

## Input for Lebanon visit

### Background

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor is a Geneva-based non-profit, non-governmental organization with regional offices, experts and representatives in Europe and the Middle East. The Euro-Med Monitor's work not only documents human rights violations but also provides aid other human rights organizations to achieve the desired impact and change.

### Introduction

Since 2019, Lebanon has been experiencing successive economic crises that have significantly exacerbated during 2020 and 2021 and directly affected the economic, social, and cultural rights of the Lebanese. The purchasing power declined, and prices rose dramatically as a result of the depreciation of the local currency to unprecedented levels. This caused a shortage of goods and basic services and a significant increase in poverty rates in the country.

The economic crises in Lebanon have directly affected the citizens, who are now struggling to secure their daily living. According to United Nations estimates, the poverty rate has reached about 74%<sup>1</sup>. This means that almost three quarters of the population are facing challenges in providing basic commodities, including bread. Similarly, this affected their ability to obtain health care, electricity, and fuel which are barely available in the country.

### The political system

The severe political and administrative crisis in Lebanon has played a key role in deepening the various crises. All partisan parties share responsibility for the political stalemate over the past two years, including the failure to form a government and the consequent freezing of important files, such as the negotiations with IMF that have stopped in July 2020. This caused a profound impact on the continuation of the economic collapse in the country.

In addition, Lebanon ranks 149<sup>th</sup> out of 180 economies in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index<sup>2</sup>. The rampant corruption in ministries and public administrations in Lebanon, especially regarding the appropriation of public money expenditures, increases the deterioration of government services that benefit the most affected groups in Lebanon.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unescwa.org/news/escwa-warns-three-quarters-lebanon%E2%80%99s-residents-plunge-poverty>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/lbn>

On September 20, the Lebanese Parliament granted confidence to a new government headed by Najib Mikati after more than a year of government vacuum. However, the government still faces major challenges, on top of which is containing the collapse in all sectors and restructuring the banking sector. Therefore, it is not expected that the government will be able to take measures that would alleviate the mounting poverty crisis in the country.

## Food

The escalating poverty rates in Lebanon have caused a significant deterioration in the food security of the Lebanese. A recent study indicated that about 53% of Lebanese families lack food security, 9 out of every 16 families eat less than two meals a day, and 70% of these nine families give up a basic meal every day to save as long as possible.<sup>3</sup>

A UNICEF report issued in June 2021 indicates that about 77% of Lebanese families lack enough food or money to buy it. This percentage rises to 99% among Syrian refugee families in Lebanon. At the same time, 60% of families have to buy food by accumulating unpaid bills or borrowing to meet their needs of food and water, and a large proportion of these families are subsequently unable to pay their debts due to the bad economic conditions<sup>4</sup>.

According to a Lebanon Crisis Observatory report, 17 basic commodities, including vegetables, fruits, grains, meat, oils, and dairy products, recorded a significant increase in their prices, some of which reached 350% between December 2020 and April 2021. This high inflation in food prices led to the deterioration of the exchange rate of the Lebanese pound, which lost 100% of its value in less than two years<sup>5</sup>.

This year alone, the price of bread increased eight times, as the price of less than one kilogram jumped from 2,500 Lebanese pounds (\$1.65) to 4,500 Lebanese pounds (\$3), leaving many Lebanese with a daily challenge trying to provide bread for their families<sup>6</sup>.

In light of the increase in inflation, the decline in purchasing power, and the high rates of poverty, the Lebanese living below the poverty line have become unable to buy fuel, not only because of its severe scarcity in the market but also because of the unprecedented doubling of its prices, as the minimum wage set at 675,000 pounds is enough to buy fuel 80 liters of gasoline only<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/16/8753/pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/lebanon-escalating-crisis-puts-children-risk-majority-families-cannot-afford-meet>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/CrisisObservatory/posts/124044166446013>

<sup>6</sup> <https://euromedmonitor.org/uploads/reports/LebanonReportEN.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/17/lebanon-government-hikes-petrol-prices-again-to-tackle-shortages>

## Electricity

Lebanon is also suffering from a major electricity crisis. The hours of power outages in some areas reach 22 hours per day after the two largest power stations in Lebanon stopped working due to the lack of fuel. However, the impact of the electricity crisis varies depending on the citizen's income level and living standard. People with high or middle incomes can pay for private generators to obtain about 12 hours of additional power supply a day in return for exorbitant subscription fees, making it a luxury that low-income people cannot afford.

The electricity shortage for some patients with low income represents a serious dilemma. Euro-Med Monitor recorded several cases in which asthma patients failed to operate their oxygen devices at home due to power outages, and they had to go to public facilities where electricity is available.

## Water

With regard to water, there is a direct relationship between the electricity crisis and the water crisis. The greater the electricity deficit, the greater the lack of ability to operate wells and water stations, and consequently, the hours of water cuts increase, and the crisis deepens significantly. Like other crises, the worst affected are the poor and low-income. A recent report by UNICEF revealed that about 4 million Lebanese - most of them children and vulnerable families - are threatened with a complete loss of potable water supplies during the coming period<sup>8</sup>.

## Health sector

The health sector has been greatly affected by the economic crisis in Lebanon in terms of the availability of medicines and medical supplies needed for surgeries and other medical necessities. This directly affected the provision of health services to the Lebanese, especially the poor and low-income groups who rely almost entirely on government health services. These groups' right to health becomes threatened, particularly those with chronic diseases and those who need to undergo medical examinations and surgeries.

Euro-Med Monitor conducted field interviews with Lebanese suffering chronic diseases and others in need of surgery. They spoke of the difficult economic conditions and the decline in their purchasing power, in addition to the scarcity of medicines in the market. They said that they are now living a daily challenge of securing the price of their medicines. The hospitals' suspension of surgical operations, except for emergencies, has exacerbated the suffering of individuals among the poor, who suffer from health problems that require surgical

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/lebanon-danger-losing-critical-access-water>

interventions, as they must wait for months to perform them in government hospitals because they do not have enough money to perform them at their own expense<sup>9</sup>.

## **Labor**

The successive crises in Lebanon have greatly affected the job opportunities in the country. The unemployment rate reached about 40%<sup>10</sup>, especially after the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, and a large number of employees and workers lost their jobs as a result of the closure procedures to join the poverty lists, and thus find it difficult to provide the basics of life.

## **Social security**

According to a joint report of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and UNICEF, the social security system in Lebanon suffers major gaps in legal and effective coverage and a chronic lack of funding even before the outbreak of the current crisis in 2019. The report indicated that the institutional structure of the current social security system in Lebanon lacks solid foundations and includes a set of political, legislative, and institutional loopholes, leaving a large segment of the population without any support<sup>11</sup>.

As a result of the complexity of the system, a large number of people who work in the private sector, or those who do not fall within the poverty classification, are denied access to any form of social protection.

The authorities in Lebanon rely on a national program that is aimed at reducing poverty as the main social assistance program. These programs currently provide a set of basic social services and in-kind support to about 43,000 poor Lebanese, equivalent to 1% of the total population. These services include exemption from payments for public health services and registration fees in public schools, as well as providing electronic cards to purchase food for the poorest families benefiting from the program<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, Lebanon needs a multi-tiered social security system based on a permanent social protection floor to ensure that all Lebanese have equitable access to social protection.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://euromedmonitor.org/uploads/reports/LebanonReportEN.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.news.cn/english/2021-09/06/c\\_1310171659.htm](http://www.news.cn/english/2021-09/06/c_1310171659.htm)

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_791113.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_791113.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_765091.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_765091.pdf)

## Banking system

Lebanese banks played a major role in the economic crisis that the country is witnessing. They prevented depositors from withdrawing their dollar savings due to the collapse of the exchange rate of the Lebanese pound against the dollar. This created a real problem for thousands of families by withholding their main source of spending. According to the data of the Lazard financial consultancy and asset management company, the banking sector in Lebanon has witnessed a state of bankruptcy despite the Central Bank's refusal to acknowledge this, in light of losses estimated at \$40 billion, which was confirmed by a recently issued specialized study, which concluded that the banking system in Lebanon has completely collapsed, and the state is suffering from bankruptcy in light of the large foreign debts<sup>13</sup>.

## Coronavirus

The widespread outbreak of the Coronavirus in Lebanon has contributed to deepening the economic crisis and significantly increasing poverty and unemployment rates. According to a UNICEF report, Lebanon has been affected more than other countries by the pandemic due to Lebanon's labor market instability and the fact that the overwhelming majority of businesses are small enterprises operating in the informal economy. The country also relies heavily on the service sector and has high levels of informal employment, which has suffered from high rates of job loss.

An assessment – based on a random sample – conducted by the ILO last year shows that about half of the companies included in the sample, temporarily suspended their operations due to the pandemic and the associated closure measures<sup>14</sup>, which means that the employees of these companies lost their jobs and the possibility of them joining the lists of poverty and unemployment.

*Euro-Med Monitor is working on the ground in Lebanon, and it is pleased that the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier de Schutter, will meet with Euro-Med Monitor's representative in Lebanon, Tarek Hajjar, and it is possible to organize joint field visits and conduct interviews that may be useful for the visit. If you wish, you can kindly contact the email address [geneva@euromedmonitor.org](mailto:geneva@euromedmonitor.org) to provide you with Hajjar's contact information.*

*P.S: We have no problem with this being published the website of the Special Rapporteur.*

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/BBL%20-%20Report%20-%202021%20-%20FINAL%20.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/ar/media/5616/file>