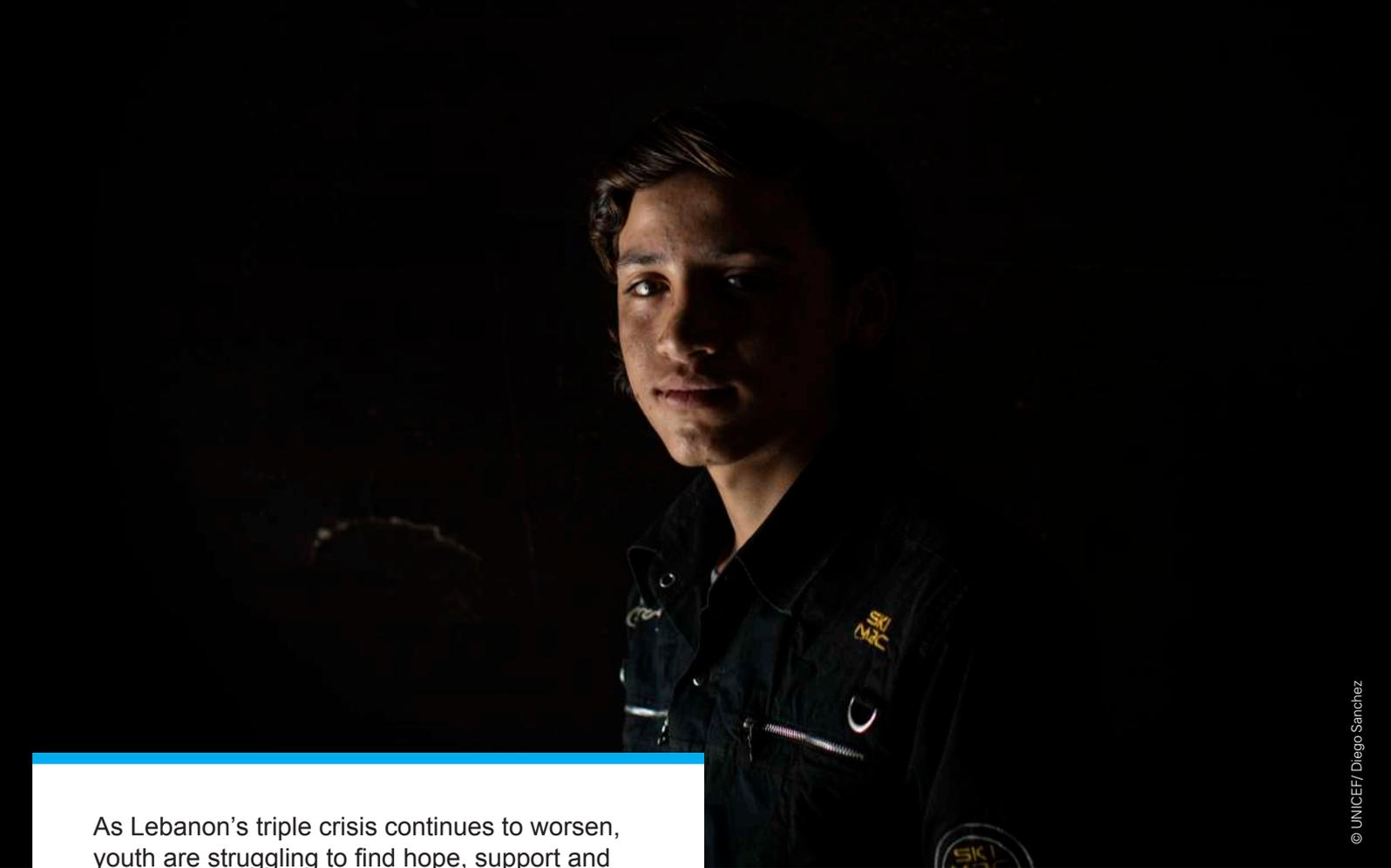


SEARCHING FOR HOPE

A GRIM OUTLOOK FOR YOUTH
AS LEBANON TEETERS
ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE



As Lebanon's triple crisis continues to worsen, youth are struggling to find hope, support and opportunities amid mounting despair.

The combined impact of an economic meltdown, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Beirut Port explosions are forcing youth from all backgrounds to take on responsibilities beyond their ages, with detrimental impacts on their mental health and on access to opportunities. More and more young people are dropping out of education or any type of learning to engage in ill-paid, irregular and informal work to generate whatever income they can to help their families cope with the mounting challenges. UNICEF's new assessment shows that 3 in 10 young people in Lebanon have stopped their education, while 4 in 10 reduced spending on education to buy essential items like basic food and medicine¹.

Dropping out of education and learning can severely affect young people's life-long education and longer-term employment prospects. Unless current trends are reversed and appropriate action is taken, this will have serious implications for future growth and social cohesion in the country.

The unprecedented crisis has left the majority of Lebanese economically vulnerable and more than 90% of Syrians living in poverty.² This is also taking a heavy emotional toll on young people, who often feel their prospects for a better life are looking dimmer by the day.³

"The crisis is depriving adolescents and youth of the stability that is so important at their age. It is robbing them of their education, their dreams, their future. They urgently need support that addresses not only education and livelihood challenges, but also their emotional and mental well-being."

Ettie Higgins, UNICEF Lebanon Representative a.i.



3 in 10

YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEBANON HAVE STOPPED THEIR EDUCATION.



4 in 10

REDUCED SPENDING ON EDUCATION TO BUY ESSENTIAL ITEMS.



YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEBANON ARE NOT OK

The combined impact of the crises has led to a significant increase in mental health issues among young people, resulting in risky behaviour and substance abuse, as well as an increase in gender-based violence (GBV).⁴ Approximately one in four adolescents in Lebanon suffers from a psychiatric disorder. Alarmingly, 94 per cent of adolescents with a mental disorder have not sought any treatment.⁵

In September 2021, UNICEF conducted a Youth-Focused Rapid Assessment (YFRA), interviewing around 900 youth and adolescents aged 15 to 24⁶ across Lebanon. One in four reported often feeling depressed and just over half the respondents said their lives worsened over the past year.

A separate survey, the Changing Childhood Project poll – conducted by UNICEF and Gallup⁷ – shows that 86 per cent of youth in Lebanon report frequently feeling worried or anxious.

"As an ambitious person that wants to achieve a bright future for himself, everything is very hard. I am trying to release my emotions, I am trying to forget, trying to get out of the situation we are in that is, as they say, taking me down." Badwui, 21.

"My outlook for the future here is bleak. For the first time in my life, I want to leave my country, I want to leave Lebanon." Hind, 22⁸

Many young people, like Hind, believe their only chance for a better life lies beyond Lebanon's borders. A 2020 survey showed that 58 per cent of young people were not optimistic about finding a job and 41 per cent felt their only chance was to seek opportunities abroad – raising the likelihood of a substantial brain drain.⁹ The YFRA indicates that almost 3 in 10 youth believe life would worsen over the next year. At the same time, 4 in 10 expect life to improve, which might reflect the ability of youth in Lebanon to bounce back from adversity.



86%
LEBANON REPORT
FREQUENTLY
FEELING ANXIOUS.



41%
FELT ONLY CHANCE WAS
TO SEEK OPPORTUNITIES
ABROAD.



3 IN 10
EXPECT LIFE
TO WORSEEN.



THE HIGH COST OF COPING

The increasingly desperate socio-economic situation in Lebanon has led to an increase in negative coping mechanisms, including child labour, skipping meals and cutting down on health expenditure.

“My father cannot find a job, so my brothers – 15 and 16 years old – go out and work instead. Between them, they bring home around \$100 a month, and we must find a way to survive on this.” Fatima, 18.¹⁰

“The money we receive now is no longer enough. Inflation is so high, and incomes haven’t matched this. Every month we have to choose a priority – rent, medicines, food. But we can never have them all.” Haneen, 17.

THE UNICEF YFRA SURVEY SHOWS THAT:



13% OF FAMILIES SENT CHILDREN UNDER 18 TO WORK AS A COPING STRATEGY AND THIS NUMBER COULD RISE IF THE SITUATION WORSENS.



ALMOST **1 IN 2** REDUCED EXPENSES ON HEALTH.



MORE THAN **4 IN 10** YOUNG PEOPLE REDUCED SPENDING ON EDUCATION TO BUY BASIC FOOD, MEDICINE AND OTHER ESSENTIAL ITEMS AND **3 IN 10** STOPPED THEIR EDUCATION ALTOGETHER.



ONLY **6 OF 10** RECEIVED PRIMARY HEALTH CARE WHEN THEY NEEDED IT.



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CAN'T AFFORD SCHOOL, CAN'T GET A JOB

An increasing number of young people can no longer afford to stay in education, amid rising poverty and soaring inflation, and are forced to drop out of learning and look for work.

But youth often find themselves ill-equipped to compete for increasingly scarce jobs, lacking skills, labour market experience and professional networks. As a result, there is increasingly fierce competition among young people for low-paying work in the informal sector and cash-for-work programmes.

With almost one million of the 5.5 million population in the 15-24 age group, the youth unemployment gap, estimated at 60 per cent, is expected to continue rising.¹¹

"I had to stop university studies to work and support my family and get money." Ali, 20.

"My mother died four months ago. My father told me and my two young sisters that we had to find work. He said that without this the family wouldn't survive. Now we work six, sometimes seven days a week, and barely make enough to feed ourselves." Tayma, 19.

The UNICEF YFRA survey shows that:

- ▶ About 1 in 3 youth aged 19-24 worked/generated income for at least one day in the week prior to the survey. Of those, just over 4 in 10 were in full-time employment.
- ▶ Working youth had an average monthly income of 1,600,000 Lebanese pounds (LBP) – equivalent to about US\$64 at the parallel-market rate.¹²
- ▶ For Syrian youth in Lebanon, this number is about half, equivalent to a daily income of around a US\$1 a day.
- ▶ 7 in 10 were considered unemployed, not having generated income over the week prior to the survey.
- ▶ Enrolment in educational institutions dropped from 60 per cent in 2020-2021 to 43 per cent in the current academic year.
- ▶ More than half of Syrian youth, 32 per cent of Palestinians and 22 per cent of Lebanese are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). In all, 31 per cent of youth in Lebanon are considered NEETs.
- ▶ The YFRA also shows that 16 per cent of female youth aged 15-24 are married, including 2.4 per cent of adolescents under the age of 18. By comparison, the share is 9.2 per cent and 0 per cent respectively for males.

A NEED FOR URGENT ACTION

Far more needs to be done to support vulnerable youth across the country.

Young people in Lebanon face multiple challenges that need to be addressed simultaneously to prevent the crisis from taking a further toll on their health, safety and future, and to prevent the loss of an entire generation. Investments are needed to ensure that the costs of education do not prevent young people from getting the education and skills they need to eventually find decent work and contribute to the stability and prosperity of Lebanon. Support is urgently needed to address livelihood challenges, protection risks and the mental and emotional well-being of adolescents and youth.



HOW UNICEF IS HELPING

The UNICEF Adolescent and Youth programme's core response to the crisis centres on addressing the growing vulnerabilities of young people – aged 15-24 – not in education, employment or training. We have adopted a holistic and integrated approach to learning, economic empowerment, skill building, active citizenship and protection, reaching close to 60,000 young people across Lebanon in 2021.

The main goal is to increase professional readiness among the most disadvantaged young people in Lebanon, while at the same time empowering them to become more active members of their community.

The programme has adapted its approach to the needs arising from the crisis to include cash assistance, access to online learning and mental health services. In 2021, UNICEF reached close to 60,000 vulnerable adolescents and youth with formal and non-formal education opportunities, employment support services, empowerment and engagement activities. This includes support for formal technical and vocational education and training for 7,892 youths, basic literacy and numeracy for 4,849 (69 per cent female) and integrated skills trainings for 16,563 adolescents and youth (56 per cent female). Of the youth trained, close to 10,000 were supported with employment services, on-the-job training, internships, or apprenticeships and access to employment or income generation opportunities. Lastly, over 22,000 beneficiaries (51 per cent female) were engaged in activities to maximize physical and social well-being, empowerment and civic engagement.

GAPS FOR 2022 AND 2023:

UNICEF requires more than \$20 million in 2022 and the same amount in 2023 to reach 25,000 young people per year with an integrated package of services to improve foundational, digital, vocational and life skills and increase access to income-generating opportunities. Funding will also support expansion of volunteer and civic engagement initiatives and digital learning opportunities and will support greater access and improved mental health services for young people.

REFERENCES

- 1 UNICEF Youth-Focused Rapid Assessment (YFRA) 2021
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- 3 The British Council: Next Steps - Lebanon
- 4 GBV IMS: Annual Overview of Incidents of GBV in Relation to Lebanon's Situation 2020; Substance Abuse journal: National trauma and substance use disorders: A slippery slope in Lebanon
- 5 Building Emotional Resilience in Youth in Lebanon – a school-based randomized Controlled trial of the FRIENDS intervention
- 6 UNICEF describes youth as persons aged 15-24. This includes adolescents aged 15-19 but not those aged 10-14.
- 7 UNICEF Gallup Changing Childhood Project poll
- 8 Name changed to protect her identity
- 9 Centre for Lebanese studies: Marginalized Youth in a failed state
- 10 Name changed to protect her identity
- 11 GIEWS Country Brief Lebanon, Dec. 2020
- 12 The official rate was about LBP1,500 to the US\$ before the crisis but the Lebanese currency changed hands at the parallel rate of approximately LBP25,000 to the US\$ in mid-December 2021.

YOUTH-FOCUSED RAPID ASSESMENT 2021

KEY FINDINGS

	Total	Male	Female	Lebanese	Syrian	Palestinian	Aged 15-18	Aged 19-24
NEET	31%	27%	36%	22%	54%	32%	22%	33%
ATTENDED SCHOOL IN 2020-2021	60%	52%	69%	79%	14%	63%	77%	58%
ENROLLED IN THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR	43%	41%	46%	57%	12%	43%	62%	41%
WORKED FOR AT LEAST 1 DAY IN THE PAST WEEK.	30%	38%	22%	31%	31%	27%	20%	31%
PERCENTAGE OF THOSE WHO WORKED IN THE PAST WEEK WHO ARE IN FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT	42%	38%	50%	54%	20%	36%	55%	41%
AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME OF EMPLOYED YOUTH (LBP)	1,578,462	1,329,604	2,024,866	1,998,177	726,927	1,442,612	717,504	1,647,064
DID NOT GENERATE INCOME OVER PAST WEEK	70%	62%	78%	69%	69%	73%	80%	69%
RECEIVED PRIMARY HEALTH CARE WHEN NEEDED	61%	60%	61%	68%	38%	59%	61%	61%
REDUCED SPENDING ON HEALTH	48%	47%	50%	44%	68%	40%	50%	40%
STOPPED EDUCATION	30%	37%	24%	15%	69%	26%	28%	31%
REDUCED SPENDING ON EDUCATION	43%	46%	39%	34%	74%	32%	40%	43%
FELL LIFE WORSENER SINCE LAST YEAR	53%	57%	49%	47%	70%	51%	52%	53%
EXPECT LIFE TO IMPROVE WITHIN A YEAR	41%	35%	47%	60%	5%	32%	45%	40%
EXPECT LIFE TO WORSEN WITHIN A YEAR	29%	35%	22%	15%	56%	32%	27%	29%
REPORTED BEING HAPPY	47%	40%	53%	64%	17%	37%	51%	46%
OFTEN FEEL DEPRESSED	27%	25%	28%	28%	36%	15%	15%	28%
YOUTH AND ADOLESCENTS (15-24) WHO ARE MARRIED	13%	9%	16%	5%	35%	9%	1%	14%
ADOLESCENTS (UNDER 18) WHO ARE MARRIED	1%	0%	2%	2%	0%	0%		



United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
Lebanon Country Office
www.unicef.org/lebanon