

NEIGHBOURHOOD PROFILE



FOREWORD

Lebanon is experiencing a number of intersecting social and economic challenges. The Syrian refugee crisis is currently in its ninth year, and Lebanon is host to an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees (Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, 2019). Furthermore, since October 2019, the country has been experiencing a nationwide wave of political protests and a severe economic crisis, compounded, since March 2020, by a lockdown resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this neighbourhood profile's publication, Beirut is still recovering from the port explosion of 4 August 2020.

The explosion has caused devastating physical damage to the capital, and has resulted in the deaths of more than 600 people, the injury of thousands and the displacement of about 300,000 inhabitants. In a long-standing national context of scarce data, combined with ever-growing pressure to maximize efficiencies in intervention funding, there is an urgent need for reliable spatialized information on which to base holistic, multisectoral, multi-actor mitigation approaches that support municipalities and other state entities.

Adopting an area-based approach to data gathering and synthesis, where a defined territorial unit is the point of entry rather than a particular sector or beneficiary cohort, neighbourhood profiling can inform integrated programming for communities in ways that benefit all residents in the long term.

This has the potential for mitigating cross-cohort vulnerabilities and for reducing host-refugee community tensions, which are reported to be on the rise year-on-year. Thus, neighbourhood profiling offers a springboard for moving towards sustainable development and prosperity, shedding light on how relatively fixed built environments and relatively mobile social dimensions interface with each other in specific contexts.

Organizational profiles can serve as a framework for coordinated actions between partners to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), United Nations Strategic Framework (UNSF), and local authorities to improve the response in line

with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in complex urban settings. Profiles of neighbourhoods with varying levels of vulnerability can be used for better understanding and monitoring dynamics in urban pockets that cadastral, municipal and district averages can be blind to, and how these relate to their wider urban contexts.

Neighbourhood profiling was initiated in 2017 as part of a joint ongoing project by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across Lebanon, and the project findings are currently available as part of the publicly accessible UN-Habitat UNICEF online portal. As part of knowledge exchange that started in 2018, UN-Habitat and the RELIEF Centre—an international partnership programme between University College London (UCL), the American University of Beirut (AUB), and the Centre for Lebanese Studies at the Lebanese American University (LAU)—collaborated on the production of the Hamra Neighbourhood Profile.

The RELIEF Centre and UN-Habitat recognize that the value of profiles lies in their use by partners, including local authorities, for evidence-based coordination and programming. We welcome constructive conversations about how this may best be achieved going forward.

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CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A slightly adapted version of the UN-Habitat UNICEF neighbourhood profiling methodology was used for this profile. The cooperation of UNICEF is recognized.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hamra is one of the most socially and economically vibrant sectors. However, public facilities face various challenges, areas in Lebanon. Covering an area of 0.52 km² and including limited financial resources, shortage of equipment for the purposes of this study, the neighbourhood is located in the Ras Beirut quarter and falls within the jurisdiction of Beirut Municipality.

Children and youth are particularly vulnerable groups, experiencing various challenges, including child labour, scarcity of specialized healthcare and education services for children and adolescents with disabilities, and lack of vocational training opportunities for the elderly. A household survey shows that around three quarters of Syrian households arrived in Lebanon after 2011, the year when the Syrian refugee crisis started, suggesting the crisis has greatly contributed to demographic changes in the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood has a total of 634 buildings, including 21 buildings that are under either demolition or construction. The average number of occupants per residential unit is higher among Syrians (5.7 per unit) than among Lebanese (3.6 per unit). More than half of Lebanese households (51.9 percent) own their residential units, whereas this percentage drops to around one third (31.7 percent) for Syrian-owned households.

More than a third of buildings in the neighbourhood (33 percent) are mixed-use, both commercial and residential. Ras Beirut, and more specifically Hamra, became a vibrant commercial and cultural centre in the 1960s, with renowned cinemas, theatres, newspaper headquarters, educational centres, and cafés, which became spaces for heated debates and political activities. The neighbourhood's physical fabric dates back to earlier than the 15th Century; the area was originally inhabited by Sunni and Greek Orthodox families. After the opening of the American University of Beirut, it was initially the Syrian Protestant College in the late 19th Century, the area started to undergo significant urban growth especially during the 1950s, following the 1948 Palestinian Nakba and the boom of the Arabian Gulf, which resulted in population influx and brought in cash flow, respectively. This growth stopped during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) as the area experienced economic decline but remained undivided during the country's political crisis and sectarian clashes in spite of the religious diversity of its population.

The structural condition of buildings in the neighbourhood is mainly good (81 percent), noting that 79 percent of the buildings date to the period between 1944 and 1975. The majority (66.5 percent) of pre-1920s buildings require structural repair, whether minor, major or emergency. Buildings with structural and exterior conditions in need of major repair or emergency intervention are concentrated on the north-south axis at the centre of the neighbourhood, while those in need of minor repair are scattered all over the neighbourhood. The majority (80 percent) of buildings, housing 86 percent of residents, have a functional connection to the domestic water network with good-quality pipe, while 61 percent of buildings, amounting to 55 percent of residents, benefit from a functional connection to the public electrical grid, with properly installed electrical wiring.

Today, Hamra is a hub for real estate development and is considered a vibrant commercial centre. The big construction projects with large footprints and high number of storeys that multiplied in the 2000s have led to a noticeable change in the urban fabric. Some challenges include housing insecurity due to the high prices of land and properties, demolition of old heritage buildings, increased pressure on services and infrastructure, traffic congestion, and lack of parking spaces.

A number of public and private facilities, located within or outside Hamra, provide a range of healthcare and education services to the neighbourhood's residents—often regardless of nationality, age and gender. The presence of important private facilities (such as schools, hospitals and universities) is considered an asset in the area and could be seen as an opportunity of collaboration between both public and private sectors.

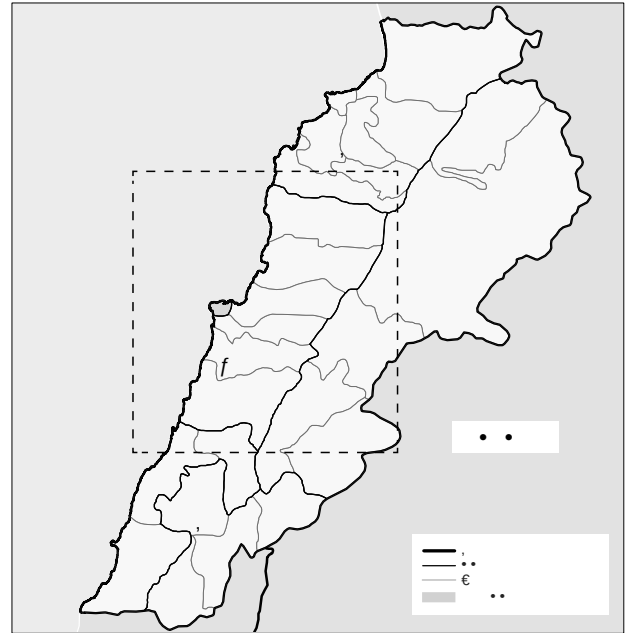


Figure i Beirut Governorate within Lebanon

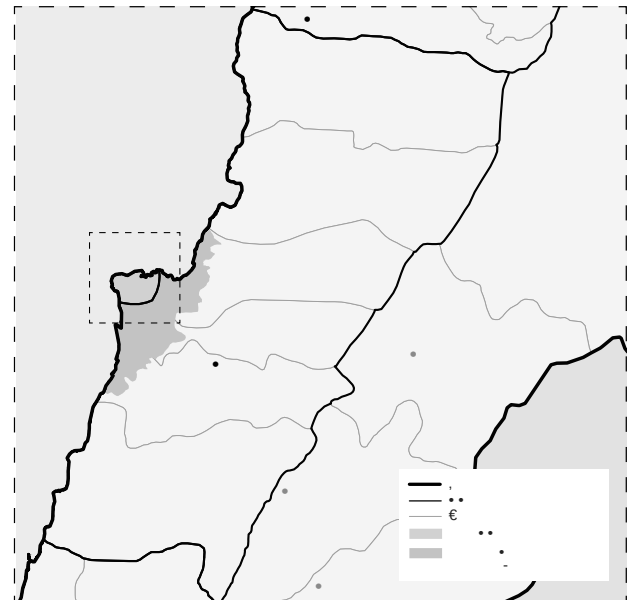


Figure ii Beirut Governorate and Beirut City (continuously built-up area)

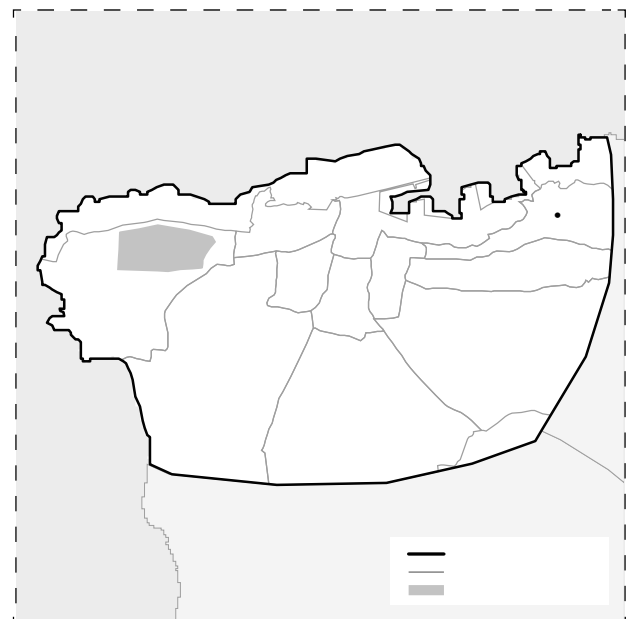


Figure iii Hamra within Beirut Governorate

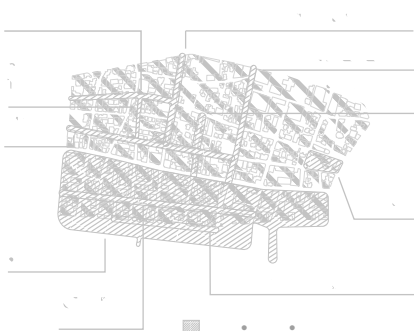
ⁱThe boundary of Beirut City's continuously built-up area has been defined by UN-Habitat (UN-Habitat Lebanon, forthcoming).



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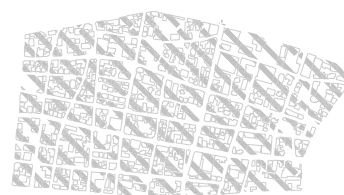


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RELIEF-UN-Habitat Hamra Neighbourhood Profile available at: <https://www.relief-centre.org/un-habitat-lebanon>
UN-Habitat–UNICEF Lebanon neighbourhood profiles are available at:
<http://lebanonportal.unhabitat.org/>.



For further information including data, contact: unhabitat-lebanon@un.org or relief_admin@ucl.ac.uk

Related Publication:

UN-Habitat Lebanon (forthcoming) *Beirut City Profile*, Beirut: UN-Habitat Lebanon.

ⁱⁱ The city profile is a geographical, statistical and multisectoral description and analysis of an urban area, where the boundary is defined by a continuously built-up area. Its purpose is to inform the urban crisis response, generate a national urban database, lead to a city strategy and inform strategic project identification.

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