

***“EVERYTHING
AROUND ME
IS IN RUINS.”***

**Impact of August 4 explosions
on children and families in Beirut,
one month on**

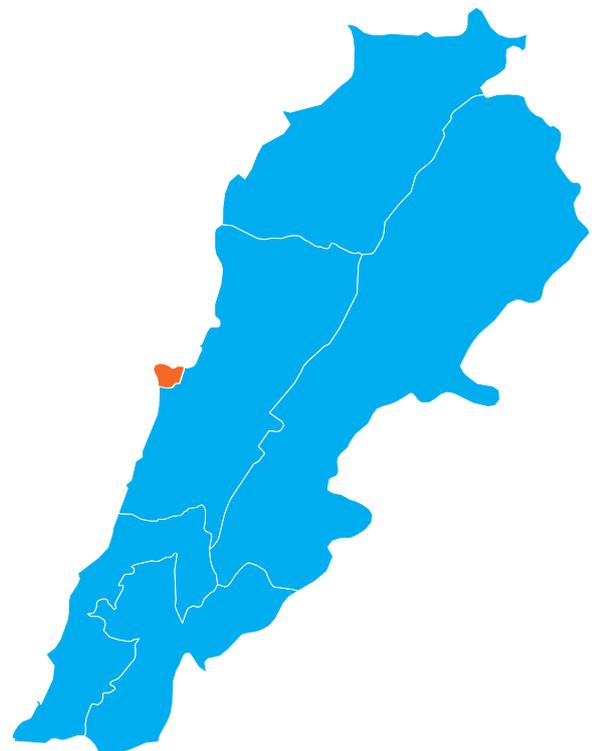
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“The children of Beirut have had their lives turned upside down by the Beirut explosions, just the latest in a long line of catastrophes to hit the people of Lebanon. Before the dust even settled, UNICEF and our partners were on the ground responding, but the needs are immense and there is so much more to do to help children and their families rebuild their shattered lives.”

Yukie Mokuo, UNICEF Lebanon Representative





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On the afternoon of Tuesday 4 August 2020, a fire broke out at the Port of Beirut, sending plumes of white smoke into the air. Pictures and video started circulating on social media, as the blaze grew.

At just after 6pm local time, when many children and families were at home preparing for the evening meal, a first explosion shook Beirut. The blast was followed by what sounded like fireworks going off. A little over 30 seconds after the initial blast, a further, much larger explosion tore through the city and was heard up to 150 miles away.

“Everything around me is in ruins.”

- As the dust settles, the immediate impact became clearer

The immediate impact of the explosions was staggering. Much of the port – a critical lifeline for the imports of food and medical supplies to the country – and the surrounding areas were levelled. Thousands of homes in the surrounding neighbourhoods were damaged or destroyed, with windows and doors blown out. Thousands of people were injured by shattering glass and flying debris.



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***"I feel different after the explosion.
I'm always scared, and I still dream about
the feeling of the blast.
It keeps me awake at night."
- Hanan, 8, Karantina***

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The impact in numbers



More than **180 people** killed, including at least 4 children.



Three hospitals were severely damaged and at least **20 medical facilities** suffered from moderate to serious damage.



6,500 people injured, including around **1,000 children**.



At least **183 educational** facilities were damaged, affecting more than **77,000 children and youth**.



Approximately **4,000 pregnant and lactating women** live in the affected area.



An estimated **130 buildings** have been completely disconnected from the main water network and the water systems of **more than 500 occupied buildings** have been damaged.



600,000 children may be in need of psychosocial support



300,000 people, including around **100,000 children** whose homes damaged or destroyed.

“I thought my children were gone.”



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Amidst the chaos, the impact on children was severe. We know out of the more than 180 deaths, at least four children were killed in the explosions. Around 1,000 children were injured, many suffering deep cuts to their hands and faces. An estimated 300,000 people, including 100,000 children, saw their

homes damaged or destroyed. The explosions ripped through hospitals, health centres, schools and other vital public buildings. In the immediate aftermath, many health services – already battling the COVID-19 pandemic were overwhelmed.

Immediate UNICEF response

Before the dust had even settled on the night of the explosions, UNICEF and our partners were on the ground delivering immediate support: from identifying, tracing and reuniting children separated in the chaos, offering psychosocial first aid to children and families; delivering safe drinking water to first responders and

remaining affected communities; facilitating the urgent relocation and cold storage of 1.7 million doses of critical vaccines and providing emergency health kits and medicines; to distributing essential hygiene supplies and supporting youth volunteers to help badly affected communities.

**“I couldn’t stand still and watch my beloved city in ruins.
I couldn’t stay at home.”**



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We continue to work around the clock with our Lebanese partners to help meet the massive needs. Our priorities are health, education, protection, and water and

sanitation services, to support those affected by the destruction and help prevent a further spread of COVID-19.

“I didn’t know what to say to them. I was completely lost.” The psychosocial impact on children, parents and caregivers



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The sudden horror of the explosions, coupled with the creeping threats of COVID-19 and the wider instability, has left children and adults alike traumatized and in need of psychosocial support. “Every morning, as soon as my children wake up, they ask me if anything else happened last night”, mother of three Rania told UNICEF. “We’re all still terrified after the explosion. The blast petrified me; my children were terrified. We all still are”. While flesh wounds begin to heal, the mental impact on children could reverberate for months and years to come

“My eldest daughter, every two hours she comes to me asking “When will we die.” She still doesn’t sleep at night. She asks me to stay by her side, feeling she will die any second.”

The psychological impact can be especially profound on children who have already experienced traumatic events or are living with disabilities. “I have a younger sister with autism,” 21-year-old university student Nadiya explained to a UNICEF worker. “She’s gone through the traumatic experience of the blast in Beirut, and now she’s come back to a home in chaos.” Nadiya and her family live in the Karantina neighbourhood of Beirut, one of the worst affected areas where recovery will likely be long and slow. In a rapid assessment conducted by UNICEF’s partners between

10 and 24 August, half of the respondents said that children in their households were showing changes in behaviour or signs of trauma or extreme stress.

To alleviate the psychosocial impact on families, UNICEF has scaled up counselling and mental health services, reaching deep into the most affected communities. We estimate that almost 600,000 children will ultimately need some form of support to help them cope with this experience. Working with our partners, we have opened and expanded hotlines for trauma

counselling, put together plans for group and individual trauma therapy; set up a network of safe spaces for children staffed with trained counsellors and toys to help give children a sense of normality and distraction, and provided resources for parents on how to recognize trauma in their children and where to go for help. One urgent priority is ensuring that children can get back to learning – helping to bring a sense of normalcy for girls and boys who may be feeling anxious, confused and stressed.



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Before the blasts – A country in crisis

Even before the explosions tore through Beirut, the situation for many children and families across the country was precarious, facing political instability, a battered economy, unrest and a raging pandemic. The confluence of these events that many children – especially the most vulnerable – with little chance of accessing education and other learning opportunities for almost six months of the 2019/2020 school year. Even before COVID-related lockdowns, families were struggling in the face of a plummeting currency, job losses and rapid inflation, together with daily power cuts and limited public healthcare. Prices for basic items such as food and shelter have soared by 169 per cent since September 2019, dramatically reducing families' purchasing power and forcing them to make hard choices between life's essentials.

Then COVID-19 pushed nearly one in three of people in Lebanon into unemployment. Half of Lebanese families and 75 per cent of refugees are now living in extreme poverty. Syrian refugee Wasfiyah fled Aleppo to

Beirut in 2010. The explosions forced her and her children from their home again. "We fled our damaged home for what we hoped would be the sanctuary of a relative's house only to find they were in an even worse situation than us", Wasfiyah recalls. "Another of my daughters is woken every night by terrifying dreams of another explosion. In truth, we're all traumatized by our experience - not only families like mine but every family in the city."



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VOICES OF CHILDREN



*“My school was damaged by the explosion and I no one knows when it will reopen. I’ll miss going to school. I’ll miss studying, and I’ll miss spending time with teachers.”
Hanan, 8, Karantina*

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The explosions coincided with a significant rise in COVID-19 infections: From around 70 cases a day in July, Lebanon is now dealing with upwards of 600 cases a day. Hospitals were already overstretched, and front-line workers exhausted. The areas around the blast site are among those with the most active clusters and community transmission, but it is now extremely difficult for those affected to practice safe distancing. Reinforcing COVID-19

prevention activities remains a high priority as cases rise. Lockdowns, suspended the two-week state of emergency that followed the explosions, have been re-imposed as of 21 August. UNICEF has already procured fresh stocks of personal protective equipment – including 3.5 million surgical masks; 17,370 N95 masks; 2.6 million pairs of gloves; 124,810 gowns, face shields, coveralls, boot covers, headcovers and goggles.

“We will make Beirut rise again.” Supporting Beirut’s children and young people to rebuild their city

In the days following the explosions, incredible solidarity and community-led clean-up campaigns immediately sprang up all over the city, with people of all ages and backgrounds working together to clean the streets of glass and debris and to help those worst affected. UNICEF supported this amazing youth movement – providing brooms, shovels, cleaning, water/food – and mobilized more than 1,900 young people,

including Palestinian refugees, through a community-based response focusing on cleaning, minor rehabilitation of households, and preparation and distribution of meals for vulnerable families. Working with our partners, UNICEF has designed a response which combines investing cash directly into the hands of families to spend locally on goods and services, and offering wages for young

people for working across the city to help with clear up and repairs to make homes as safe as possible as quickly as possible – before winter sets in. In parallel, with others like WHO, UNICEF is rapidly restocking medications, surgical supplies, immunization and nutrition treatment supplies, as well as rehabilitating Public Health Centers, to help get the health system back on its feet so it can cope with not only the number of trauma injuries but also the rising rates of COVID-19 – which will now certainly get worse as people are forced to stay with relatives in crowded conditions whilst their homes are repaired or rebuilt.



Key UNICEF Response Highlights

- Since 5 August, UNICEF has delivered 18 shipments of critical humanitarian supplies, totaling 67 tons, with a total value of US\$1.7 million, and in addition to local procurement of emergency supplies
- UNICEF and partners have re-connected over 155 buildings to the public water system and installed more than 870 water tanks in damaged households.
- 2,400 people assisted with temporary access to adequate quantity of safe water for drinking and water for domestic use.
- Distributed 4,485 hygiene kits and 462 baby kits to affected families.
- 1,406 children, parents and caregivers provided with psychosocial support.
- Three children without parental or family care provided with appropriate alternative care arrangements.
- 308 children under 5 receiving essential nutrition supplements.
- Provision of two new solar fridges to be installed in Rafic Harriri Hospital and support on the maintenance requirements of two cold rooms in the hospital for vaccine storage.
- More than 430,000 fabric masks distributed to affected population.
- Provision of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to primary healthcare centers and dispensaries and providing immunization services.



- Supplies order includes more than 3.5 million medical masks, 8,070 face shields, 124,810 gowns, 11,145 goggles, 7,646 thermometers, and 2.6 million pairs of gloves.
- More than 1,900 young people mobilized in response including cleaning, minor rehabilitation of households, and preparation and distribution of meals for vulnerable families.

“With no education, there will be no hope for the future.” Getting children back to learning and returning to a sense of normalcy



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Getting children back to education – whether in classrooms or via COVID-enforced distance learning – is critical. The safe space of a classroom or the structure of online learning can help children work through the traumatic experiences they have been through and return a sense of normalcy to their lives. UNICEF is planning the mass distribution of laptops and tablets and finding innovative ways to ensure connectivity at home to enable children –especially the most vulnerable to leave no child behind– to keep learning safely at home whilst their schools are rebuilt in the longer term.

UNICEF is collaborating with public and private partners to try and secure large-scale ICT solutions for the upcoming school year including procurement of laptops and tablets as required. We are also working on

finding innovative ways to ensure connectivity at home to enable children –especially the most vulnerable to leave no child behind– to keep learning safely at home whilst their schools are rebuilt in the longer term. UNICEF is also supporting the rebuilding of primary schools and vocational training centers to help children and adolescents continue learning. For the young people the focus will be on providing the skills they need to help rebuild the city – and offer them much needed jobs, helping to ease the crushing pressures on families’ finances.

The importance of this was reinforced by Ahmad, a 40-year-old father in Karantina. “Next month, schools should reopen,” he told a UNICEF worker. “I’m also worried there won’t be a place in the local school for my children. With no education, there will be no hope for the future.”



"I can't remember when I last went to school, and now that my school is destroyed I have no idea when I will be able to go again. Coming to the safety park helps – with the team from UNICEF we play games and we learn some easy things together. It's not the same as school, but when you've lost as much as we have in this neighbourhood, something like this becomes really important."
Abdulkarim, 10, Karantina

Rebuilding lives turned up-side down. The long-term impacts of the explosions



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For the approximately 300,000 people – including 100,000 children – whose homes were damaged or destroyed, the immediate priority is rebuilding or rehabilitating their home, or finding somewhere new to live. Mother of two Doa'a is currently living with her sister but is desperate for somewhere safe and secure for her family. "Only then will we be able even to start to think about recovering from the shock, truly comfort our children, and begin to rebuild our lives."

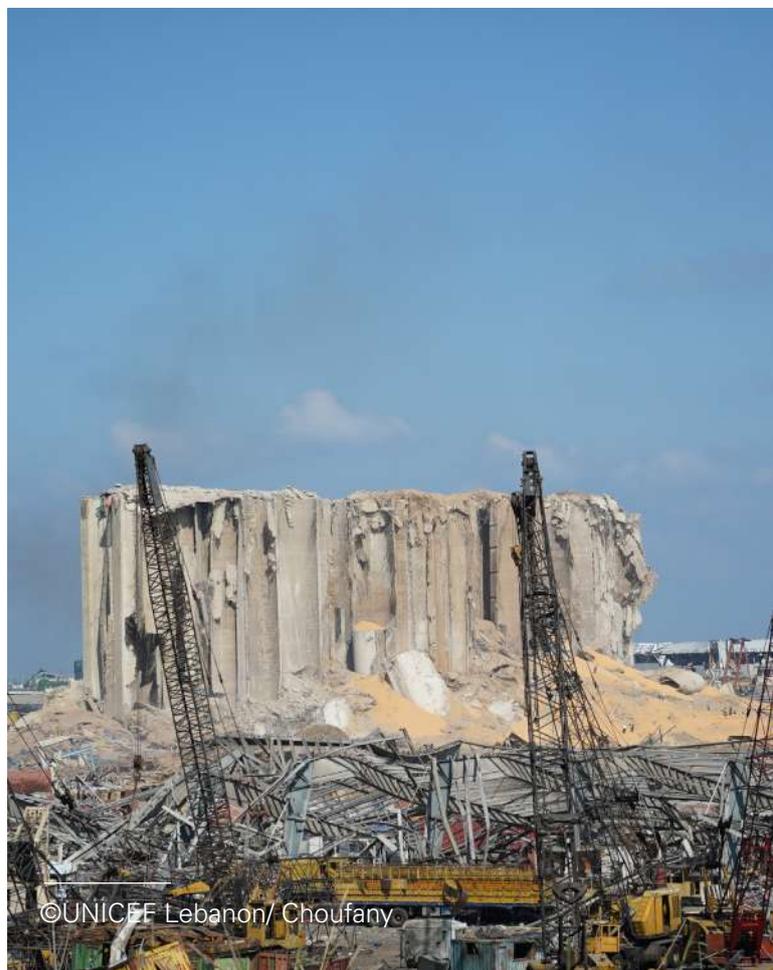
In the worst affected neighborhoods, many homes that were ill-equipped to support one family are now providing shelter to two and sometimes three families. Making matters worse, the heat of the Mediterranean

summer, combined with Lebanon's frequent and lengthy power cuts, is forcing families to spill out on to the streets in front of their homes in search of a cooling breeze. Many families have also lost their livelihoods as businesses and vehicles were damaged or destroyed in the explosions. "It will take more than a construction team to rebuild my neighbourhood," Mazen, father of two, said. "It will take a lot of care and a lot of time."

"I have simple needs now," Ahmad, the father living in Karantina told a UNICEF worker. "I only want someone to replace the roof that collapsed so that I can bring my children back so we can be a family again."

I could never dream of being able to afford to do this.”

Emergency cash assistance can play a vital role in helping families who have faced these multiple crises to cope and recover. Cash assistance schemes are immensely powerful, enabling families to prioritize exactly what they need – whether food, money for repairs or rent, medicine or commute to work or school – and live with dignity. In turn, the money they spend is invested in local businesses, bringing a proven multiplier effect to the local economy and community. UNICEF already operate cash assistance schemes in Lebanon supporting Syrian refugees. We will extend this using a newly built website supplemented with a call centre for those who are not IT literate to help families come forward for rapid assessment.



“I want to provide a bright future for my children.” - Urgent and sustained support required to help rebuild shattered lives.

UNICEF requires \$50 million to respond to the immediate needs of children and their families in the aftermath of the explosions in Beirut. So far, we have received US\$3.2 million. The funds will support directly affected children and families as well as health and other front-line workers. They will help with psycho-social and mental health services, immediate rehabilitation of health centers, schools and the water network, while limiting the spread of COVID-19 during the emergency response to the explosion. This urgent funding appeal is in addition to already existing humanitarian funding needs: \$461.7 million for the Syrian refugee crisis (70 per cent funded) and \$58.9 million for the COVID-19 response which received only 39 per cent of required funding



“UNICEF has been in Lebanon, working directly with children and families for 72 years. Children we supported many decades ago will have seen their children, grandchildren and maybe even great-grandchildren receive the same help and assistance. Thanks to the support of our committed donors and partners, we have been able to help improve the lives of millions of children, and we will not falter in supporting families rebuild after this catastrophic explosion. We cannot fail them.”

**Yukie Mokuo, UNICEF Representative,
UNICEF Lebanon**

*All figures correct at time of publication. Reported casualties according to UN OCHA.

UNICEF Lebanon would like to thank our partners and donors without whom its work on behalf of children in Lebanon would not be possible. From donor governments and every individual donor to companies and foundations partners, we deeply thank you for your support to the children and families affected by the explosions in Beirut.

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