

## Socio-Economic Vulnerability in Lebanon

Impact and outlook of conflict escalation

04 October 2024 | Lebanon

## **KEY MESSAGES**

- The recent escalation in conflict is expected to have widespread and long term repercussions on Lebanon's economy and its populations' access to livelihoods, already fragile following the financial crisis in October 2019 that led to a threefold increase in poverty between 2012 and 2022. Data from 2023 demonstrated that poor access to livelihoods was the primary driver of humanitarian needs prior to the most recent escalation.
- With almost half a million already displaced, livelihoods for both displaced and host populations have already been disrupted. Conflict has caused destruction and/or damage to agricultural lands, had immediate consequence on the tourism sector, and is expected to affect the most vulnerable populations, including economically vulnerable Lebanese, displaced agricultural workers, Syrian Refugees, and children forced to enter the labour market.
- The 2006 Lebanon War resulted in USD 1.1 billion in direct damages to economic infrastructure and another USD 1.7 billion in damages to residential buildings, which has had far-reaching consequences for the population. With the compounding crises already faced in recent years, **minimising disruptions to economic activity and access to livelihoods is crucial, while maintaining a necessary focus on critical life-saving assistance and services.**

### **Context and Rationale**

Lebanon has faced a multitude of crises in the past years that have had compounding effects on the population. This includes the financial crisis which began in October 2019, causing a threefold increase in poverty from 12% to 44% between 2012 and 2022 among the Lebanese population.<sup>1,2</sup> The situation was made worse by the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020<sup>3</sup> and the explosion in the port of Beirut<sup>4</sup> later that year. More recently, hostilities along the southern border since October 2023<sup>5</sup> have had severe repercussions on affected populations' livelihoods due to the destruction of productive infrastructure, housing, and agricultural land, high levels of displacement, and high numbers of casualties. Already in 2023, data suggests that poor access to livelihoods was the primary driver of humanitarian needs amongst the **Lebanese population.**<sup>6</sup> As such, any further deterioration in households' socio-economic situation is of major concern for their welfare and survival.

This brief provides an overview of socio-economic conditions in Lebanon following the onset of conflict since 7 October 2023, with a particular focus on the impacts of confliction escalation since 23 September 2024.

Data is derived primarily from humanitarian and news reports, and is supplemented by academic articles which

3-fold increase
in poverty between 2012 and
20221

capture the impacts of conflict on livelihoods more generally. Information is included up to 8 p.m. (GMT+3) on 3 October 2024.

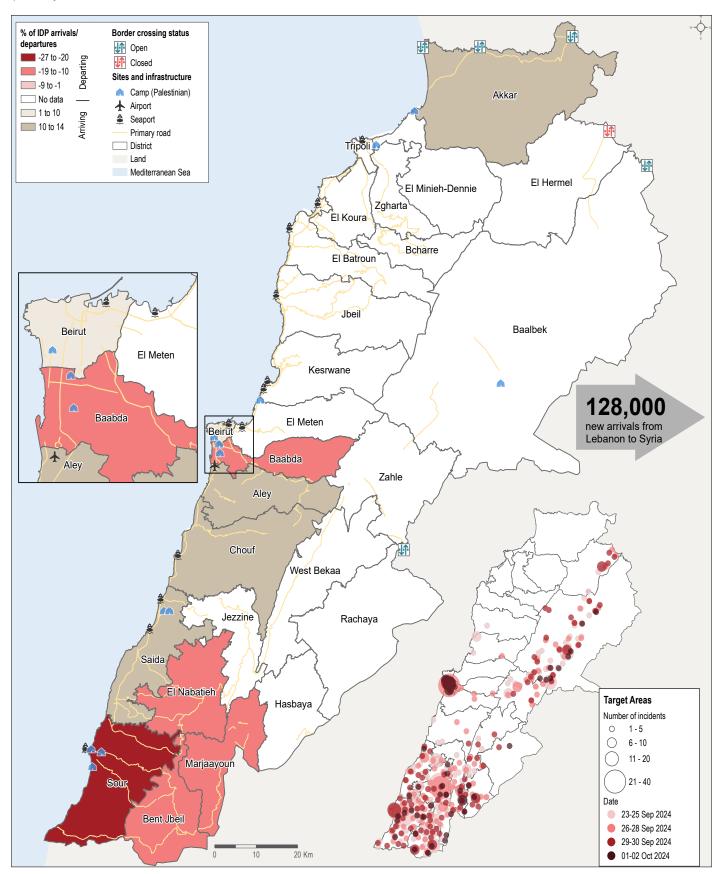
Damage to infrastructure disrupts services and economic activity, with prohibitively high costs of reconstruction.

Damage to housing and infrastructure has been substantial, particularly in the most heavily targeted areas in southern (South and Nabatieh governorates) and eastern



## Locations Affected by Conflict Between 23-Sep and 2-Oct, and Main Districts of New Displacements Between 24-Sep and 30-Oct

Data on conflict locations is provided by Live Universal Awareness Map (<u>liveuamap</u>), which derives data on conflict activity from news and social media. Reported conflict incidents are included if words such as "strike", "raid", or "bomb" were mentioned. Incidents in close proximity to each other are summarised.



#### **Data Sources**

Infrastructure and urban areas: OpenStreetMap Administrative boundaries: OCHA Populated area: WorldPop 2020 Camps: UNRWA

IDP Movements (22-29 Sep): IOM DTM Round 49 Displacement to Syria (24-30 Sep): UNHCR Flash Update #5 Conflict incidents: Liveuamap (as of 23 Sep-02 Oct, 11.45AM)



(Baalbek-El Hermel and Beqaa governorates)
Lebanon. See the map on page 3 for
locations of conflict incidents as of 2 October.
This damage has immediate adverse effects
for the local population. Firstly, it limits the
provision of essential services. Between 7
October 2023 and 30 September 2024, 25
water stations were damaged, affecting
access to safe water for around 360,000
individuals. Another 11 conflict incidents
affecting health centres were recorded,
with 37 centres having to close due to
conflict-related insecurity.

Secondly, damage to productive infrastructure can limit economic activity and cause loss of employment. Already, damage to and destruction of electricity infrastructure, public roads, factories, and agricultural land have been recorded.<sup>9,10,11</sup>

Lastly, the cost of reconstruction - when feasible - could be prohibitively high. The 2006 Lebanon War, which lasted just over a month and had a roughly similar geographic distribution of conflict incidents (see map 1), resulted in USD 1.1 billion in direct damages to economic infrastructure and another USD 1.7 billion in damages to residential buildings.<sup>12</sup>

At that time, Lebanon had extensive

## **USD 2.7 billion**

est. direct damages from the 2006 Lebanon War<sup>12</sup> foreign support for reconstruction; due to changes in the geopolitical landscape, this level of support is as of

yet not expected.<sup>13</sup> Given the severity of the financial crisis, this raises concerns about the state's ability to recover basic services.

Additionally, many displaced households were unable to afford to repair or rebuild their homes after the 2006 war, preventing them from returning to their areas of origin. Mitigating this requires a statefunded compensation mechanism, posing additional high financial burdens.<sup>14</sup>

# Given high levels of import dependence, protection of trade routes is essential for national fuel and energy supply.

In 2022, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN (FAO) estimated that 80% of calories consumed in Lebanon were imported, with local agricultural production insufficient to meet demand. This means that conflict-related disruptions to imports may have widespread and severe impacts on food security. These impacts have not yet materialised, with the World Food Programme (WFP) assessing in July 2024 that

markets showed high levels of resilience with 3-4 months of stocks available in-country.<sup>16</sup> The government re-emphasised the availability of food stocks on 26 September.<sup>17</sup>

While national supplies are thus indicated to be secured, there remain concerns that insecurity will limit the ability to distribute supplies to households remaining in targeted areas. Preliminary analysis by WFP indicated decreased operationality of shops particularly in the targeted governorates of Baalbek-El Hermel and South on 25 September. Further data is needed to monitor how the situation evolves, as well as to understand how many households remain in these locations. Locally, some shortages of food and water have anecdotally been noted in communities receiving large numbers of new arrivals. 19

Even more starkly than food supply chains, Lebanon relies almost exclusively on fuel imports to meet its energy needs.<sup>13</sup> On 27 September 2024, the government announced that it had sufficient reserves to maintain electricity production for only 12 days.<sup>20</sup> Electricity generation through public networks was already insufficient prior to the current conflict escalation, providing around 2-3 hours of electricity daily. Instead, most households rely on private generators, again highlighting dependence on fuel.<sup>1</sup> This emphasises the importance of maintaining import routes – primarily through maintaining seaports – in order to ensure continued supplies of fuel to maintain basic services.

In the same announcement, the government noted expected arrivals of freight ships with additional fuel supplies.<sup>20</sup> As of the time of writing, ports have not been directly targeted and remain operational.<sup>21</sup> However, immediately after the onset of hostilities in October 2023, rising insurance premiums led to marked reductions in both imports and exports, down by 50% and 65% respectively in October 2023 compared to October 2022.<sup>13</sup> As conflict continues, trade routes may become more difficult to maintain, with the World Bank (WB) anticipating a nationwide black-out if conflict should render all sea- and airports inaccessible.<sup>13</sup>

## Conflict has caused devastating financial losses for households through destruction of housing and agricultural land.

Conflict exposes households to a direct loss in financial resources through the destruction of assets, particularly housing and agricultural



land. As of 18 September 2024, it was estimated that 20,600 residential buildings were severely damaged and 4,200 completely or partially destroyed. Half of these were in Marjaayoun district in the south-east, and another third in Bent Jbeil, bordering Marjaayoun in the south. Given the marked escalation since 23 September including strikes on residential areas in Beirut city, this number is expected to have greatly increased. As a benchmark, the 2006 Lebanon War was estimated to have destroyed 30,000 homes.

Around 22% of the country's farms are located in the southern governorates of South and Nabatieh,<sup>23</sup> with agriculture reportedly constituting up to 80% of local economic output (Gross Domestic Product, GDP) in parts of Nabatieh.<sup>11</sup> Conflict affecting these governorates has led to widespread damage, destruction, and contamination of agricultural land. These losses have been exacerbated by fires caused by shelling and contamination due to the reported use of white phosphorous

munitions.<sup>24</sup> The map below shows agricultural and vegetation areas that had potentially been burned as of August and September 2024.

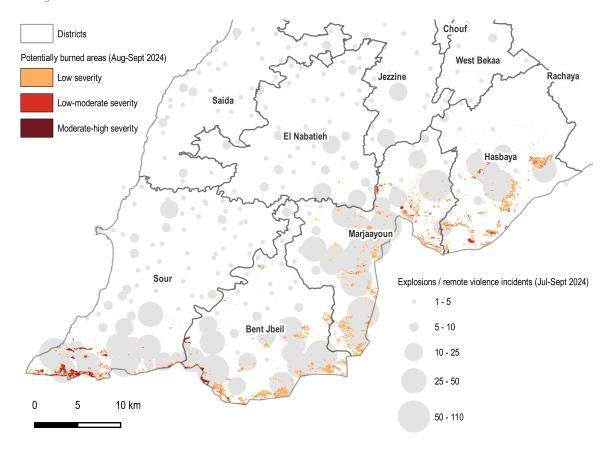
Next to the immediate losses of production – for instance, 40,000 olive trees were reportedly burned within the first month of hostilities<sup>25</sup> while insecurity prevented harvesting<sup>11</sup> – **long-term impacts are expected due to contamination of agricultural land with unexploded ordnances**. This was particularly severe following the 2006 Lebanon War due to the use of cluster munitions, with losses in agricultural production valued between USD 23 million and USD 27 m, and cost of clearance valued at USD 120 m.<sup>26</sup>

## Displacement disrupts employment and entails additional costs.

As of 3 October 2024, it is estimated that 542,000 persons have been internally displaced,<sup>27</sup> with 185,000 displaced to Syria as of 2 October 2024.<sup>28</sup> Displacement

## Potentially Burned Areas (Aug-24 to Sep-24), and Number of Explosions or Remote Violence Incidents (Jul-24 to Sep-24) in Southern Lebanon

Preliminary analysis indicates large areas of agriculture land and natural vegetation may have sustained fire damage, concentrated along the Blue Line area. Given the rapid escalation of conflict as of 23 September 2024 and its spread to areas further removed from the Blue Line, it is expected that damages will accumulate.



**Data Sources and Methods:** Potentially burned areas based on delta Normalised Burn Ratio (NBR). NBR is calculated from Landsat 8 using median NBR in Aug-Sept 2024, and from the same period in 2023 as the "before" image. Methodology and burn severity classification based on UNSPIDER recommended practice. Analysis conducted for agricultural and natural vegetation areas only.

Analysis is preliminary and has not been validated in the field. Number of conflict incidents extracted from

ACLÉD for July-Sept.

is associated with major economic costs, both for the affected households and for the country as a whole. In 2020, the average estimated costs and losses associated with

542,000
est. to have been internally displaced between 8-Oct-23 and 3-Oct-24

one year of internal displacement was USD 370 per person globally. Of the 18 countries included in this calculation, Syria topped

the list with costs and losses estimated at USD 830. Calculations include the costs of providing IDPs with housing, education, health, and security, as well as losses in employment resulting from displacement.<sup>29</sup>

From the perspective of displaced persons, displacement often results in a loss of access to their previous employment, business, or agricultural land. This is of particular concern in the current context as many of those who have been displaced since October of 2023 come from rural agricultural communities. Some have reportedly commuted between their location of displacement and their farms in order to maintain their lands and livestock and thus ensure their livelihoods, exposing them to heightened protection risks.

For displaced persons who need to find new livelihoods sources, they compete with host communities for limited employment opportunities. Other country contexts have also shown systematic discrimination, with displaced persons receiving lower incomes than their host-community counterparts.<sup>30</sup> Increased demand for goods and services in host communities may cause increases in prices, further increasing the income-expenditure gap. In Lebanon, this has particularly affected rental prices, impacting displaced persons' abilities to access housing.31,32 Social networks which might have helped to buffer impacts from income losses are disrupted. These effects are particularly severe when displacement is reactive rather than preventive,<sup>30</sup> as in the current context.

Displacement, injury, and loss of life may shift labour market participation, with increases in child labour already being observed.

Since 8 October 2023, it is estimated that 1,640 individuals, including civilians, have lost their lives and 8,410 have been injured (as of 30 September 2024), with a sharp increase in casualties since 23 September. Next to the devastating impacts on families and affected communities, these

dynamics have substantial impacts on the economy through their effects on labour supply. For instance, loss or injury of male breadwinners may increase female labour force participation as well increasing the probability of child labour. Economic losses due to displacement may force households to resort to child labour as a means of coping.<sup>33</sup> Already by November 2023, the compounding crises had led to a marked increase in child work, reported by 11% of households in April 2023 and rising to 16% in November 2023.34 Furthermore, conflict may encourage out-migration of skilled labour, which has been prevalent since the onset of the financial crisis and has severely affected specific sectors of the economy, including education and healthcare. 13 Gaps in healthcare staff are particularly concerning in the current context, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) reporting shortages in healthcare staff, particularly in frontline areas.8

Injury and disability are likely to cause persistent reductions in incomes with increased health spending, pushing households into poverty.

Health shocks, which currently particularly include conflict casualties, are often associated with major care costs. This is of particular concern in Lebanon, where the health system is heavily privatised, social security systems are insufficient to cover incurred costs, and the majority of the population are not privately insured.35 Considering the short term, the government has previously authorised admissions of conflict casualties under its coverage.<sup>36,37</sup> However, these conflict injuries may result in major long-term health repercussions requiring continuous – and likely unaffordable – care. Experiences of survivors of the 2006 Lebanon War suggest persistence of chronic pain, impaired mobility, trauma and psychological distress, and financial repercussions even 16 years later.<sup>36</sup>

Globally, chronic illnesses in low and middle-income countries are associated with increased expenditures and corresponding severe livelihoods coping strategies such as reduced food expenditures and child labour.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, incomes are reduced as chronically ill household members and members with disabilities are less able to participate in livelihoods while family members may leave employment to care for others.<sup>39</sup> Even for those not physically harmed



by conflict, the psychological impacts may be debilitating.<sup>40</sup>

## The tourism sector has been severely impacted, leading to loss of livelihoods.

Access to livelihoods may be disrupted due to insecurity preventing access to workplaces, disruptions in demand such as due to displacement of customers, disruptions to supply chains, and a multitude of other factors. Sectors that have reportedly shown particular vulnerability to conflict escalations since 8 October 2023 include tourism and agriculture. See above for a discussion of agricultural impacts.

Prior to the onset of hostilities, tourism was one of the primary sources of income from foreign transactions (current account receipts) at 26% in 2022.<sup>13</sup> Declines in tourist arrivals were observed immediately following 8 October. While it had been

**26%** 

of income from foreign currency transactions previously came from tourism<sup>13</sup> forecast that tourist arrivals would increase by a margin of 42% in the fourth quarter of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022,<sup>13</sup> October 2023 in fact observed a 23% decline.<sup>41</sup>

Since 23 September 2024, the majority of airline carriers have stopped flights to Lebanon,<sup>42</sup> with some countries having begun evacuations.<sup>43</sup> As such, tourism has likely halted completely, with major repercussions for individuals employed in the industry.

Some of these losses in employment may be permanent. It is estimated that 30,000 jobs were permanently lost due to the 2006 Lebanon War, equivalent to 3% of pre-war employment.<sup>44</sup>

## Those already poor, dependent on agricultural activities, and children are expected to be particularly vulnerable.

The impacts of conflict are not equally distributed across the population, but rather disproportionately affect those who are already worse off, including:

#### Lebanese Poor

33% of Lebanese households were impoverished according to the informal national poverty line. This was correlated with several demographic markers – lower education levels, greater reliance on informal, casual, and low-skill employment, lower access to remittances

and other foreign currency earnings, and higher dependency ratios (a greater proportion of children and elderly in the household).<sup>1</sup>

#### Syrian Refugees

1.5 million Syrian refugees were registered in the country as of 2022.<sup>45</sup> Poverty rates were remarkably higher amongst this group at 87% of Syrian households compared to 33% of Lebanese households. This was related to legal barriers to accessing formal employment, with informal employment associated with reduced economic protection.<sup>1</sup>

#### Displaced Agricultural Workers

Agricultural workers, making up just over 5% of the Lebanese workforce,<sup>1</sup> may face increased difficulties in adapting when displaced to urban areas, particularly as compared to those with higher education levels and transferable skills (health workers, teachers, etc.).<sup>30</sup>

#### Children

Children's education has been disrupted due to the various crises over the past years, limiting acquisition of foundational literacy, numeracy, and life skills.<sup>10</sup> The proportion of out-of-school children, working child, and children showing signs of psychological ill-health had already increased substantially by November 2023.<sup>34</sup> Education has now been halted since the 23 September 2024 escalations.<sup>46</sup> Disruptions to education are associated with reductions in lifetime earnings and increased poverty rates.<sup>47</sup>

### **ABOUT REACH**

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, Acted and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).



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