

PRESS RELEASE

Productive Sectors Development Essential for Achieving #TheLebanonWeWant

Beirut, Lebanon

Friday, 15 May 2020 (United Nations) – The Lebanese economy is suffering from the consequences of longstanding development challenges and multiples crises. Starting from the Syrian crisis in 2011, to the ongoing financial and economic crisis exacerbated further by the COVID-19 health emergency, these shocks are coming at a very high economic and social cost.

Productive sectors critical for Lebanon’s economic recovery and COVID-19 response

Productive sectors’ development will support early recovery and job creation while building resilience and shifting the country’s trajectory towards sustainable growth and inclusive development in the long term.

“Unemployment, inequality, poverty and domestic violence are rising, and risk reversing the progress made on Sustainable Development Goals in Lebanon. Productive Sectors development has been a long-standing priority for the UN in Lebanon and our commitment remains even higher today given their important role in leading the economic recovery and the overall COVID-19 response,” said Claudio Cordone, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator *ad interim* in Lebanon.

Urgent support to Lebanon’s productive sectors

While some essential economic sectors have remained functional and others are gradually reopening, ensuring health and safety of producers as well as consumers is an immediate priority.

To promote occupational safety and health, the UN has developed guidelines for the COVID-19 response and is building the capacity of the Ministry of Labor as well as employers’ and workers’ organizations to ensure safety and health at the workplace. The UN and the Ministry of Industry are also developing comprehensive and detailed safety guidelines for the manufacturing sector to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect workers and the public.

“The impact of COVID-19 on global value chains is so dramatic because the world is extremely interconnected,” said Bassel Al Khatib, Chief of the Arab Regional Division and Officer in Charge of the Lebanon field office at UNIDO. “Strengthening the industrial sector will be a key element to ensure the sustainability of critical supply chains in the country. As Lebanese businesses adjust to the new reality, there are important opportunities to strengthen local production by identifying changing demands at an early stage and applying new and innovative technologies to meet them.”

The UN is supporting SMEs in the agriculture, agro-food, carpentry and ICT sectors to continue operating during the pandemic restrictions, retain jobs and access local markets through web-based operations including e-commerce, social media and online advertising. The UN is also providing on-the-job training to 250 women to locally produce highly demanded medical gowns and PPEs.

As concerns regarding food security in Lebanon are already emerging, the UN and the Ministry of Agriculture are also supporting small-scale farmers to ensure local food production and food security.

“Resuming food production is important for Lebanon’s food security and rural livelihoods. Supporting farmers in need will ensure that they will not miss the current planting season and will be able to supply their communities and domestic markets with more affordable produce than imported food,” said Etienne Careme, FAO Liaison and Resilience Officer in Lebanon. “The disruption of some imported food value chains highlights the need to strengthen domestic food production and enhances its quality and safety in order for Lebanese farmers to have a greater share of the domestic food market as well as improved access to export markets,” he added.

The UN is also responding through cash-assistance that delivers at scale, short-term employment and cash injections into the local economy, as well as integrated agriculture value chain support to strengthen local food systems.

Economic resilience critical for the response

The UN will continue supporting the government’s development priorities including promoting access to finance, supporting high value-added sectors, including food systems, developing productive infrastructure and strengthening access to international markets.

The UN will also work with the Government of Lebanon to integrate development programming with social protection systems to provide a pathway to transition from emergency aid to development assistance.

Special attention will be given to vulnerable groups including women, youth, people with disability, and people working in the informal sector. Environmental sustainability, gender equality and decent work principles will also be at the core of the UN response.

A call for action

Along with the health and humanitarian response to COVID-19, supporting the Lebanese economy and its productive sectors is now more important and necessary than ever. No country, including Lebanon, has the financial resources, infrastructure and capacity to overcome these crises alone. This will require full scale solidarity and cooperation among all stakeholders, including the Government, donors, and the UN as well as the private sector and civil society. The UN urges collective action to support the Government’s development priorities for the productive sectors of the economy, namely industry and agriculture, as part of a comprehensive response to address the impact of COVID-19 and the economic crises.

“We must come together to develop, today, forward-thinking interventions that will lay the foundation for recovery and equitable development for a better tomorrow,” highlighted Cordone.
