



A Year After the Beirut Port Explosion

A needs Assessment for Syrian Refugees Impacted by the Beirut Port Explosion

August 2021

Introduction

4 August 2020 was not a regular day for the Lebanese capital, Beirut transformed that day to a disaster-stricken city filled with sadness and destruction as a result of the port explosion and its tragic repercussions on the capital and its residents.

A year has passed since the disaster and the most horrific of human losses it caused. The explosion resulted in more than 200 casualties, injured 6,500 others, and destroyed part of the historic heart of Beirut, damaging nearly 9,200 buildings, including 73,000 apartments, and as a result, 219,000 of its residents were affected. Moreover, nearly 70,000 workers lost their jobs, which had direct negative impacts on the living conditions of at least 12,000 families.¹

This report provides an overview of the main international support that Lebanon received as a result of the explosion, while shedding light on the biggest challenges that accompanied the provision of aid and explains the struggles of Syrian refugees that were affected by the explosion over the past year.



¹ Humanitarian Response Services. N.d. OCHA. Accessed July 29, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3ykCym1>

The International Support for Lebanon in Response to the Beirut Port Explosion

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) which runs the Financial Tracking Service database that records funds and grants, the total amount of emergency funding in response to the Beirut port explosion during 2020 was 317.7 million US Dollars (USD).

The health sector received the largest portion of the funding with 74,273,913 USD (23 percent of the total aid), followed by the food security sector with 65,848,354 USD (21 percent), and the emergency shelter sector and non-food materials which received 54,519,707 USD (17 percent).²

Additionally, Lebanon received 1.9 million USD during 2021, including 1.5 million USD from the Swiss government, mainly for the education sector.³



The Most Prominent Funding Appeals

The International Conference on Assistance and Support to Beirut and the Lebanese People

On 9 August 2020, France hosted a conference entitled “the International Conference on Assistance and Support to Beirut and the Lebanese People” with the participation of 32 countries, 12 international organizations and seven civil society organizations. The conference attracted approximately 340 million USD, in addition to in-kind aid including food and medical material. More than 195 million USD of the total amount received was channelled through the Lebanon Flash Appeal, run by the UN, while approximately 145 million USD was channelled outside of UN administration.⁴

In the meantime, non-governmental organizations and individual initiatives received millions of dollars in individual assistance. For example, Impact Lebanon – a platform run by a group of Lebanese emigrants – received 6.6 million euros. In addition to other donations that came into Lebanon and was mainly received by the Lebanese army and not coordinated by any organized external platform or initiative.⁵

² Financial Tracking Service. “Beirut Port Explosion - August 2020”. n.d. Unocha.Org. Accessed July 29, 2021. <https://fts.unocha.org/emergencies/944/summary/2020>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sewell, Abby, and Chehayeb, Kareem. 2020. “Long Road to Recovery for Lebanon’s Blast Survivors.” The new humanitarian.Org. December 9, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3COnA70>

⁵ Ibid.

Lebanon Flash Appeal

The United Nations “Lebanon Flash Appeal 2020” received 167.1 million USD to cover the basic needs of approximately 300,000 individuals in the sectors of protection, education, food security, health, shelter, WASH, and logistics.⁶

● Main Funding Parties

The European Commission and its Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) was the main donor party with 81,801,333 in funding, followed by the United States of America, then France, Canada, and Germany.⁷

The European Commission funds concentrated on emergency needs, medical support, and the protection of critical infrastructure, as well as rehabilitation of homes and legal support and assistance. The funds targeted the urgent humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable residents of Beirut affected by the explosion, including Syrian refugees.⁸

As for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), its funding focused on food assistance through support given to the World Food Programme (WFP) as well as health, shelter, and camp support.⁹

● Main Funding Parties

The United Nations Agencies received half of the total funding (155,823,543 USD) which was divided between the World Food Programme – WFP (58,301,268 USD), the UN Refugee Agency – UNHCR (40,228,194 USD), the World Health Organization – WHO (20,945,375 USD) and the Children’s Emergency Fund – UNICEF (17,659,198 USD).¹⁰ Followed by the international non-governmental organizations (82,541,343 USD), then the Lebanese Red Cross and the Lebanese Red Crescent (a total of 49.5 million USD).¹¹ While, the Lebanese government directly received 7,540,045 USD.¹²

These funds targeted Syrian refugees as well. Based on an assessment conducted by the UNHCR that included 15,421 refugee impacted by the explosion, refugee needs concentrated on food security, shelter and rehabilitation or repair. By end of April 2021, the UNHCR had provided cash assistance for shelter to 115 Syrian refugee, and emergency cash assistance to 2,727 Syrian refugee, in addition to various types of support for rehabilitation or repairs.¹³

Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework

In December 2020, four months after the explosion, the European Union, the United Nations, and the World Bank launched the “Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF)”, which is a part of the response to explosion. It primarily focuses on the citizen and links between the immediate humanitarian response, medium-term recovery, and reconstruction efforts to put Lebanon on a sustainable development path. This response also considers reliable and accurate data and its accessibility crucial for achieving transparency and accountability, and the mechanism of existing cooperation for the reform, recovery, and reconstruction framework.¹⁴

⁶ Financial Tracking Service. “Lebanon Flash Appeal 2020” n.d. Unocha.Org. Accessed July 29, 2021. <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1009/summary>

⁷ Beirut Port Explosion - August 2020.” 2020. Accessed July 29, 2021. <https://fts.unocha.org/emergencies/944/summary/2020>

⁸ Hans. 2020. “EU Steps up Aid for Lebanon – Commissioner Janez Lenarčič in Beirut.” Europa.Eu. September 12, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3idyEFU>

⁹ “Lebanon - Explosions: Fact Sheet #5”. N.d. Usaid.Gov. Accessed July 29, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3C1Wa0C>

¹⁰ “Beirut Port Explosion - August 2020.” 2020. Accessed July 29, 2021. <https://fts.unocha.org/emergencies/944/summary/2020>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Beirut Port Explosions: 2020-2021 Shelter and Protection Response - Mount Lebanon Sub-Office (As of April 27, 2021).” UNHCR.Org. 20 May 2021. <https://bit.ly/3ljP5mi>

¹⁴ “Lebanon Reform, Recovery & Reconstruction Framework (3RF).” Worldbank.Org. 4 December 2020. <https://bit.ly/3ymZoti>



The Challenges Accompanying the Aid

Local and international civil society organizations faced various challenges during their response over the past year, to include:

- Coordination issues between the multiple working actors on the ground, causing duplication of work and difficulty in exchanging and sharing information and data.¹⁵
- Overreliance on the Lebanese civil society which took on the majority of the response to the health and social needs resulting from the explosion, in addition to the rehabilitation and renovations.
- The lack of trust in the current political system in Lebanon, and the decades-long corruption of Lebanese governments.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Lebanon scores high levels of corruption, ranking 149 out of 180 countries on the corruption perception index (CPI) for 2020." For more information: "Transparency and International Accountability in the Case of Lebanon" UNDP, July 4, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3fvX3S>

The Worsening of Syrian Refugee Struggles Due to the Explosion

More than 34 Syrian refugees lost their lives as a result of the Beirut port explosion, while 124 others were injured, of which 20 individuals suffered from serious injuries. Despite that, the actual number of victims is estimated to be higher as many Syrians are not registered with the UNHCR in Lebanon and/or entered Lebanon through informal pathways and did not regulate their legal status, some of whom might reside or work in areas near the explosion's location.¹⁷

In the past year, there has been a rise in cases of forced eviction and cases of well-founded risk of forced eviction of individuals residing in areas impacted by the explosion, especially against marginalized groups including Syrian refugees. The main reasons reported for the eviction were the inability to pay rent especially after its increase, or the refusal to pay rent until repairs are done. In some cases, people reported the intention of the landlord to reuse or upgrade the property as a reason, or the refusal of the landlord to renew the rent claiming the "unsafety of the property" despite the lack of technical appropriate assessment.¹⁸

In this context, the Norwegian Refugee Council reported 20 cases of Syrian refugee families being threatened with eviction after the explosion in August 2020, in the neighbourhoods of Karantina and Mar Mikhael.¹⁹ Subsequently, many Syrian refugees have had to move to other properties with lower rent or to informal settlements or camps.

The causes behind the risks of eviction – and especially evictions affecting low-income families, refugees, migrant workers, and those without formal rental agreements – may be summarized as:

- The lack of clarity regarding the criteria and procedures of the governmental compensation for the damage caused by the explosion, especially if the renovation was conducted by a third party.
- The lack of awareness among the individuals impacted by the explosion with regards to access to free or affordable legal support and consultation.
- The inability to access the judicial system for cases related to property and land.

¹⁷ Foreign Aid to Lebanon: Goodwill Marred by Smoke and Mirrors." Timep.Org. 3 November 2020. <https://bit.ly/3ylFZcb>

¹⁸ "The Beirut Blast Lays Bare a Shockwave of Evictions Hitting Syrians in Lebanon." 2020. Syriadirect.Org. September 20, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3lfff9H>

¹⁹ Ibid.



Discrimination in Aid Distribution and Financial Compensation

Following up on the efforts of Access Center for Human Rights in monitoring and documenting violations against refugees, ACHR remained in contact with a number of Syrian refugees that had participated in the field study conducted for the report “Discrimination in the Distribution of Aid to the Syrian Refugee Victims of the Beirut Explosion,”²⁰ and which targeted 47 Syrian refugees impacted by the explosion and found that 29 individuals were refused assistance due to their Syrian nationality, as of 29 September 2020. Some of these families still have not received any assistance to this day.

On a similar discriminatory note, Law No. 196 was adopted on 3 December 2020, and it aims to pay compensation and pensions for the families of the victims of the Beirut port explosion. It also allows those who suffered disabilities as a result of the explosion, to receive health benefits from the National Social Security Fund. The law did not exclude foreigners from financial compensation nor from the equation of victims with “Lebanese Army martyrs.” However, a bill was submitted, repeatedly, on 17 December 2020, and seeks to exclude and deprive foreigners of financial compensation and limit the latter to Lebanese citizens, under the allegation of “not incurring the Lebanese treasury additional financial obligations,”²¹ bearing in mind that at least 76 victims are non-Lebanese, including 52 victims of Syrian nationality including 34 Syrian refugees.²²

M.S., Syrian Refugee

The house he lived in was impacted by the explosion in Beirut, while five of his family members suffered from serious injuries, in addition to the painful psychological impact the family suffers from. All of that did not stop the landlord from throwing their furniture outside of the building, claiming the “need to renovate”, despite there being a written rental agreement between them. The Lebanese Armed forces contacted M.S. and promised him compensation, but he still has not received anything to this day. No one provided M.S. with aid except for one non-governmental relief organization, amid complete absence from the UNHCR and other international organizations. As for M.S.’s current place of residence, the rent has doubled, leaving him at risk of eviction again.

A case recorded by Access Center for Human Rights, update of 29 July 2021.

A.S., Syrian Refugee


The Lebanese government offered him financial compensation after he had lost his wife and two daughters in the Beirut explosion, except that the offered price was equal to less than half of the compensation offered to the Lebanese families of victims. A.S. told ACHR that the discrimination and inappropriate treatment by the lawyers made him feel humiliated, so he refused the compensation despite his urgent need for assistance.

A case recorded by Access Center for Human Rights, update of 29 July 2021.

²⁰ “Discrimination In The Distribution Of Aid To The Syrian Refugee Victims Of The Beirut Explosion.” Achrights.Org. September 29, 2020. <https://www.achrights.org/2020/09/29/11461/>

²¹ “What does Parliament discuss in the June 30 - July 1, 2021 session? Public Procurement and Finance Annunciation at the fore.” Legal Agenda.Org. June 30, 2021. <https://bit.ly/2UZU6FT>

²² “Marginalized Victims of August 4”. Megaphone. August 1, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3liMVTN>



Recommendations

The Lebanese government

- Immediately respond to the forced eviction of those impacted by the explosion, from all nationality, and to pay particular attention to the random rise in rent, by adopting and enforcing decisions that protect tenants from the abuse of landlords.
- Financially compensate the individuals impacted by the explosion and the families of the victims, fairly and without any form of discrimination, especially on the basis of nationality or race.
- Reject the bill submitted on 17 December 2020 that seeks to exclude non-Lebanese victims of the Beirut port explosion from Law No. 196/2020 which aims to pay compensation and pensions to victims or their families.

To the international community

- Adopt strict oversight policies on the organizations and associations funded by them to ensure that aid reaches those impacted by the explosion without discrimination.
- Increase support for projects to reduce hate speech and discrimination based on nationality.
- Incorporate local NGOs and civil society organizations, which enjoy the confidence of their local communities in the design and planning phases of the necessary interventions and intensify their role in the monitoring of violations.

To donors

- Support the necessary training and capacity building workshops for workers in organizations active on the ground, to develop mechanisms for risk mitigation, and improve guidance on reporting and financial tracking requirements.
- Develop innovative verification mechanisms to effectively address risks arising from corruption and misuse of funds through field visits, geo-tagging, citizen engagement tools, and support for extensive implementation, to contribute to the goal of ensuring that funds are used for the intended purpose.

To the UN agencies and local and international organizations

- Follow up on the affairs and conditions of the refugees affected by the explosion and provide them with the necessary services for health, psychological, economic, legal or protection needs.
- Activate coordination with associations operating on the field and exchange information with them, to avoid duplication of work or the absence of the necessary intervention in some cases.
- Prioritize coordination between civil society organizations, the private sector and emerging advocacy groups to develop a common local agenda based on the national context and unify to contribute to the public policy process.



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