



BEIRUT CITY PROFILE 2021

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

UN-Habitat mandate

UN-Habitat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities, and adequate housing for all, and is the lead agency within the United Nations system for coordinating activities in the field of human settlements. It is mandated through the Habitat Agenda¹ to take the lead in disaster mitigation, and post-crisis rehabilitation capabilities in human settlements.

UN-Habitat's global responsibilities in emergency, humanitarian and post-crisis response are to support national and decentralized governments, and civil society in strengthening their capacity for managing human-made and natural disasters affecting human settlements. Experience has shown that the potential for development gain is high in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, and this is a key principle underlying UN-Habitat's efforts to deploy at the earliest opportunity following a disaster. UN-Habitat's added value is that it is the United Nations agency specialized in working in cities and human settlements.

Since 2006, the agency has been present in Lebanon, first involved in recovery and reconstruction efforts in South Lebanon, Beirut, and Northern Lebanon (particularly in the Nahr el Bared Camp crisis response in 2007), and in efforts to improve the living conditions in the 43 Palestinian out-of-camp concentrations. Since 2013, UN-Habitat has been involved in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis, and since 4 August 2020 to the Beirut blast.

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¹ United Nations, "United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II): The Habitat Agenda," 1996.

Urban profiles:

Shared understanding to inform urban recovery efforts at scale

The Beirut City Profile (BCP) has been developed to provide a cross-sectoral and spatial analysis to inform the ongoing efforts to respond to the compounding shocks that has impacted the Lebanese capital the recent years. UN-Habitat has over the years built a robust methodology to conduct urban analysis at the neighbourhood and city levels, as well as review of policies and legislations at the national levels to provide diagnostics of how slow and rapid onset shocks manifests in cities. Urban profiling has been core to the agency's contribution in the Middle East and North Africa region, where cities have been particularly affected by crises. With a growing trend of humanitarian crises affecting cities, urban profiling has emerged as a critical tool to form a shared understanding of needs, system gaps, and opportunities to inform response efforts. The urban profiling has taken shape as part of the agency and partners' Urban Recovery methodology, emphasising multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder, multi-scalar and phased approaches that aims to strengthen the capacities of local authorities to prepare and respond

to crises. Acknowledging the existing systems and know-how already in place in cities faced by crises, the urban recovery programmes seek to leverage and build on these to set a transformative path going forward.

In Lebanon, UN-Habitat has published the Tripoli City Profile (2016) and Tyre City Profile (2017), a number of neighbourhood profiles and a database on neighbourhood data in partnership with UNICEF.² The BCP makes use of the methodology developed for the former city profiles, covering the core thematic areas part of UN-Habitat's Urban Recovery approach, and aligning with the pillars of the Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) of the United Nations, European Union and World Bank. The report uses existing available information on structural challenges and the effects of overlapping crises to provide a diagnosis of key factors relevant to the response efforts. The report also seeks to shed light on potential threats to further socioeconomic deterioration and increased tension.

² <https://lebanonportal.unhabitat.org/neighbourhood-profiles/>



Executive summary

Compounding shocks

Beirut City in a state of crisis

The massive destruction and human suffering caused by the blast that struck Beirut on 4 August 2020 will have lasting impacts on Lebanon's capital beyond the central areas most directly affected by the blast. The city, and the country, have experienced a series of shocks – including the protracted Syrian refugee crisis, a collapse of the economy, a political crisis, large-scale civil protests, and the COVID-19 pandemic over the past years. Moreover, a large portion of Beirut's residents live in chronic poverty. Many residents live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the city, and especially in pockets of poverty surrounding the inner-city centre. With the economic collapse further exacerbated by the blast, the number of families struggling to put food on the table is on the rise; every second Lebanese is now living in poverty. Tension and unrest over lockdown measures and over scarce food and household items and electricity cuts have been reported first half of 2021, signifying an emerging risk of punctual or city-wide conflicts. The ripple effect

of these compounded shocks renders the whole city in a state of crisis, beyond the neighbourhoods physically affected by the blast, where the main attention of the immediate response to the blast has been focused. A further deterioration of the situation in Beirut, as the political and economic centre of the country, may spill over to other regions of the country.

The Beirut City Profile provides a cross-sectoral and spatial analysis to help form a shared understanding of how these shocks and vulnerabilities manifest across the city to inform holistic and longer-term urban recovery. By using a spatial approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of different geographical and administrative scales, the analysis highlights existing systems and governance structures' respective capacities to absorb shocks, and suggests how these can be further strengthened to help the city bounce back and transform from a current fragile state towards a resilient and inclusive city.



Figure 1 Boundary of the continuously built-up Beirut urban area, defined as Beirut City in this report. Source: UN-Habitat, 2020.

THE DIAGNOSIS OFFERED IN THE BEIRUT CITY PROFILE CAN BE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:

Compounding crises and overlapping shocks - with their severe economic, environmental, and social impact on Lebanon - have reinforced structural patterns of economic and social division within the rapidly growing capital city. The Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990 increased sociodemographic divisions in Beirut, which manifested in more pronounced patterns of spatial segregation of populations according to economic, ethnic, and religious factors. Moreover, the conflict that erupted in Syria in 2011 and the subsequent large influx of Syrian refugees into Beirut (and other areas of the country) have placed significant additional demands on already strained infrastructure and service delivery, and have contributed to the increase of competition for jobs and housing. The economic instability has been heightened by widespread protests and the closing of economic activities and banks, to the point of economic, monetary, and financial collapse. Adding to long-standing unresolved economic and social grievances, COVID-19 and the 4 August 2020 blast are causing an already extremely precarious situation to rapidly deteriorate.

The current situation in Beirut City is one of depleted business activities, high unemployment, heightened tenure and food insecurity, and a significant rise in poverty levels. In the months after the blast, many apartments were left dark, while stores and restaurants remained closed. What used to be some of the most vibrant neighbourhoods in the city, and indeed in the country and region, was for months left quiet and empty. Although some residential buildings and businesses have managed to repair and reopen and life has modestly returned to houses and streets, economic and social activities across the city has been stifled by COVID-19 measures. The physical and psychological damage and destruction caused by the 4 August 2020 blast on people, housing, businesses, offices, and infrastructure including the Port of Beirut, will have a lasting negative effect. Escalating poverty levels demonstrate the severity of the situation. More than half of Lebanon's population is estimated to be trapped in poverty and struggling for bare necessities, almost double the 2019 rate. Extreme poverty has registered a threefold increase from 8 per cent in 2019 to 23 per cent in 2020,³ with 9 out of 10 Syrian refugees living in extreme poverty nationally, and disproportionately impacting women and female-headed households.⁴

³ Poverty in Lebanon, ESCWA Policy Brief 15.

⁴ Inter-Agency Coordination, "VASyR 2020 Key Findings," 2020.

