

LEBANON

Explosion in Beirut

Crisis Impact Overview

- On 4 August a large explosion occurred in the port of Beirut. Pending investigation, the cause of the explosion has been attributed to a badly kept deposit of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate in one of the port warehouses (The Guardian 05/08/2020).
- The blast killed over 150 people and injured over 5,000. Search and rescue teams are still deployed as many are still missing (The Guardian 07/08/2020; OCHA 05/08/2020).
- Among the most affected neighbourhoods are Marfa, Gemmayzeh, Mar Mikhael, Ashrafieh and Central District. People have lost homes and businesses, including restaurants, bars, and hotels while already facing a deep economic crisis (OCHA 05/08/2020, BBC 06/08/2020, NYT 05/08/2020).
- Up to 300,000 people might have lost their homes. The majority seems to be housed with families, friends, and fellow citizens. Schools, hotels, and other public buildings have been offered as shelter (World Vision 08/2020; UNICEF 05/08/2020, NYT 05/08/2020, UNICEF 07/08/2020).
- No rapid needs assessment has yet been published, the number of people in need is unclear. Local NGOs have mobilised, but systematic governmental response seems to be lacking. International Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams and a UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team have been deployed.
- Coping capacities of population and infrastructures were already stretched due to the Syrian refugee crisis, an economic, fiscal, and financial crisis, and a recent increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Key priorities



Businesses and food provisions destroyed or damaged



Up to 300,000 people in need of shelter assistance



Hospitals and supplies damaged amid a COVID-19 outbreak

National response capacity

Lebanese Red Cross (assessments and response)
Syndicate of Engineers (assessments)
Civil Defence, High Relief Committee, Local NGOs and volunteers

International response capacity

UN (INSARAG, UNDAC, UN-HABITAT, OCHA...),
INGOs, EU Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM),
international medical and rescue teams

Anticipated scope and scale

The blast has caused damages as far as **20 km** from the port, destroying and damaging businesses, houses, hospitals, and schools. Up to **300,000 people** are estimated to have been made homeless (OCHA 05/08/2020). These figures **might grow** as evaluations of area safety are led by the government and humanitarian needs assessments will follow in the next few days. It is unclear how rapidly the displaced figure will decrease as **house repairs** might take time. The explosion is expected to cost Lebanon **USD billions** compounding its recession. Almost all materials need to be imported and their prices will probably remain prohibitive for many Lebanese (Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020 and 07/08/2020).

Humanitarian constraints



- Some humanitarians and their families are among the casualties and unable to respond (UNICEF 05/08/2020, discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020).
- Search and rescue operations are hindered by debris and lack of electricity at night (OCHA 05/08/2020, NYT 05/08/2020). Some areas are still closed off due to danger of collapsing buildings (Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020).
- Aid is being flown in. Sea traffic is redirected to Tripoli, which has a port smaller than Beirut in capacity (OCHA 05/08/2020). Redirection of sea traffic might take some time (ICRC 06/08/2020).

Sectoral needs



Shelter and NFIs

- Up to 300,000 people might be homeless (OCHA 05/08/2020). Most seem to have moved in with relatives, friends and volunteers (Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020; World Vision 08/2020).
- Schools, public buildings, churches, and hotels were opened as shelters. It is unclear how many people are actually hosted, especially in light of COVID-19 distancing measures (World Vision 08/2020; UNICEF 05/08/2020, NYT 05/08/2020, ACTAlliance 06/08/2020).
- In the short and long term, the demand for already expensive building and repair materials will spike (Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020).
- Refined petroleum is Lebanon's top import (OEC 2018). With the supply chain likely disrupted, pre-existing fuel shortages and power cuts are bound to last even longer (HRW 09/07/2020).



Food and livelihoods

- Around the port were essential grain storage facilities and mills, whose content is now lost. Reportedly the country is left with less than one month of grain provisions (UNICEF 05/08/2020, Al Arabiya 05/08/2020). Flour shortages can be expected as, even if food imports can be redirected via Tripoli port in a timely manner, milling capacity has been substantially reduced (Islamic Relief 07/08/2020).
- Imports, which cover about 85% of Lebanon's food needs, will be disrupted while the supply chain adapts to the loss of Beirut port: an increase in food prices is likely (WFP 06/08/2020).
- The food market of the Karantina neighbourhood was destroyed and the definitive closure of food shops for lack of funds and material for reconstruction cannot be excluded. Affordability of food remains a main issue for many in Lebanon (ACTED 07/08/2020, WFP 07/08/2020).
- Business owners who saw their activities damaged or destroyed, might not have funds to rebuild. This loss of livelihoods can push owners and employees into poverty (The Economist 05/08/2020).



Health

- WHO reports the closure of three, and heavy damages to two other hospitals in Beirut with an estimated 500 beds lost (WHO 06/08/2020). Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) were also heavily damaged (UNICEF 07/08/2020).
- Already struggling to treat COVID-19 patients, hospitals were overwhelmed with trauma patients on 4 August and the situation remained critical the next day. Pharmacies and Lebanese Red Cross stations are open for treatment of minor injuries (Middle East Eye 05/08/2020; Lebanese Red Cross 04/08/2020)
- Airborne toxic substances were reported after the explosion. The public was advised to wear masks and keep windows shut. Most airborne toxins will have disbursed by now (The Economist 05/08/2020, Science Media Centre 05/08/2020).
- Increased demand for medical treatment, combined with the loss of essential health equipment and medicines in the blast, is expected to result in a short-term shortage of vaccines, medical, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) supplies (IMC 05/08/2020, UNICEF 05/08/2020, CBS 06/08/2020). Tons of medical aid have been sent, but more might be needed (World Vision 06/08/2020; discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020).
- Journalistic reports underline widespread shock and trauma among the population, including children. An increase in needs for psychosocial support (PSS) and mental health services can be expected (IMC 05/08/2020, Save the Children 05/08/2020).



WASH

- Water services in the neighbourhoods closest to the explosion have been affected, including water tanks. Drinking water was also needed (ICRC 06/08/2020, Islamic Relief 05/08/2020, Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020, ACTAlliance 06/08/2020).
- It is unclear whether waste collection and processing facilities were damaged. Renewed disruptions in waste collection are likely, as they were already re-emerging before the blast (The National 16/07/2020).



Protection

- Children have been separated from families and need to be reunited with them. Their number is unclear (Save the Children 05/08/2020).
- The chaos following the explosion, loss of livelihoods in the service industry, and lack of social safety nets, may result in a rise in petty crime; lootings can be expected (The Economist 05/08/2020).



Education

- Schools were closed due to COVID-19 and summer break. Initial assessments report 34 schools as damaged (UNICEF 05/08/2020).
- If the number of homeless families housed in schools is substantial, the resumption of classes in September might be affected (World Vision 08/2020, discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020).

Aggravating factors

Socioeconomic crisis: Since October 2019, a wave of protests engulfed the capital and other cities of Lebanon in response to a severely deteriorating quality of life. The economic, financial and fiscal crisis led to the Lebanese pound losing over 80% of its value and the country falling into hyperinflation (The Conversation 06/08/2020, Reuters 23/07/2020). The price of a staple food basket more than doubled in the last six months and aid delivery programmes started including short-term food relief packages (WFP 06/08/2020, Islamic Relief 05/08/2020). Maternal and baby care items were difficult to purchase before the blast and now might be even harder to obtain because of import disruptions, shop closures and subsequent rising prices (Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020). With banks imposing strict limits on withdrawals and high prices of construction materials, even people who can afford the reconstruction of their houses might have to wait, especially if materials are not available on the market (NYT 05/08/2020, Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020). The unemployment rate skyrocketed due to the economic and COVID-19 crisis, further undermining livelihoods (CNBC 10/07/2020). Even before the blast, up to 45% of the country population was at risk of falling below the upper poverty line (World Bank 21/04/2020). The explosion has fuelled discontent with the authorities. Protests have resumed since the blast and have met with a heavy police response while many Lebanese are calling for aid not to be directed via the government (Al Jazeera 07/08/2020).

Low governmental response capacities: The government might have difficulties in supporting consistent emergency and reconstruction efforts after the blast, as it lacks financial resources and defaulted on loan repayments in March. Subsequent negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for help have made no progress (The Economist 05/08/2020). Mistrust in governmental response capacities is widespread among the population (CBC 06/08/2020, Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020).

COVID-19 outbreak: Several hospitals in Beirut had Intensive Care Units (ICUs) already near capacity due to COVID-19 (OCHA 05/08/2020). In the chaos after the explosion social distancing and other measures are harder to undertake. It remains to be seen if the current rise in confirmed cases (over 140 per day in August) will continue or accelerate. Health personnel have been overstretched and the limited number of health facilities still functioning are under strain (MOPH 07/08/2020, OCHA 05/08/2020). Amid the economic crisis underfunded hospitals had to lay off staff or close wards, further reducing their capacity (AP 22/07/2020).

Dependence on imports: Imports cover 85% of Lebanon's food needs and local production of goods is limited. Due to currency depreciation, imports got more expensive since 2019. A further spike in prices cannot be excluded due to supply chain disruptions after the explosion. As the main hub for maritime commerce is no longer operational, Tripoli and other ports need to guarantee import flow and distribution (WFP 06/08/2020, The Conversation 06/08/2020, OCHA 05/08/2020).

Lacking infrastructures: While power outages of three to six hours are common, they went up to 20 hours a day in July due to fuel shortages. Private and public consumers have to pay for generators out of their own pocket. Telecommunication networks are disrupted (Discussions with operational partners 06/08/2020, The Economist 05/08/2020, TSF 07/08/2020).

Pre-existing displacement: The country has the highest rate of refugees per capita, hosting 1.5 million Syrians, 20,000 refugees from other countries and 180,000 Palestine refugees (UNICEF 05/08/2020, UNHCR 2020). As a result, infrastructure has been overstretched in the past years. Vulnerable households in the host and refugee communities were already struggling with COVID-19 and the socioeconomic crisis. Some of the neighbourhoods hit by the blast hosted refugee populations (UNHCR 07/08/2020).

Neighbourhoods most affected by the explosion on 4 August

Source: BBC 06/08/2020



BBC

Satellite images of the port of Beirut: before and after 4 August

Source: UNITAR 07/08/2020

BEFORE



WorldView02 / 31 July 2020

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AFTER



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