

CRISIS OVERVIEW

Since 2019, Lebanese people have been living under multiple crises, which have had particular impacts on children (FP 26/12/2021; NYT 14/10/2021; WB 01/12/2020; Save the Children 07/12/2021).

A series of nationwide protests resulting from financial mismanagement and new taxes in the context of economic stagnation and a high unemployment rate initially triggered the crisis (WB 01/12/2020; Reuters 23/01/2022; NYT 14/10/2021). The protests continued throughout 2020–2021 as the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the economic situation (WB 01/12/2020; HRW accessed 10/05/2022). The Beirut blast on 4 August 2020 also caused property damage amounting to around USD 15 billion, further aggravating the economic crisis (WB 01/12/2020; FP 26/12/2021).

The Government's inability to provide adequate services and the coping mechanisms families are employing to deal with the crisis are affecting children's wellbeing (OCHA 05/08/2021). The impact of the economic crisis has decreased the Government's ability to provide basic services, including safe drinking water, education, and health services, to Lebanese children (BBC 05/08/2020; NYT 04/08/2021; Al-Fanar Media 29/01/2022). As at September 2021, nearly 75% of Lebanese people were living in poverty. 82% of the population lived in multidimensional poverty in terms of income and various aspects of living conditions (ESCWA 03/09/2021). To cope with economic hardships, Lebanese parents are resorting to desperate measures that affect their children, including cutting back on health and education spending, eating less and poorer-quality food, sending children to work in hazardous work environments, and marrying off young girls (Save the Children 29/07/2021; UNICEF 01/07/2021). These negative coping mechanisms compromise children's food security levels, education, and physical and psychological health (Save the Children 04/08/2021; UNICEF 01/07/2021; Abouzeid et al. 16/08/2021). Such mechanisms are likely to have long-lasting effects on their wellbeing.

KEY MESSAGES

1. More than 50% of school-age Lebanese children have dropped out for the current school year. They are not developing the skills they need to make a living and take part in Lebanon economic recovery.
2. Child labour and early marriage are increasing as families try to cope with a lack of food, price increases, and inflation. Such coping mechanisms expose children to different forms of violence, exploitation and abuse, and physical and mental health issues.
3. The deterioration of the economic situation and growing insecurity expose children to uncertainty and violence that are likely to affect their mental health in the context of a collapsing healthcare system.

Aim

This report aims to increase awareness of the scale and severity of the economic crisis in Lebanon over the past three years. It describes how the crisis disproportionately affects children and is likely to have short- and long-term consequences on their future.

Methodology

The analysis is based on interviews with key informants from UN agencies and NGOs, as well as a review of publicly available Arabic and English secondary data sources.

Limitations

- The report focuses on the impact of the economic crisis on Lebanese children ages 0–17,¹ who make up 20.9% of the population (1.4 million).² It does not address the disproportionate effect of the crisis on the Palestinian, Syrian, and Iraqi refugee children hosted in Lebanon.
- The report does not exhaust all impacts of the economic crisis and how they affect Lebanese children.

1 There is no clear legal definition of 'children' in Lebanese law, but it defines 'juveniles' as those under the age of 18 (Shafi 11/2008).

2 Population figures in Lebanon are based on estimations, as no census studies have been conducted in the country since 1939 because of the sensitivity around sectarianism and population demographics (Abouzeid et al. 16/08/2021).



KEY FIGURES

+500,000

CHILDREN WERE
OUT OF SCHOOL

9%

OF FAMILIES SENT
THEIR CHILDREN
TO WORK

34%

OF CHILDREN
WERE UNABLE TO
ACCESS PRIMARY
HEALTHCARE

53%

OF FAMILIES
HAD DIFFICULTIES
PROVIDING FOOD FOR
THEIR CHILDREN

45%

OF FAMILIES
REPORTED NOT
HAVING ENOUGH
DRINKING WATER

CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION (APRIL 2022)

Between 2019–2021, the Lebanese gross domestic product contracted by 58.1%, the largest among 193 countries (WB 25/01/2021). Since 2019, the Lebanese pound has lost more than 90% of its value against the US dollar. It remains highly unstable because of the economic crisis (Al Jazeera 06/01/2022; NYT 04/08/2021 and 14/10/2021; EIU 09/11/2021; WB 01/12/2020; Knoema accessed 18/11/2021). This economic crisis is particularly affecting Lebanese workers paid in pound, who constitute around 95% of workers in the country (Independent Arabia 01/03/2021; WB 31/03/2021).

The depreciation of the Lebanese pound has led to inflation (WB 25/01/2022). In March 2022, inflation was 215% over the same month in 2021 (Take-profit.org accessed 30/03/2022). Unemployment rates went up from 18.5% in 2019 to 36.9% in 2020 and then reached over 40% by the end of 2021 (An-Nahar 01/01/2022; Al-Akhbar 26/04/2021; Al Modon 24/09/2021). Before 2019, the minimum wage stood at LBP 675,000 (USD 450) a month. As at 18 May 2022, it was worth less than USD 22 (Lira Rate accessed 18/05/2022; France 24 21/07/2021; Arab News 16/01/2022).

In August 2021, around 85% of people found it difficult to get by on their income (Gallup 02/12/2021). Living expenses exponentially increased, especially food and fuel. As at February 2022, the year-on-year inflation in food prices was nearly 400% (WFP accessed 30/03/2022). Throughout 2021, petrol prices in pound increased by 1,000%, and cooking gas prices increased by 955% (Caritas Australia 24/12/2021). In 2020, the Lebanese Government started ending subsidies on essential goods, including fuel and medicine, leading to Lebanese families struggling with inflation (CNN 21/10/2021; Youm7 25/10/2021; An-Nahar 20/11/2021).

The economic crisis is increasing operational costs, affecting the provision of public services (including electricity, water supply, sanitation, health, and education). The Government is struggling to meet the increasing demand for public services, like health and education, as people are unable to afford private substitutes (WB 31/03/2021; WHO 19/09/2021; KII 26/01/2022; KII 25/01/2022 a).

IMPACT OF THE CRISIS ON CHILDREN

The economic crisis in Lebanon is affecting most aspects of children's lives. These aspects include education, child labour, healthcare, food security, water and sanitation, and their general safety in light of the deteriorating security levels in the country. If not mitigated, the crisis will have lasting impacts on them, affecting their future livelihoods and physical and psychological wellbeing.

Education

As at September 2021, over 500,000 Lebanese children were out of school (UNICEF 28/01/2022; Lebanon Education Sector 05/11/2021).

School enrollment dropped to 43% for the current academic year (UNICEF 28/01/2022; Lebanon Education Sector 05/11/2021). Around 35% (over 400,000) of school-age children were out of school in the 2020–2021 academic year (Lebanon Education Sector 05/11/2021). Protests, the pandemic, and the economic crisis have disrupted school education, meaning the last time many Lebanese children last attended school was in October 2019 (Save the Children 01/04/2021). Although there are no tuition fees for public education in Lebanon, the financial situation of many families prevents them from sending their children to school. Transportation costs are the main barrier to accessing education (KII 25/01/2022 a; AVSI 13/10/2021; Lebanon Education Sector 13/10/2021).

Schools' readiness for the 2021–2022 academic year was limited (HRW 11/10/2021; KII 25/01/2022 a). Challenges included inadequate funding to supply the lack of stationery, computer equipment, and hygiene materials. Schools have also had intermittent access to electricity (Save the Children 24/01/2022; HRW 11/10/2021; Alhurra 13/08/2021; KII 25/01/2022 a). Some of the 700 schools in mountainous areas do not have the budget for heating during winter (Save the Children 24/01/2022; Alhurra 09/09/2021; Tarbaweya 08/09/2021; ICGHE accessed 19/05/2022; KII 25/01/2022 a).

During the first semester of the current school year, Lebanese children only attended public schools for 21–25 days (much lower than the 75–85 days in a regular semester). The recurrent teacher strikes over pay, healthcare coverage, and transportation allowance repeatedly disrupted the school year. Lebanese teachers receive their salaries in pound. With the depreciation of the currency, the salary of Lebanese teachers has gone down to USD 1–2 an hour (Save the Children 24/01/2022 and 01/04/2021; KII 25/01/2022 a; AA 26/09/2021). Transportation costs also make it difficult for teachers to go to their place of work (Sky News 11/09/2021; Save the Children 01/04/2021).

The public education sector is struggling to accommodate the influx of students from private schools because of a lack of space and shortage of teachers (Al Jazeera 26/07/2021). The quality of public sector education pre-crisis was already low owing to poor infrastructure and undertrained teachers (Save the Children 01/04/2021; ALEF 07/2020). As the economic crisis deepens, families who could no longer afford private schools are transferring their children to public schools (France 24 31/08/2021). Prior to the economic crisis (between the 2014–2015 and 2017–2018 academic years), around 30% of Lebanese students attended public schools. This percentage went up to 36.5% during the 2020–2021 academic year, with more

than 45,000 students transferring to public schools since the beginning of the economic crisis (CRDP accessed 23/11/2021). The numbers have likely increased as private-to-public transfers have continued increasing during the 2021–2022 academic year (KII 25/01/2022 a). Schools in Lebanon are experiencing staff shortages as teachers leave their posts for better opportunities abroad (Sky News 11/09/2021; AP 30/09/2021; Al Jazeera 26/07/2021). As a result, the teacher-to-student ratio has increased from 1:7.7 in 2017–2018 to 1:9.7 in 2020–2021 (CRDP accessed 23/11/2021).

Lebanese children have lost nearly 3.9 years of basic school education (out of 10.2 average years of basic school education) (WB 09/2020). COVID-19 containment measures beginning in mid-March 2020 closed schools down, leading Lebanese schools to shift to online education (EDC 26/05/2020). By September 2021, public schools had adopted a hybrid model (four days in school education and one online) (HRW 11/10/2021). With the economic crisis limiting access to electricity, the internet, and electronic devices, Lebanese teachers and families have been unable to afford the tools needed to properly implement online education, affecting the quality of education children are receiving (Open Democracy 27/04/2020; Save the Children 01/04/2021).

Expected short-term impacts

- The increased number of students per class as a result of the influx of students from private to public schools leads to higher failure rates (AVSI 13/10/2021). As a result, children are also more likely to drop out of school (Salyers 2018).
- Children who drop out of school spend more time on the streets, increasing their risk of acquiring unhealthy behaviours (including substance abuse) (Makhoul et al. 10/2003).
- Children who drop out of school often have fewer friends and are more likely to suffer from social isolation (Makhoul et al. 10/2003).

Expected medium-to-long-term impacts

- The gap in access to quality education is likely to perpetuate socioeconomic inequalities in the country, including differences in educational attainment levels (HRW 11/10/2021; AR 20/10/2021). This situation restricts the social mobility of children with lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Driouchi and Gamar 24/09/2016).
- The inability to access basic education potentially hinders children from developing the necessary cognitive and non-cognitive skills (WB 09/2020). Such an outcome affects their sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, as well as their future productivity and wellbeing (Pritchett 29/06/2004; UNESCO 2012).

Child labour

In 2021, around 9% of Lebanese families sent their children to work (UNICEF 01/07/2021).

Because of the economic crisis, the number of children who have to work for money has significantly increased (Al Jazeera 03/12/2021; Save the Children 31/07/2021). Lebanese families are increasingly depending on income generated from child labour (IRC 26/03/2021). Children as young as six years of age are working on the streets, in agricultural fields (including potato and tobacco farms), and on construction sites (UNHCR 20/01/2022; Save the Children 13/07/2021; UNICEF 01/07/2021; FAO/UNICEF 24/07/2019).

The lack of safety measures in these sites exposes children to physical and psychological harm (Al-Quds Al-Arabi 20/03/2021; Save the Children 31/08/2021). Children are working in hazardous work environments that lack proper protection measures, such as when using unsafe machinery and tools (KII 25/01/2022 a; Save the Children 07/12/2021 and 13/07/2021; IRC 26/03/2021).

There is an increasing number of children subjected to sexual exploitation (including trafficking and prostitution), which is among the worst forms of child labour (KII 25/01/2022 a; UNHCR 10/01/2022). Under Lebanese law, children victims of trafficking can be detained for actions they committed while subject to trafficking. On the other hand, the law does not criminalise certain exploitation acts, such as the use of children in pornography (Save the Children 07/12/2021; DOL accessed 05/12/2021). Gaps in information and the absence of a legal framework hinder the understanding of the full extent of the issue and the means to address it (DOL accessed 05/12/2021).

The Ministry of Labour does not have the resources to conduct inspections despite the increasing number of children engaged in child labour (DOL accessed 05/12/2021; Al Jazeera 03/12/2021). For the most part, the informal and unregulated businesses that employ these children are hard to inspect as they do not register their activities (Al Jazeera 03/12/2021; GDRC accessed 13/03/2022). The Lebanese labour code does not apply to domestic work and non-industrial, non-trade agriculture forms of labour, meaning there is no regulation of the minimum work age in these work environments (KII 25/01/2022 a; DOL accessed 05/12/2021).

Expected short-term impacts

- Being forced to work is one of the main reasons children drop out of school (AVSI 13/10/2021; IRC 26/03/2021).
- The time children spend on the streets directly increases their risk of facing violence and their exposure to sexual abuse (UNICEF 17/12/2021; IRC 26/03/2021; FAO/ILO 2017). Such forms of abuse are associated with a wide range of mental issues and developmental delays (UNICEF 04/01/2021).
- Children whose families depend on their labour for income have to deal with the psychological burden of being responsible for preventing the homelessness and hunger of their families (DOL accessed 05/12/2021).
- Lebanese children involved in child labour work for longer hours (up to 12 hours a day), which exceed the maximum legal number of working hours (8.7 hours a day for adults) (KII 25/01/2022 a; Al Jazeera 03/12/2021). Children working longer hours are likely to experience social isolation and depression (FAO/ILO 2017).
- Lebanese children engaged in labour are at a higher risk of work-related injuries and health issues given hazardous work environments and a lack of protective measures (FAO/ILO 2017; Nuwayhid et al. 18/01/2005; KII 25/01/2022 a; IRC 26/03/2021).
- Victims of child trafficking and sexual exploitation are at risk of a range of physical health issues (including sexually transmitted diseases) and psychological and behavioural issues (including shame, post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD, depression, and substance abuse) (Rafferty 31/03/2008).
- A lack of family support and protection hinders the recovery and reintegration of child trafficking victims into their societies. These children are also at risk of being unable to return home or becoming subject to emotional abuse by their own families upon returning (NEXUS Institute 2021).
- Food-insecure children engaged in labour have a higher risk of malnutrition and anaemia. They are also more likely to sustain injuries (IRC 26/03/2021).

Expected medium-to-long-term impacts

- Children engaged in labour are unlikely to return to school, affecting their future socioeconomic status. They are likely to remain poor, which perpetuates a cycle of poverty (IRC 26/03/2021). In Lebanon, an early entry into the labour market is associated with a 13–20% decrease in lifelong income levels (Raseef22 06/10/2021).
- A child's exposure to pesticides and other chemicals without proper protection increases their risk of developing health issues (FAO/ILO 2017).

- Child labour and trafficking expose these children to physical violence and abuse (UNICEF 17/12/2021; IRC 26/03/2021; FAO/ILO 2017; Rafferty 31/03/2008). As a result, they are more likely to themselves become violent as adults or continue to be victims of violence (UNICEF accessed 04/01/2022). Long-term consequences include developmental delays, cognitive impairment, eating and sleeping disorders, teenage pregnancies, the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, and injuries to the central nervous system (UN 2006).

Health

In October 2021, around 34% of children (up from 28% in April) who needed primary healthcare were unable to access it (UNICEF 23/11/2021).

The Lebanese economic crisis is affecting the functionality of hospitals and health facilities. There is a lack of intensive care units, dialysis units, and cold chain requirements, compromising sterilisation and diagnostic procedures. A lack of personnel and shortage of medical supply, fuel, electricity, and water are causing Lebanese hospitals to ration and prioritise the provision of health services (MSF 01/09/2021; OCHA 05/08/2021). Because of financial difficulties, people are avoiding and delaying seeking medical help, which contributes to worsening medical conditions (Al-Akhbar 21/10/2021).

Since 2019, nearly 40% of doctors and 30% of registered nurses have left Lebanon permanently or temporarily because of the economic crisis. The resulting staff shortages have led to hospitals closing down wards, affecting their ability to provide health services (TWP 12/11/2021; Sky News 30/11/2021). The increase in demand for public health services is amplifying the issue, as more Lebanese people who primarily accessed healthcare through the private sector but could no longer afford the costs are seeking access to public health services (OCHA 05/08/2021; Agulhas 05/05/2020). The public health sector lacks the capacity to deal with the increased demand (MoPH 05/2018; AR 15/10/2020; Al Jazeera 23/08/2021 and 13/07/2021).

Fuel shortages are causing Lebanese hospitals to function at 50% of their capacity (UN 17/09/2021; An-Nahar 15/11/2021). Hospitals continue to experience power outages as a consequence of government electricity rationing, which limits electricity availability to two to three hours a day. Because of fuel shortages, hospitals are unable to operate backup generators (MSF 01/09/2021; AA 03/10/2021). This persistent issue threatens the provision of health services in the country and is likely to continue to do so as fuel suppliers struggle to provide the foreign currency needed to maintain the chain (UN 12/11/2021; An-Nahar 10/12/2021; Sputnik News 10/12/2021).

Fuel and electricity shortages affect shops' ability to store and preserve food. As a consequence, cases of food poisoning in the country have increased (KII 26/01/2022; France 24 27/03/2022; An-Nahar 14/06/2021; Beirut Observer 22/08/2021). The lax enforcement of food safety measures enables merchants to sell inadequately stored foods, posing additional health risks for the population (961 02/03/2021).

Lebanese families struggle to provide sick children with needed medication. The prices of diabetes drugs have increased more than fourfold (a month's worth of insulin supply costs around 80% of the minimum wage) (Al-Eqtisadiyah 26/11/2021; Al-Akhbar 16/12/2021). Patients are coping by reducing drug doses or stopping the intake of drugs altogether without consulting their doctors (DW 05/12/2021; Al Jazeera 04/06/2021; Independent Arabia 18/11/2021). Families are also struggling to afford other medical necessities for their children, including antiseptic and fever-reducing drugs (the prices of fever-reducing drugs have increased tenfold) (DW 05/12/2021; Al Jazeera 04/06/2021; Independent Arabia 18/11/2021; KII 26/01/2022). A decrease in hoarding is improving drug availability, as the Government has partially stopped subsidising drugs. As availability improves, however, price hikes are rendering some drugs unaffordable.

The instability and uncertainty Lebanese children experience are also affecting their mental health (UNICEF 14/12/2020). The number of Lebanese children suffering from mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD, is rising as the country goes through multiple crises (KII 26/01/2022; KII 25/01/2022 a). Lebanese families struggling with the economic crisis seek to lower their expenses by cutting back on health spending, affecting their ability to seek mental health support for their children (Save the Children 29/07/2021; KII 26/01/2022).

Mental health services are difficult to obtain in Lebanon because of the loss of specialised staff in public health facilities and the high prices of private health services (KII 26/01/2022; MSF 14/10/2021; DW 29/12/2021). Medication for mental health issues, including depression and schizophrenia, has tripled in prices since the Government removed subsidies in November 2021 (DW 29/12/2021). Other medications, such as for bipolar patients, are not available (DW 29/12/2021; Amnesty International 16/12/2021).

Children are not receiving sufficient medical care when needed because of the continued rationing in the provision of health services in the public sector as a result of the economic crisis (KII 26/01/2022). The quality of health services children receive in Lebanon is deteriorating, as a significant number of pediatric specialists have left the country. The tendency of families to delay seeking medical services because of financial difficulties is also affecting children's ability to receive timely medical attention (Al-Akhbar 21/10/2021).

In November 2021, the prices of infant formula increased by 50–70%, and the prices of diapers significantly increased after the Government partially removed subsidies (NNA 20/11/2021; Independent Arabia 18/11/2021; KII 26/01/2022).

The unavailability of vaccines hinders or delays children's immunisation. Even if vaccine availability were to improve, the prices of vaccines have increased four to five times since the beginning of the economic crisis, especially with the removal of government subsidies, rendering vaccines unaffordable to most Lebanese families (Independent Arabia 18/11/2021; KII 26/01/2022).

Expected short-term impacts

- With the deterioration of health services, hospitals and healthcare facilities are only accepting patients in need of emergency care and delaying routine operations (Hamadeh et al. 07/04/2021). The situation compromises children's timely and appropriate access to health services and increases their risk of morbidity and mortality (UNICEF 23/11/2021; Al Jazeera 13/07/2021; Al-Akhbar 21/10/2021; Rutherford et al. 09/04/2010; de Silva et al. 10/09/2001).
- To cut back on health spending, Lebanese people are delaying seeking medical attention. Children are at risk of not getting needed medical interventions until conditions become critical (Hamadeh et al. 07/04/2021).
- As a result of the deterioration of mental health services in the country, Lebanese children suffering from stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues are unlikely to receive the support they need (KII 26/01/2022; MSF 14/10/2021; DW 29/12/2021).

Expected medium-to-long-term impacts

- Because of the unavailability of vaccination, Lebanese children are at risk of lacking immunisation (Independent Arabia 18/11/2021). Adults not immunised as children have an increased risk of morbidity or mortality from preventable infectious diseases, although catch-up immunisation is possible even among adults (Tan and Nolan 2000).
- Immunisation weakness increases the risk of the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases in Lebanon, potentially expanding to other countries in the region (UN 17/09/2021).

Food security

In October 2021, around 53% of Lebanese families (up from 37% in April) had difficulties providing food for their children (UNICEF 17/12/2021 and 01/07/2021).

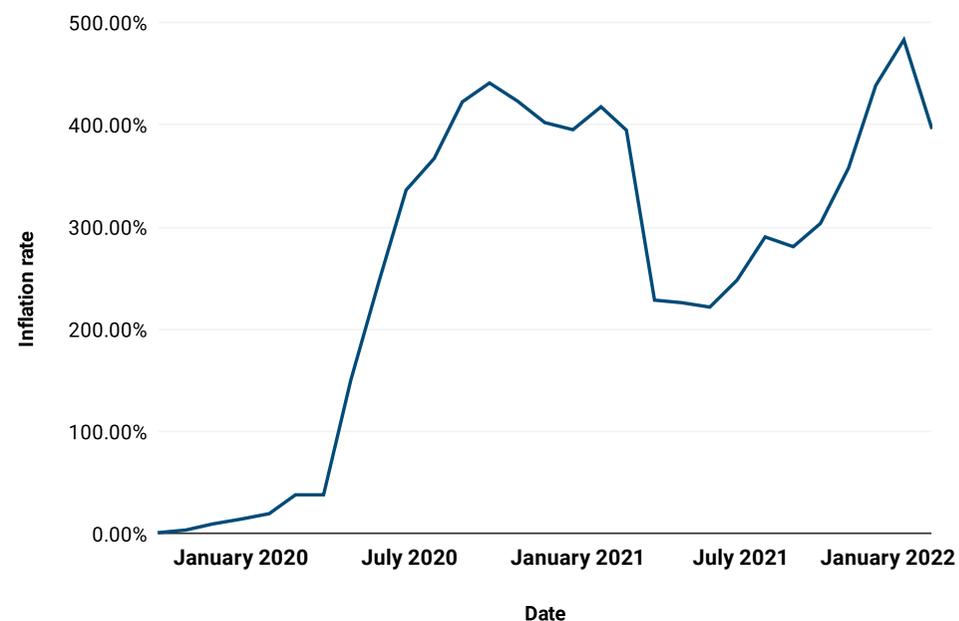
Higher food prices are causing Lebanese children to skip meals as their families struggle to afford food (Save the Children 26/01/2022). Lebanese families cope by lowering portion sizes and eating cheaper and less nutritious food (KII 26/01/2022; Save the Children 26/01/2022). Food insecurity is most prevalent in Akkar, Bekaa, and North governorates, where more than 25% of people have insufficient food consumption in terms of quality and frequency (WFP accessed 16/12/2021).

The shortage of flour is affecting the availability of bread, which is the only subsidised stable food item in the country. This shortage limits the production of bakeries, particularly in Nabatieh and South governorates (France 24 13/08/2021; Inbaa 18/12/2021). Bread makes up around 35% of the caloric intake of Lebanese families (HRW 21/03/2022). As the economic crisis worsens, the demand for bread, which is also among the cheapest stable food items in Lebanon, increases. Because the flour and fuel subsidies they receive from the Government are insufficient to cover the increasing demand, bakeries are forced to ration bread production (An-Nahar 20/07/2021; AA 07/09/2021; France 24 13/08/2021). In March 2022, the Lebanese Government announced flour rationing amid the growing uncertainty surrounding the war in Ukraine, where over 65% of the country's wheat supply comes from (CARE 11/03/2022; AA 06/03/2022; The Irish Times 08/03/2022). The rationing of flour has led to a 20% increase in bread prices and the further rationing of bread production (CARE 11/03/2022). The economic crisis and the Beirut blast further reduced Lebanese wheat storage capacity, as the blast destroyed the country's main grain silos and the economic crisis reduced the country's capacity to import wheat (The Irish Times 08/03/2022). As at March 2022, Lebanon only had one month's worth of wheat reserves left (CARE 11/03/2022; TWP 11/03/2022).

Food prices increased by more than 480% in January 2022 compared to the same time in 2021 (CAS 01/2022). Food access has become more difficult for Lebanese people because of food price increases (Alhurra 02/12/2021). The depreciation of the Lebanese pound has fueled the inflation in food prices, with the year-on-year food price inflation exceeding 480% by the end of January 2022 (WFP 03/2021; WFP accessed 10/03/2022; Alhurra 02/12/2021). The substantial increase in the prices of essential food items has made them unaffordable. Lebanon also heavily relies on imported foods, with about 80% of the country's food needs covered by imports (Berytech 29/06/2021; ESCWA 05/2016). This reliance has worsened the impact of the

global increase in food prices and restricted people's purchasing power (Al Jazeera 08/07/2021; Al-Araby 04/10/2021). The lack of consumer protection and competition laws, which allow cartel behaviour,³ aggravate the issue (KII 26/01/2022; Triangle 12/05/2020; Carnegie MEC 13/11/2020; ACCC accessed 21/04/2022).

Food inflation rate in Lebanon since the beginning of the economic crisis



Sources: WFP (accessed 11/05/2022); FX Empire (accessed 11/05/2022)

Lebanese families vulnerable to food insecurity use early marriage as a coping mechanism to reduce financial burdens, including food expenditure. Even though early marriage cases are underreported, information on gender-based violence suggests that the number of Lebanese families using early marriage as a coping mechanism has increased as the financial difficulties they experience deepen (IRC 26/03/2021; Anera 27/09/2021). Early marriage has been affecting Lebanese girls prior to the economic crisis. The lack of a legal framework regulating early marriages allows the issue to persist (Humanium 19/10/2021).

³ Cartel behaviour is when businesses collude with competitors to improve their profit through several tactics, including controlling the output or limiting the amount of goods and services available to consumers and increasing prices (ACCC accessed 21/04/2022).



Expected short-term impacts

- Food-based coping mechanisms are likely to cause micronutritional deficiencies associated with fatigue and reduced intellectual capacity. They are also likely to increase the risk of death from severe infections among children (IRC 26/03/2021; WHO accessed 03/01/2021; Jomaa et al. 12/06/2017).
- Food-insecure children are more likely to drop out of school or not enrol at all as they have to work and help support their families (IRC 26/03/2021).
- To cope, Lebanese families vulnerable to food insecurity risk reducing essential expenditure on health and education, likely affecting children's physical, cognitive, and psychological wellbeing (Jomaa et al. 04/12/2018; Aqeel 05/2014).
- Children from food-insecure households are likely to experience psychological distress related to a lack of food choices and not having enough to eat (Leung et al. 17/01/2020; Aqeel 05/2014).
- Early marriage increases the likelihood of early pregnancy. Young girls often lack the knowledge and status to negotiate contraceptive practices, increasing the probability of early pregnancy. Early childbirth often causes emotional withdrawal and social isolation for young mothers. Adolescent pregnancy complications are also a leading cause of death among girls ages 15–19 (KII 25/01/2022 a; The Borgen Project 28/02/2021; WHO 06/2018; Kotoh et al. 05/05/2022).
- Food insecurity disrupts household dynamics, particularly child-parent relationships, manifesting in parents' irritability, anger, and unavailability because of the increased time required for food procurement. It also leads to conversation gaps as parents are unable to face their perceived incapacity to adequately feed children (Gee and Asim 12/2018; Masa et al., 23/07/2020).

Expected medium-to-long-term impacts

- Some Lebanese families make changes to their dietary options given the inadequacy of food – a coping mechanism linked to malnutrition among children (KII 26/01/2022; IRC 26/03/2021). Childhood undernutrition has long-lasting effects on their health; some effects include insulin resistance in adulthood, hypertension, and a reduced capacity for manual work (Martins et al. 26/05/2011). The coping mechanism is also linked to delayed development (Worku et al. 09/02/2018).
- Early marriage is associated with children dropping out of school, a lack of employment and future career prospects contributing to a cycle of poverty, gender inequality, and protection concerns (The Borgen Project 28/02/2021; PRB 22/04/2010).

WASH

In October 2021, 45% of Lebanese families (up from 20% in April) reported not having enough drinking water in the last 30 days (UNICEF 23/11/2021).

The Lebanese Government is struggling to keep water pumping and treatment stations operating as costs increase (Al-Araby 20/12/2021). Fuel and power shortages are affecting the Government's ability to operate water stations, threatening access to clean water for people who cannot afford alternative options (Refugees International 02/12/2021; Yasour 15/12/2021). Water trucking is 12 times more expensive than the public water supply system. People who cannot afford this option are deprived of fresh water and depend on less reliable service providers (OCHA 05/08/2021).

As sanitary pads become unaffordable, Lebanese girls resort to using alternative, less hygienic options that can cause serious health complications (Daraj 14/07/2021; L'Orient Today 12/03/2021). The Lebanese economic crisis has also affected menstrual hygiene. Because of increased prices, over 76% of Lebanese women reported having difficulties accessing menstrual products. The prices of sanitary pads have increased by 320%. Alternatives to pads include cloth, newspapers, and paper tissues, and some reuse or use pads for a longer time (Plan International 28/07/2021; Al Arabiya News 07/07/2021). Some girls on their period also skip school when they cannot afford menstrual hygiene products (Plan International 28/07/2021).

Burning solid waste has a number of serious health implications on children, including respiratory issues, particularly among children with chronic diseases (HRW 01/12/2017). People living in nearby residential areas resort to burning waste, which can cause health issues for people with pre-existing respiratory difficulties. The act also has environmental implications, including releasing toxins into the air and leaving ashes that contain heavy metals and toxins (KII 25/01/2022 b; Al-Araby 05/12/2021; Asharq Al-Awsat 03/12/2021; ClientEarth 09/03/2021; Gochfeld 10/1995). Improper solid waste management is a nationwide issue. Solid waste management is lacking most in Nabatieh and Akkar, where around 70% and 54%, respectively, of solid waste does not go through proper processing (UNHCR 06/12/2021). The accumulation of solid waste provides a breeding environment for insects and releases strong odours that affect people in nearby residential areas (AA 18/11/2021; KII 25/01/2022 b). Contractors responsible for solid waste management, whom the Government pays in Lebanese pound, are unable to maintain operations as operational costs increase (KII 25/01/2022 b; Al-Araby 05/12/2021; Asharq Al-Awsat 03/12/2021).

Expected short-term impacts

- The lack of access to safe water and sanitation increases children's risk of contracting water- and vector-borne diseases and the likelihood of COVID-19 outbreaks (KII 25/01/2022 b; UNICEF 13/08/2021; OCHA 05/08/2021).
- The lack of menstrual hygiene management is affecting girls' access to education. Teenage girls who cannot afford sanitary pads are skipping school during their menstrual period (KII 25/01/2022 b; Daraj 14/07/2021; Plan International 28/07/2021).
- Having to rely on water trucking as a source of water is expensive and likely to reduce expenditure on children's health and education (OCHA 05/08/2021; WHO 21/03/2022; KII 25/01/2022 b).
- The smoke released from burning solid waste exposes children to multiple health risks, including respiratory diseases and cancer. Burning solid waste near schools forces them to close because of heavy smoke, disrupting children's education (HRW 01/12/2017).

Expected medium-to-long-term impacts

- More individuals resort to the consumption of non-potable water or open defecation, increasing public health risks. These risks disproportionately affect girls, who would face challenges related to menstrual hygiene management (OCHA 05/08/2021).
- Children's exposure to toxins released from burning solid waste can affect their growth and development at varying degrees depending on the frequency of exposure (HRW 01/12/2017; Faustman et al. 01/03/2000).

Security

There is an increased risk of children becoming victims of ransom kidnapping (UNICEF 17/12/2021). The economic crisis has led to a deterioration of security and a significant increase in crime rates (Independent Arabia 18/12/2021; Al Jazeera 23/11/2021; AA 17/11/2021). Between January–November 2021, thefts increased by over 137% compared to the same period in 2020 (The Monthly 11/12/2021). Between January–October 2021, murder crimes increased by more than 100% compared to the same period in 2019 (The Monthly 15/11/2021). Other crimes, including ransom kidnapping and blackmailing, are also on the rise (Nabd 05/03/2022; Independent Arabia 18/12/2021). It remains difficult to gauge the actual size of the problem given that such crimes are often unreported (Nabd 05/03/2022).

Rising tensions in the country have increased the burden on security forces. Since 2020, they have had to deal with the Beirut port explosion, the mid-2021 wildfires, monitor protests, riots, smuggling, and fuel hoarding. They have also had to confront armed drug traffickers and contain clashes between political factions (ICG 28/10/2021).

Children as young as 15 years of age are carrying weapons and engaging in local security structures created to protect their communities as a result of rising crime levels and the erosion of trust in security services (ICG 28/10/2021; KII 25/01/2022 a; COAR 14/01/2022). Information on the topic is scarce because of its sensitive nature (KII 25/01/2022 a).

Children are witnessing violence between different armed groups, which is affecting their mental wellbeing. For instance, in October 2021, they have had to experience the clashes in Tayouneh neighbourhood, Beirut city, where armed groups have increased their activities (Save the Children 14/10/2021; The Irish Times 14/10/2021; ICG 27/01/2022). These groups also exploit poverty and food insecurity to recruit children, who end up participating in riots and carrying weapons during protests (KII 25/01/2022 a).

Between January–December 2020, the UN verified that armed groups in Lebanon recruited nine children and maimed and killed six others. Lebanese children associated with armed groups face legal repercussions, like being arrested and prosecuted under military jurisdiction, with no distinction between minors and adults (UNSC 06/05/2021).

The economic crisis has made the Lebanese security forces unable to procure or maintain military equipment. Fuel prices present logistical difficulties that restrict their movement. Security personnel are also facing cuts on some of their basic employment benefits, including health insurance and transportation (ICG 28/10/2021; Reuters 10/03/2021; Alhurra 17/05/2021). The 90% devaluation of the salaries of security forces has led to more personnel requesting furlough, seeking early retirement, or moonlighting in other jobs (Atalayar 01/02/2022; COAR 14/01/2022; ICG 28/10/2021). The situation is leaving the Lebanese security forces drained and security personnel unable to fulfil their duties (ICG 28/10/2021; Reuters 10/03/2021).

Expected short-term impacts

- The deterioration in the security situation and higher crime rates lead to increased rates of ransom kidnappings (Al-Ain News 17/12/2021; An-Nahar 02/02/2022). Kidnapping is a traumatic experience for a child, and children who become victims can exhibit symptoms of PTSD (Dyregrov and Yule 2006).
- Children are being armed and are participating in policing activities to protect their communities, increasing their risk of getting involved in acts of violence, being physically injured, and being psychologically affected (KII 25/01/2022 a; COAR 14/01/2022; KII 25/01/2022 a). They also have to suffer legal repercussions that do not distinguish between minors and adults (UNSC 06/05/2021).
- Children engaged with armed groups experience various mental health issues, including PTSD and severe personality disorders (Schauer and Elbert 18/03/2010).

Expected medium-to-long-term impacts

- Children involved with armed groups are deprived of a normal and healthy development. Their involvement exposes them to severe violence, impairing their integration into society as fully functioning members and leading to social isolation (Schauer and Elbert 18/03/2010).

INFORMATION GAPS

As the report uses secondary information sources, there is a lack of information regarding the following:

- Lebanese children's involvement in the worst forms of labour
- child abandonment and documentation issues (UNICEF 17/12/2021)
- the nature and level of children's involvement in armed groups and community protection armed bands
- the prevalence of ransom kidnapping and blackmailing crimes and the number of affected children
- cases of early marriage.