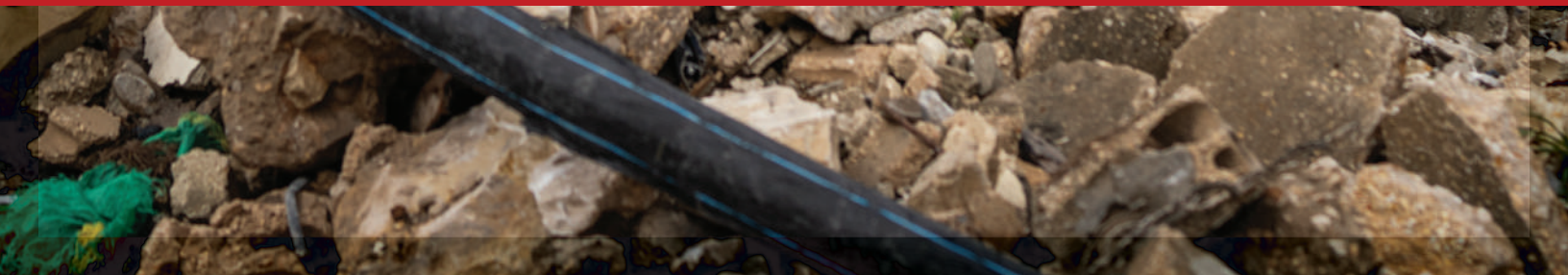




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# Shattered Childhoods

The catastrophic toll  
of war on children  
in Lebanon





Children in Lebanon are struggling to recover from a devastating war. In the aftermath of months of bombardments, they are facing prolonged and intensified vulnerability due to physical injuries, emotional shocks, loss of learning and inadequate nutrition, which are all threatening their health and development.

Wave after wave of deadly air strikes upended children's lives, forced families to flee their homes, and destroyed infrastructure and services that children depend on. Just about every child in Lebanon has been affected in some way.

Hostilities between Israel and Lebanon escalated sharply in September 2024 after 11 months of cross-border strikes. The war officially ended two months later, with more than 310 children killed and over 1,500 wounded, out of a total of over 4,000 fatalities and 16,590 injuries<sup>1</sup>. Many children suffered traumatic brain injuries and shrapnel wounds, while some lost limbs. An estimated 400,000 children were forced to flee their communities<sup>2</sup>.

The humanitarian needs remain staggering. Even before the conflict, many families were struggling to feed their children as an unrelenting economic crisis and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic plunged countless households into poverty. Now, the devastation has worsened, leaving children to cope with profound loss. Many have lost one or both parents, beloved siblings, or close friends. Entire communities have been shattered, homes reduced to rubble, and essential infrastructure—such as water pumping stations, hospitals, and schools—damaged or destroyed.



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A new UNICEF Child-focused Rapid Assessment (CfRA) exposes the profound toll of war on children, revealing the collapse of their support systems and the escalating risks of exploitation and deep emotional trauma. With schools damaged or destroyed, their education—and future—hangs in the balance, while the loss of safe water and healthcare endangers their very survival. Beyond the immediate devastation, the war's lasting consequences will reshape generations to come.

This report's data was collected in early January, just as several governments announced further aid cuts—meaning the reality for many children is likely even more dire than these figures suggest. Between January and April 2025, over 500,000 children and their families risk losing critical subsistence cash support from UN agencies. These cuts will strip the most vulnerable of their last lifeline, leaving them unable to afford even the most basic necessities and pushing them deeper into desperation at a time of unprecedented crisis.

***“The survey clearly shows the shocking toll the war exacted on children, affecting their health, their education and their futures. Many have suffered deep emotional scars that could take years to heal.”***

Akhil Iyer, UNICEF Representative (a.i.) in Lebanon.





## CHILDREN STRUGGLING TO COPE WITH THE HORRORS THEY WITNESSED

Seventy-two per cent of caregivers said their children were anxious or nervous during the war, and 62 per cent said they were depressed or sad, according to UNICEF's latest CfRA. This represents an increase from 59 per cent and 45 per cent respectively in the 2023 CfRA.<sup>3</sup>

In the worst affected areas, children learned that the sound of planes overhead often meant death and destruction would follow. Over 14,000 air strikes and shelling incidents were reported.<sup>4</sup>

Many children witnessed loved ones being killed or injured in the bombardment, saw their homes reduced to rubble, and were forced to flee to overcrowded emergency shelters.

In areas most affected by the war, children have shown emotional, behavioural and physical signs of distress, including anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, and headaches.

While eight in 10 survey respondents said they saw some improvement in their children's emotional status after the ceasefire, those who endured prolonged periods of traumatic stress could face lifelong health and psychological consequences that affect their normal development.



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***“Our house turned into ashes.”***

***“These are children. they should not be exposed to destruction and killing, they should not fear rockets falling over their heads.”***

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Zeinab, mother of seven children

***“During the war, we could hear the bombings all around us. My uncle was killed, and we lost our home... it hurts to see our village destroyed but we will rebuild it even better than before!”***

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Ali, 13 years old

## CHILDREN ARE NOT GETTING THE NUTRITION THEY NEED TO GROW AND THRIVE

UNICEF's assessment also revealed an alarming picture of children's nutrition situation, particularly in the Baalbeck-Hermel and Bekaa governorates. Unlike people in the South and Nabatieh Governorates, who fled their homes earlier in the conflict, families in Baalbeck-Hermel and Bekaa were still in their communities when the heaviest air bombardment began in September 2024.

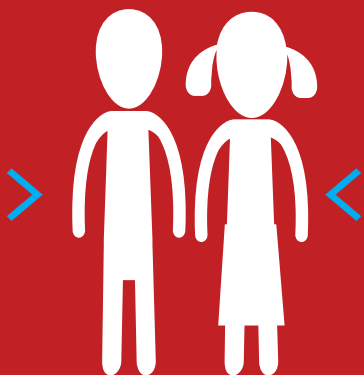
In Baalbeck-Hermel, more than half (51 per cent) of children under two years of age are now experiencing severe food poverty,<sup>5</sup> up from 46 per cent in 2023.<sup>6</sup> The situation in Bekaa is equally distressing, with 45 per cent of children under two suffering from extreme food deprivation, a shocking increase from 28 per cent the previous year.<sup>7</sup>

The crisis extends beyond infants. Nearly half of children (49 per cent) under age 18 in Bekaa and just over one-third (34 per cent) in Baalbeck-Hermel had only one meal on the day before the survey. Nationwide, the rate was 30 per cent.

The consequences of food poverty are devastating. Insufficient meal frequency and inadequate nutrition not only stunt children's physical growth but also impair their cognitive development, placing them at risk of suffering from life-threatening malnutrition.<sup>8</sup>

Proper nutrition is vital in the first two years of life, a period when up to 75 per cent of every meal fuels a baby's developing brain. It helps children build a powerful defence against malnutrition, protects babies against many common illnesses, and paves the way for healthy growth and lifelong learning.<sup>9</sup> In the first six months, mothers should provide only breast milk. Yet, the survey revealed that 39 per cent of newborns had not received any breastmilk the day before the data collection – a critical gap in early nourishment.

As children grow, they need a diverse diet that includes at least five of eight key food groups.<sup>10</sup> The findings, however, are deeply concerning: an overwhelming 99 per cent of children under 18 in Bekaa and 80 per cent in Baalbeck-Hermel consumed fewer than five food types. Nationwide, the rate was a staggering 69 per cent.



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## CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN THE CROSSFIRE

The conflict had a devastating impact on education, compounding years of setbacks caused by economic collapse, teacher strikes, and prolonged school closures during COVID-19, severely disrupting the learning of hundreds of thousands of children.

Some schools were destroyed or severely damaged, and hundreds more became shelters for some of the 1.3 million people forced to flee their homes during the conflict.<sup>11</sup> The consequences are heartbreaking.

Even after the ceasefire, school attendance remains very low. One in four children (25 per cent) was still out of school at the time of the survey. Before the ceasefire, an alarming 65 per cent of children had been unable to attend school. In Baalbeck-Hermel and Bekaa, the crisis is even more severe, with 40 per cent and 38 per cent of children respectively still out of school when the survey was conducted.

After the ceasefire, the biggest barrier to education is financial. Two-thirds of families whose children remain out of school cited the cost of school fees, transportation, and school materials. This is a huge increase from 36 per cent in 2023.<sup>12</sup> The fear of the future is widespread: 85 per cent of caregivers are extremely worried about whether their children will be able to continue their education.

***“It was so hard for me to see the school like this. When my friends first told me about the destruction, I couldn’t believe it—until I saw it with my own eyes. It made me really sad.”***

Nour, 11 years old

## A CRISIS IMPACTING EVERY ASPECT OF CHILDREN'S LIVES

Almost every aspect of children's lives has been affected by the war, as families find it ever harder to survive.



**45%**  
of households were forced to cut spending on health



**15%**  
of households withdrew their children from school entirely, while 30% reduced expenses on education so they could afford basic necessities



**31%**  
of households did not have enough drinking water in the month before the survey



**27%**  
of households could not access adequate baby hygiene items, including diapers.



**33%**  
of households could not access life-saving medications for their children



**28%**  
of children did not have enough clothes to keep warm in winter



**22%**  
of households had no heating source for the winter





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## THE HARD ROAD AHEAD

*"The findings leave no doubt—Lebanon's children need urgent support to heal, rebuild their lives, and survive the lasting impacts of this crisis. This data provides undeniable evidence of the critical need to act now. The country must receive the help it needs to restore vital infrastructure and services, ensuring that children have a future to look forward to. At this fragile and defining moment in Lebanon's history, we cannot afford to wait."*

Akhil Iyer, UNICEF Representative (a.i.) in Lebanon.

Lebanon faces immense challenges as it struggles to recover from the devastation of war and years of political and economic turmoil. In February, **the World Bank put the cost of physical damages and economic losses from the conflict alone at \$14.1 billion**, with the housing sector being the most affected (66% of total damages)<sup>13</sup>

Tens of thousands of families who were displaced during the conflict are returning to find their communities have suffered major destruction, damage, and disruption.



The damage caused to civilian infrastructure and services, includes:



• **the destruction of at least 14 schools, with over 100 more heavily damaged;**<sup>14</sup>



• **the disruption of operations in 40 hospitals;**<sup>15</sup>



• **the closure of 100 primary health centres and dispensaries;**<sup>16</sup>



• **damage to at least 45 water networks.**<sup>17</sup>



• **the destruction of over 268 hectares of crops and 446 tonnes of produce**<sup>18</sup>

Damage to health and water facilities and services has left children even more vulnerable to health issues, including waterborne diseases such as cholera, hepatitis, and diarrhoea – at a time when vaccination rates have plummeted due to the multiple crises.<sup>19</sup>

Almost eight in 10 respondents (79 per cent) said they needed urgent support, mainly for health services (47 per cent), education (46 per cent) and nutrition (43 per cent), as well as psychosocial support (38 per cent).

Recovery efforts must put children first. They need immediate access to clean water, food, education services, and medical care, along with specialized support to begin healing from the horrors they have witnessed.





## UNICEF IN ACTION

UNICEF supported children throughout the conflict, providing critical services to more than 557,000 people and delivering relief items and emergency services to 695 shelters.

Since the 27 November 2024 ceasefire, UNICEF has been assisting displaced families as they return to their homes, while continuing to support those who are still in shelters. This includes protecting children and helping them heal from the traumatic conflict, facilitating access to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and other specialized services.

UNICEF is working to pave the way for national recovery, helping ensure that:

- ***all children can go to school;***
- ***all children have access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), with temporary water systems in place where needed;***
- ***primary healthcare is restored and reaches those in need;***
- ***social protection systems are strengthened to reach vulnerable families and children with disabilities.***

UNICEF's priorities also include working with national and local authorities to prepare for future shocks in case of a renewed escalation of the conflict.

Given the complexity of the crisis and its long-term impact on children, there is an urgent need for sustained support at this critical moment for Lebanon. Now more than ever, UNICEF calls on the international community to support the children of Lebanon and contribute to the 2025 appeal of US\$658.2 million to deliver lifesaving assistance to 2.4 million people across the country.



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