

# FUTURE ON HOLD

Lebanon's worsening crisis  
is breaking children's spirits

June 2023



**"I JUST WANT MY CHILDREN  
TO LIVE THEIR CHILDHOOD,  
TO PLAY AND LEARN."**

- *Lebanese father of three*

As Lebanon's crisis keeps escalating for the fourth consecutive year, families are barely able to meet their most basic needs, are cutting down ever more on essential expenses and, in too many cases, are even sending their children out to work to help make ends meet.

UNICEF's latest rapid assessment of children's lives paints a dramatic picture of the desperate measures families are taking to cope with Lebanon's destructive socio-economic crisis.<sup>1</sup>



**"The compounding crises facing the children of Lebanon are creating an unbearable situation - breaking their spirits, damaging their mental health and threatening to wipe out their hope for a better future."**

*Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF Representative in Lebanon.*



# CAN'T AFFORD THE ESSENTIALS

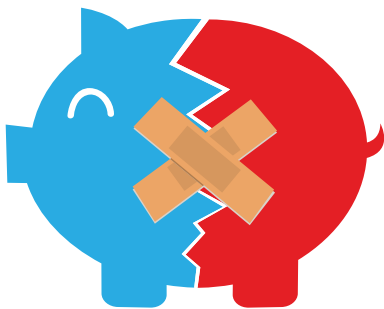
# 86%

do not have enough money to buy essentials



COMPARED TO  
76 PER CENT A YEAR AGO

Almost 9 in 10 households (86 per cent) said they now do not have enough money to buy essentials, compared to 76 per cent a year ago. Thousands of caregivers have resorted to desperate measures to cope with the dire situation. The survey shows that:



- A staggering two in five households (38 per cent) across the country are forced to sell family possessions in order to survive, up from one in five (28 per cent) last year.
- More than 1 in 10 families are now forced to send children out to work as a way of coping. More than one in four Syrian refugee families (28 per cent) sent children out to work as a way of coping, up from one in five (21 per cent) last year.
- Three quarters (75 per cent) of households reduced spending on health treatment, as compared to 60 per cent in June 2022.
- Fifteen per cent of households stopped their children's education, up from 10 per cent a year ago, and 52 per cent reduced spending on education, compared to 38 per cent a year ago. Three in 10 Syrian households (30 per cent) said at least one of their children does not attend school, mostly because of transportation costs (23 per cent), cost of educational materials (13 per cent) or because the school would not allow them to attend (11 per cent).

1 UNICEF rapid assessments are carried out twice a year in Lebanon. The latest was conducted in April 2023 among 2,090 households with at least one child (1,083 Lebanese, 518 Syrian, 489 Palestinian.) Study limitations include the fact that it was conducted by landline telephone, potentially missing vulnerable families who have no access to a phone and others who do not use landlines. Given high refusal rates, snowball sampling was used. Because snowballing is a non-probability sampling technique, it introduces biases and increases the margin of error. To mitigate this, weights were applied to adjust the distribution among governorates, so the estimates remain indicative of the situation.

Despite the desperate coping measures, many families cannot afford the quantity and variety of food they need. One third (30 per cent) of households said at least one of their children went to bed hungry, compared to 23 per cent a year ago.

**“MY CHILD NEEDS TO GET AN EDUCATION TO BE ABLE TO HAVE HOPE AND OF COURSE THE BASIC NEEDS TO LIVE IN DIGNITY.”**

- *Syrian mother of one*



In addition, many families cannot afford the expenses involved in getting health treatment, such as the cost of care or transportation to health facilities. As a result, over half the children (56 per cent) who needed healthcare received the healthcare they required.

Significantly, the crisis is also driving up “period poverty”, with just over half the respondents (51 per cent) saying women and girls in the household do not have enough female hygiene items, such as sanitary pads, and almost all women (97 per cent) saying such items are now too expensive.

**“In these difficult times, we are changing our eating habits and buying the cheapest. There are many items we can’t afford buying and this is affecting our children’s well-being.” - *Lebanese mother of one.***

# MOUNTING TENSIONS AT HOME



# 27%

**EXPECT THEIR LIVES TO BE  
WORSE IN ONE YEAR**

The multi-layered crisis is severely affecting every aspect of families' lives. Parents struggle to put food on the table amid widespread unemployment and rising prices – food price inflation, for example was at 350 per cent in April.<sup>2</sup> Many caregivers admit the desperate situation causes them to suffer persistent stress, resulting in feelings of anger towards their children.

More than half (53 per cent) of the respondents said they were less tolerant towards their children's behaviour and treated them more harshly than before. As a result, 6 in 10 (59 per cent) felt they wanted to shout at their children and 2 in 10 (21 per cent) felt they wanted to hit them. Almost 6 in 10 caregivers (57 per cent) said they were unhappy and 27 per cent said they expected their lives to be even worse in one year.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank Food Security Update





# A CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

# 66%

SAID THEIR CHILDREN SEEMED  
**ANXIOUS, NERVOUS OR WORRIED**



The rising tensions, coupled with the deprivations caused by an economic crisis that shows no sign of being resolved, are taking a severe toll on children's mental health.

Almost 7 in 10 caregivers (66 per cent) said their children seemed anxious, nervous or worried, and almost half (47 per cent) said their children were very sad or feeling depressed every week. More than 6 in 10 (62 per cent) said their children's well-being worsened over the past year.

An earlier UNICEF study showed that the crisis is causing a breakdown in family relationships, as children lose trust in their parents, for being unable to meet their basic needs, and parents feel their children no longer respect them, for failing in their roles as caregivers and providers.



# WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The sheer magnitude of the crisis continues to require swift, determined action by Lebanon's government to safeguard children and ensure they receive the services, support and protection they need so they can develop to their full potential. Failure to ensure that families have access to social assistance and affordable healthcare, nutrition, protection and education, is having dramatic, irreversible long-term impacts on children's lives, and risks reversing hard-won human capital gains made over the past 30 years. With 700,000<sup>3</sup> children out of school, education should be a priority area for government action, to ensure the most vulnerable children have access to inclusive and quality education. This will require predictable multi-year investment from the government, coupled with reforms and national policies to improve the efficiency, equity and effectiveness of spending on education sector.

3 UNICEF estimates based on administrative formal enrolment data shared by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and LCRP Population package estimate

**“WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME IS FOR MY CHILDREN TO HAVE SOCIAL PROTECTION AND THEIR BASIC RIGHTS LIKE A PROPER NUTRITION AND AN EDUCATION.”**

- *Lebanese father of three*

It is also critical to address gaps in the national social protection system – such as the absence of a National Child Grant – which make it even more difficult for families to cope with the crisis. At present, provision of social protection is marked by high levels of exclusion, narrow eligibility criteria and low coverage.

In this regard, UNICEF welcomes the government's recent production of a National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS), Lebanon's first-ever vision for developing a national social protection system. The strategy is a key step towards establishing a new social contract and providing a unified vision for the provision of social protection for every citizen as an established right. Crucially, it lays out a clear way forward for all actors to support the development of Lebanon's social assistance system – including the ongoing scale-up of programmes that cover families living in extreme poverty as well as the rapid introduction of social grants for people who face additional vulnerabilities, such as disability or raising children.



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## **“I NEED SUPPORT FOR MY CHILDREN, MY HUSBAND IS SICK”**

*- Palestinian mother of three, who depends on charity to survive.*

While international partners grant financial support for social assistance programmes, it is critical that the Lebanese government show strong commitment and make domestic financing available to introduce these social grants and ensure their sustainability. As tax revenues begin to rise again, Lebanon will have the potential ability to fund a package of social assistance programmes to be rolled out gradually over five years, starting from as low as 0.26 per cent of national GDP in 2024 up to 1.62 per cent in 2027.<sup>4</sup> This would bring Lebanon in line with spending levels in other countries across the region.

Completing Lebanon’s first-ever National Social Protection Strategy was a tremendous milestone; having a government-led, time-bound and costed action plan to implement the strategy is now crucial to support Lebanon’s recovery from the economic crisis.

4 Forthcoming: ILO, UNICEF, World Bank (2023); Scaling Up Social Assistance and System Building in Lebanon, Policy Options and Costing for a National Social Assistance System



**“It is clear that the situation continues to worsen for children across the country. With no end in sight to the catastrophic crisis, it is all the more urgent to take concerted action to protect children’s lives and futures. Increasing investment in education, health and social protection will help mitigate the impact of the crisis, ensure the well-being and survival of future generations and contribute to economic recovery.”**

*Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF Representative in Lebanon.*





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## UNICEF IN ACTION

From the very start of the socio-economic crisis, UNICEF has refocused its programme in Lebanon to support the most vulnerable children – regardless of nationality. We have played an important role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in responding to the cholera outbreak, and remain at the forefront of the response to the economic meltdown.

### **Our key 2022-June 2023 results include:**

- Supporting the government of Lebanon to launch the country's first-ever National Disability Allowance, together with the ILO and civil society groups.
- Supporting the procurement of 97 tons of essential medications and medical supplies for primary healthcare centres.
- Supporting improved access to vaccination services to reach 240,000 children through mobile vaccination units.
- Equipping 150 primary healthcare centres with solar equipment and power supply, to reduce costs and ensure immunization and essential services are not interrupted.
- Providing micronutrient supplements to 58,000 children under age 5, screening 400,000 children and subsidizing treatment to 3,200 acutely malnourished children.

- Supporting water services with supplies, consumables and repairs, making it possible to sustain the equivalent of one to two hours a day of clean drinking water supply to 3.4 million people.
- Rehabilitating 11 wastewater treatment plants across Lebanon.
- Reaching more than 63,300 children and caregivers with child protection, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services, and almost 25,700 women and girls with gender-based violence (GBV) services.
- Partnering with the Ministry of Information and local media to protect children and adolescents from media risks and to advocate for their rights.
- Rolling out the child protection policy in education as a catalyst for violence-free schools. This calls for addressing situations of violence through early identification, and a functioning referral system, while protecting the privacy of the student and their parents.
- Engaging more than 134 religious leaders to strengthen their role in promoting and protecting children's rights under the framework of UNICEF's social and behaviour change strategy QUDWA (role model).
- Supporting more than 400,000 vulnerable children with access to formal education by covering their school enrolment fees.
- Training 25,000 teachers in learning recovery, addressing learning losses caused by the closure of schools during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.
- Providing Cash for Education assistance for more than 73,500 children in formal education including children with disabilities.
- Rehabilitating 120 public schools and launching site work for the construction of four new school complexes.



United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
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