





# Piece of misinformation

## CVA AMOUNT IS DISPROPORTIONATE BETWEEN SYRIANS AND LEBANESE

### When it was most prevalent

The economic crisis and the fluctuating exchange rate were most prevalent between 2022 and June 2023. During this period, CVA actors adjusted the amount of CVA provided to Syrians based on the fluctuating exchange rate. This change led to widespread misinformation within the Syrian and Lebanese communities, as rumours about varying amounts of aid circulated, exacerbating confusion and tensions among recipients.

### Social cohesion

The misinformation spreading within Syrian communities regarding the amounts of CVA received lead to heightened expectations among Lebanese nationals (newly enrolled in CVA programmes), which translated into a feeling of inequality. Social cohesion has been strained, with Lebanese citizens expressing their frustration on the streets, in the media and through municipalities. The fact that Syrians were seen queuing for CVA, coupled with misinformation within the Syrian community about the amount they were meant to receive, intensified feelings of unfairness among Lebanese and Syrians. This has fuelled resentment, as many non-CVA recipients believe they are being overlooked in favour of refugees, despite also experiencing economic hardship. In Tripoli for example, angry citizens destroyed an ATM of the Lebanese French Bank where Syrians were queuing and chased away Syrian refugees receiving UN funds.



### Fake SMS or Altered Messages in Echo Chambers

Within the Syrian community, often through fake or altered SMS messages (e.g. receiving 200\$ in aid instead of 25\$) shared in closed Facebook groups.



### Word of Mouth

Misinformation from fake messages spreads by word of mouth to the Lebanese, raising their expectations and fuelling resentment, as they believe Syrians are receiving more aid, deepening perceptions of unfairness.



### Social media

This tension then escalates online, spilling into social media, where frustrations are voiced and discussions about aid disparities intensify.

### Local Effort

**UNHCR's HELP Webpage: A Key Tool for Debunking Misinformation on CVA**

UNHCR's primary tool for debunking rumours and countering misinformation about CVA is the [HELP webpage](#). This online resource serves as a first-stop, self-help repository for UNHCR aid, including CVA. The site features a Q&A section on CVA, compiles support materials (such as videos, leaflets and a list of redemption points), and includes a "latest news" section for quickly disseminating counter-fraud messages as soon as misinformation or fraudulent schemes are reported. Refugees and partners are encouraged to refer to HELP's Cash Assistance page for verified and updated information. Although HELP's rollout in Lebanon is recent, it has already proven effective in enhancing communication with refugees and partners. Unfortunately, it is not directed at Lebanese.

PRIMARY CAUSAL PATHWAY

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SECONDARY CAUSAL PATHWAY

### Confirmation Bias

Lebanese community members already harbour scepticism or resentment towards Syrians; they focus on and amplify exaggerated claims about the amount of aid received by Syrians. This selective attention to confirming information deepens existing biases, as they disregard any evidence of equitable treatment or fair aid distribution.

### Anchoring Bias

Initial exposure to inflated aid figures leads the Lebanese to anchor their perceptions of what is "normal" regarding cash assistance. As a result, Lebanese community members form unrealistic expectations about the aid available, which significantly influences their judgement and feelings about the situation.