


# Surviving without the basics

The ever-worsening  
impact of Lebanon's  
crisis on children

November 2021





Hundreds of thousands of children in Lebanon are at risk. They are going to bed hungry, are not receiving the health care they need and are unable to attend school.

The future of an entire generation of children is at stake as Lebanon struggles simultaneously with one of the world's worst economic depressions in modern history, the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of the massive August 2020 Beirut Port explosions.

Dalal, 4 years old. The ever-worsening crisis in Lebanon impacts society's most vulnerable disproportionately – none more so than its children. Increasingly, children are going to bed hungry and are not receiving the minimum standards of required health care. © UNICEF/Foad Choufany

# A SURVIVAL CRISIS FOR CHILDREN



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*Sara and Bilal at their home in Hay el Gharbeh, an informal settlement in Southern Beirut. Their father, Tarek, cannot afford the basics for his four children: “Everything, from food to medicine, is difficult to buy this year. We have to live without basics”, he says.*

With no sign of a let-up in the devastating compound crisis, the impact on children keeps getting worse. This is reflected in child-focused rapid assessments (CFRAs) conducted by UNICEF in April 2021 and again in October 2021 among the same families<sup>1</sup>.

The figures show a dramatic deterioration of living conditions among Lebanese children, while the refugee communities continue to be hard hit.

*“Life is very hard, it is becoming harder every day. Today I sent my four children to school without food. I am not sure if I will be able to sustain this life. I have suicidal thoughts and the only thing stopping me from doing this is my children. I feel so bad for them.” Hanan, 29,<sup>2</sup> who lives in Tripoli, northern Lebanon.*

<sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted by telephone. 1,244 households were interviewed in April of which 838 took part in October.  
<sup>2</sup> Name changed to protect her identity



Youssef, 2 years old. With no sign of a let-up in the devastating compound crises, the impact on children keeps getting worse. © UNICEF/Fouad Choufany

Faced with skyrocketing inflation, rising poverty and increasingly scarce jobs, families are struggling to provide for their children. The CFRA indicates that 53 per cent of families had at least one child who skipped a meal in October 2021, as compared with 37 per cent in April.

The CFRA shows that 9 in 10 families are experiencing electricity cut-offs, 3 in 10 households cut expenses on education and 4 in 10 had to sell household items to buy basics. Seven in ten had to buy food on credit or borrow money to afford food – a proportion that reached more than 9 in 10 among Syrian refugees.

More than 8 in 10 people live in poverty and 34 per cent in extreme poverty, according to 2021 multidimensional poverty estimates.<sup>3</sup> The figures are even starker for Syrian refugee families, with almost 9 out of 10 living in extreme poverty.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, fewer than 3 in 10 families interviewed in October 2021 said they received some form of social assistance. As a result, many households resort to desperate measures to survive, which often place children at risk.

<sup>3</sup> Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021)  
<sup>4</sup> 2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon



Any of the children skipped a meal because there was not enough food in the house



Had to sell household items, such as TVs, radios or furniture



Reduced expenses on education



Buy food on credit or borrow money to buy food



# A PROTECTION CRISIS FOR CHILDREN



Tools of the trade. A child showing his working tools used to earn money by cleaning car windows in the busy streets of Saida. He and his siblings provide their household's only income. Together, they work from dawn till dusk to support the family and guarantee the basics. © UNICEF/Fouad Choufany

The devastating crisis has increased children's vulnerability and exacerbated inequality. Many children have no other choice but to work, find themselves on the street or faced with other serious risks, including child marriage, trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The proportion of families surveyed for the CFRA who sent children to work rose to 12 per cent, from 9 per cent, and increased sevenfold to 7 per cent in the case of Lebanese households.

Many more children than before experience forms of violence, and intimate partner violence reportedly affects more women, with direct consequences for the children in the household.

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*"I worry. I feel stressed. I feel sad. So, I end up working longer hours to try to bring more money – but it's never enough. This is our life". Ala'a, 13, who works in a fruit orchard in the south of the country.*

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*"Our parents need the money we earn. What would they do if we stopped working now?" Amal, 15, who picks fruit in southern Lebanon. Her parents have no work. "When I look to the future, I see life getting harder. My biggest worry is the rent. We don't want to lose our home. It's our safe space".*

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# A HEALTH CRISIS FOR CHILDREN

A child drinks water from the only source in Hesbi Camp, South Lebanon, in October 2021. With over 2.8 million people affected by water shortages, the number of families relying on water trucks for their drinking water increased fivefold, to more than 21 per cent, between April and October 2021.  
© UNICEF/Fouad Choufany



Lebanon's health system has been devastated. Hospitals are short of fuel – leading to frequent power outages – and lack essential supplies. Health workers are exhausted. Medication prices have increased massively, leaving numerous families unable to afford proper health care for their children, while the country is facing a shortage of essential medicines.

According to UNICEF's poll, almost 34 per cent of children who required primary health care in October did not receive it, up from 28 per cent in April. In addition, more than 9 in 10 surveyed families experienced an increase in the prices of medicine in the three months prior to the survey, as compared with 7 in 10 in April.

Lack of transportation due to fuel shortages and expensive transport also prevent many families from reaching health facilities. The health sector has also been affected by, the loss of more than 1,000 health professionals<sup>5</sup>.

Making matters worse, the near collapse of Lebanon's water sector poses a huge public health threat. Water shortages have severely affected the running of vital facilities, including hospitals. Some 2.8 million people are affected by water shortages, and the water crisis still has the

potential to reach 4 million people. This could have disastrous consequences – particularly for children – such as an increase in potentially deadly waterborne diseases.

More than 45 per cent of the households had insufficient drinking water at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey, as compared with under 20 per cent in April. The main reasons they did not get enough water were the cost (35 per cent in October, up from 29 per cent) and the inability to reach the source (14 per cent, up from 9 per cent.)

The number of families relying on water trucks for their drinking water increased fivefold, to more than 21 per cent, and more than half the households spent over 100,000 LBP (equivalent to about \$5 ) on water in the month prior to the survey, up from 20 per cent. At the same time, 93 per cent said they experienced electricity cuts, up from 56 per cent.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted routine immunization services, with a study showing that use of the services dropped 31 per cent between October 2019 and April 2020<sup>6</sup>.

The crisis is also taking a heavy toll on the mental health of children and their families.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hbku.edu.qa/en/news/PPP-SP-LBDWIHC>

<sup>6</sup> [Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the utilization of routine immunization services in Lebanon](#)

# AN EDUCATION CRISIS FOR CHILDREN



Tahane, a 12-year-old Syrian refugee from Homs studying at her place in the Beqaa Valley, Lebanon, in March 2021.  
© UNICEF/Diego Sanchez

The compound crisis is jeopardizing the right to education of the most vulnerable children. An estimated 440,000 school-age refugee children and an unprecedented 260,000 of school-age Lebanese children might not get back to school. Challenges are daunting, ranging from a lack of fuel and electricity, water shortages and limited funds to pay teachers' salaries. With more people plunging into poverty every day, teachers cannot make ends meet, and the most vulnerable families cannot afford basic expenses, such as transportation to school.

School closures, largely due to COVID-19, effectively stopped the education of over 1.2 million school-age children in 2020 and for months on end in 2021, while numerous schools were destroyed or damaged in the August 2020 Beirut Port explosions.

In addition to learning loss, missing school can lead to mental distress, exposure to violence and reduced development of social skills. It also means children miss out on school-based meals and vaccinations.

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*"I miss going to school because it's much better than attending classes online. I miss answering the questions and talking to the teacher without having to unmute my microphone and risking someone else taking my turn." Mashhour, 8.*

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*"I haven't been to school for a very long time and I'm extremely excited to go back because I miss my teachers and all the fun things we used to do, like colouring and playing with my friends." Assil, 6.*

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# A NEED FOR URGENT, CONCERTED ACTION

Lebanon's Government needs to take swift action to safeguard children and ensure their well-being and development opportunities. All actors must put their differences aside and support a comprehensive reform agenda. Sustainable solutions for the most vulnerable requires reducing income vulnerabilities for both Lebanese and refugee families, revisions in the legal and policy context, long-term normative changes and access to learning and health care for all. But the most pressing need at this stage is immediate protection for the most vulnerable. Continued support from donors is also essential to keep children safe, healthy and in school.

*"The staggering magnitude of the crisis must be a wake-up call. Urgent action is needed to ensure no child goes hungry, becomes sick, or has to work rather than receive an education."*

*Yukie Mokuo, UNICEF Representative in Lebanon.*

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## UNICEF IN ACTION

- ▶ For seven decades, UNICEF has been working to improve the lives of children and their families in Lebanon, irrespective of their nationality or status. In response to the massive compound crisis affecting Lebanon, UNICEF has scaled up its programmes, providing life-saving support to children and youth of all nationalities, protecting their rights and helping them achieve their potential.
- ▶ UNICEF has refocused its efforts to support families caught up in the economic crisis, and enhanced its social assistance, notably through Haddi, an integrated grant programme providing monthly US\$ cash grants to over 95,000 vulnerable children and youth of all nationalities.
- ▶ UNICEF has supported the Government in building the foundations for an efficient management of water resources and is providing emergency support to ensure the provision of water services does not collapse.
- ▶ UNICEF has stepped up nutrition, mental health and protection support for the most vulnerable children.
- ▶ UNICEF is working with partners to support the COVID-19 vaccination campaign as well as the response to the pandemic. It has delivered critical awareness-raising messages, including in schools, and provided protective equipment.
- ▶ UNICEF responded swiftly to the Beirut explosions, distributing nutrition and hygiene supplies, delivering psychosocial support, providing cash grants, participating in the rehabilitation of health-care facilities, schools and water supply services, and supporting a youth-led community response.

[Click to learn more about UNICEF's work in Lebanon](#)





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