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# Lasting scars

One year on, a long, slow road to recovery  
for children affected by the Beirut explosions

August 2021



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**“Elias was a child. It was his right, and the right of every child killed or injured on that day, to be safe in his own house”**

Mireille, mother of 15-year-old Elias, who was killed in the explosions.

**“The sound of the explosions was so strong, BAM! I know my mum is happy in heaven...I love you mum, and I send you a heart and a kiss.”**

Joya-Maria, 6. She lost her mother.

**“Isaac deserved more from this world. He deserved a chance at life, a chance that was taken from him”**

Sarah, mother of two-year-old Isaac, the youngest victim of the explosions.



## Lasting Scars

One year after massive explosions devastated lives, livelihoods and a large swathe of Beirut, the needs of children and their families remain acute. The situation in Beirut and across Lebanon has in fact gotten much, much worse. Lebanon is facing unprecedented economic and social challenges and is at risk of free fall. The country is going through one of the worst economic crises in recent history, a political stalemate due to inability to form a government for nearly one year, and a worsening COVID-19 crisis. Every child and every family are impacted by this triple crisis one way or the other, and the number of people in need of assistance is increasing by the day.

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**“We were already living the stress of Lebanon’s economic collapse, and were six months into the COVID-19 pandemic, with school closures, lockdowns, and disappearing work opportunities. To then be injured, homeless and destitute, pushed our family and others in our community over the edge.”**

Rana, a mother of three.



The 4 August, 2020 explosions in the Port of Beirut killed more than 200 people, among them at least six children; and injured more than 6,500, including 1,000 children. The lives of 100,000 children were turned upside down overnight. Children – as well as adults – have suffered severe distress, such as anxiety, sleeplessness and flashbacks. Many will carry emotional scars for years to come: Children who have lost a parent or other loved ones; parents who have lost a child.

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**“I have lost not just a father but also a companion and a best friend. He was my secret keeper, my hero, my role model. I feel alone now.”**

Hadi, 16. His father, a firefighter, was battling the blaze at the Port.

**“I talk to him every day but he doesn’t answer me, his photo doesn’t speak back to me.”**

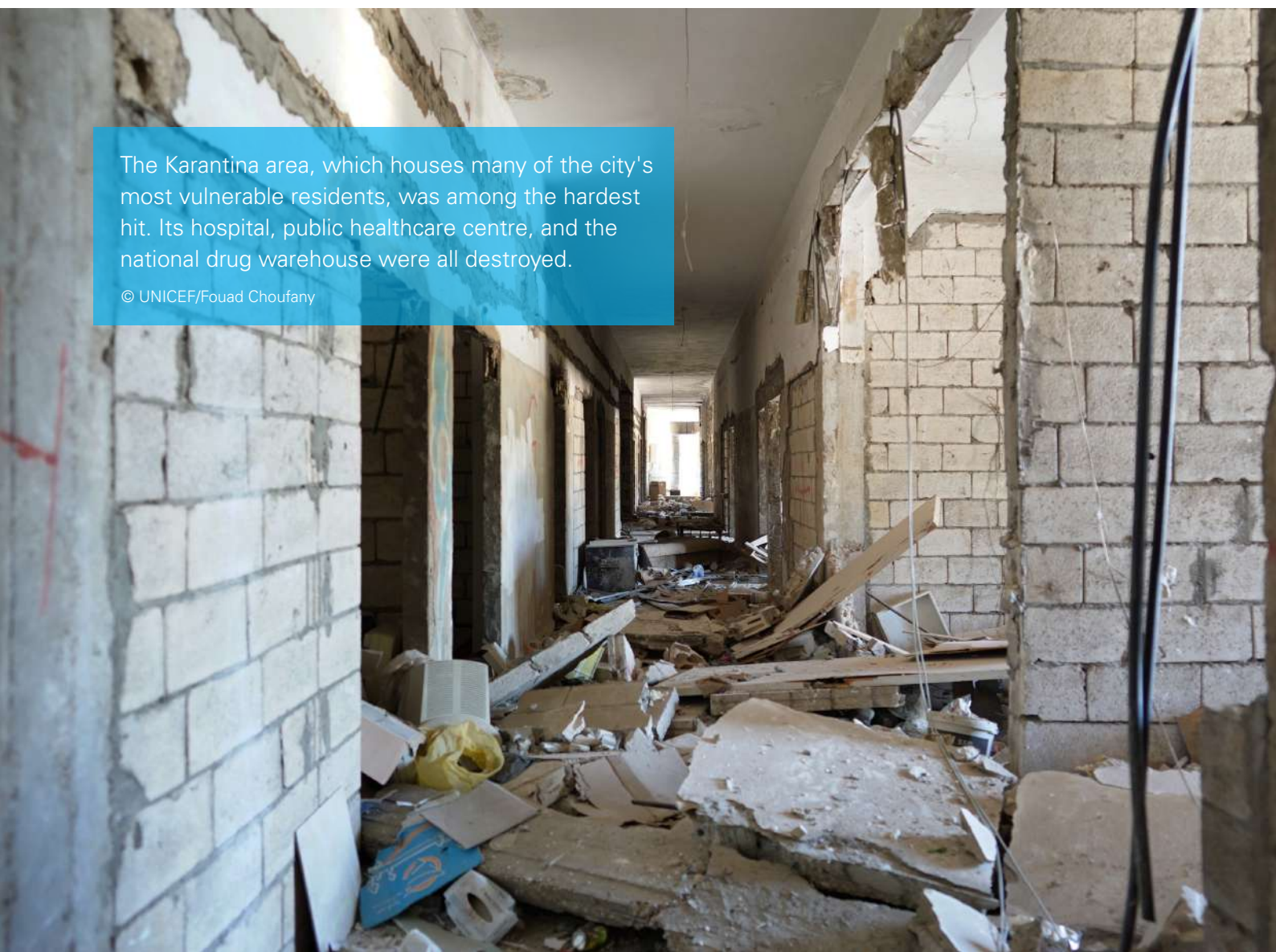
Angelina, 3. Her father was also a firefighter at the Port.

**“I want to know who took my father from me and my brother, I want to know who spoiled my life. I miss you Baba so much.”**

Sama, 5. She lost her father when the explosions destroyed the Saint Georges Hospital, where he was being treated.

The Karantina area, which houses many of the city's most vulnerable residents, was among the hardest hit. Its hospital, public healthcare centre, and the national drug warehouse were all destroyed.

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A view of the damage sustained in the children's ward at Karantina hospital on August 6, 2020. Forty-eight hours earlier, the entire facility was destroyed. UNICEF is contributing to its reconstruction.

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Many families were plunged into destitution and despair, in a country where more than half the population live in poverty.

As businesses were destroyed, tens of thousands of workers lost their jobs, leaving them struggling to feed their families, provide the health care their children need, or even afford sufficient water.

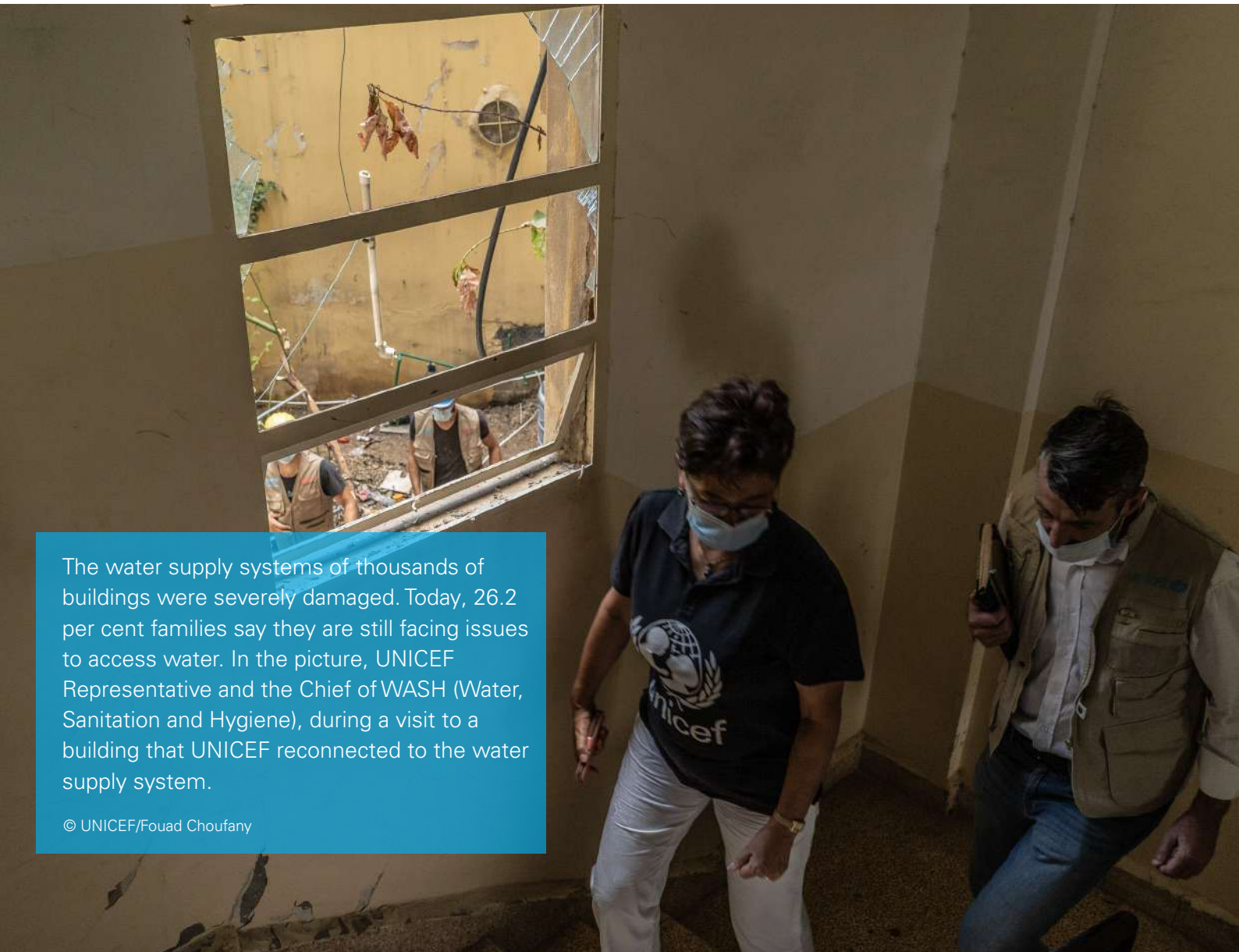
About 73,000 apartments within a 3-kilometre radius from the Port were destroyed or damaged, affecting 219,000 people<sup>1</sup>. Children's education and access to health services were severely affected. The explosions damaged 163 schools, 20 primary health care centres (PHCCs) and six hospitals – including a newborn and paediatric unit supported by UNICEF.



**“One year after the tragic events, children's lives remain deeply affected. That is what their parents tell us. Those families have been struggling to recover from the aftermath of the explosions at the worst possible time – in the middle of a devastating economic crisis and a major pandemic.”**

Yukie Mokuo, UNICEF Representative in Lebanon





The water supply systems of thousands of buildings were severely damaged. Today, 26.2 per cent families say they are still facing issues to access water. In the picture, UNICEF Representative and the Chief of WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), during a visit to a building that UNICEF reconnected to the water supply system.

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**A UNICEF survey** conducted in July 2021 shows the situation remains dire:

- **Seven in ten households** (70 per cent) requested basic assistance after the explosions and almost all of those families (98.1 per cent) still need the support. Most of the requests at the time were for cash assistance (88 per cent) and food (78.8 per cent), and those are still the most in-demand services (95.3 per cent and 73.4 per cent respectively).
- **One in three families** (34 per cent) has children still showing signs of psychological distress<sup>2</sup>. In the case of adults, the figure reaches almost one in two (45.6 per cent).
- **Four in ten households** (43.6 per cent) have at least one family member who lost employment because of the explosions, with half of them (51 per cent) saying they have not resumed work.
- Making matters worse, **one in four** (26 per cent) said they had at least one family member who tested positive for COVID-19 since the explosions.

<sup>2</sup> Among families with children under the age of 18

- **Nearly half of the families** (47.5 per cent) had at least one adult injured in the explosions. Of those, more than one in ten (12.1 per cent) said at least one adult had not recovered yet. Among households that have children, the figures are 18.7 per cent and 8.1 per cent respectively.
- **Almost all families** (97 per cent) said their homes needed repairs after the explosions and about half of those said this is still the case.
- Of the families with at least one child under 18, **one in five** (20.5 per cent) still lives in a temporary place.
- **Four in ten** (40.8 per cent) said their water supply system was affected by the explosions, and about a quarter of those families (26.2 per cent) said this is still the case.

## UNICEF'S Response

UNICEF has helped get children back to school, distributed essential nutrition and hygiene supplies, delivered psychosocial support, provided cash grants to the most vulnerable families and supported the rehabilitation of health care facilities, schools and water supply services.

UNICEF's swift and comprehensive response has been guided by three pillars:

1

Keeping children safe and healthy, and ensuring their families have access to social assistance services

2

Rehabilitating essential services, including water and sanitation, education and health infrastructure

3

High youth engagement in cleaning and rehabilitation activities



On 7 August 2020, UNICEF team and partners inspect a shipment of emergency supplies at Beirut International Airport, Lebanon.

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**“If it weren’t for the care we’ve received, I’d have been unable to offer my children the support they needed. Everyone in the city is still affected by this event. We’re all still in the process of slow recovery, trying to help one another.”**

Faten, 36, a mother of three.

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**“The psychological support I received so soon after the explosions put me on the road to recovery. It’s important now to look forward to the future, but we can’t ignore the past – it makes us who we are.”**

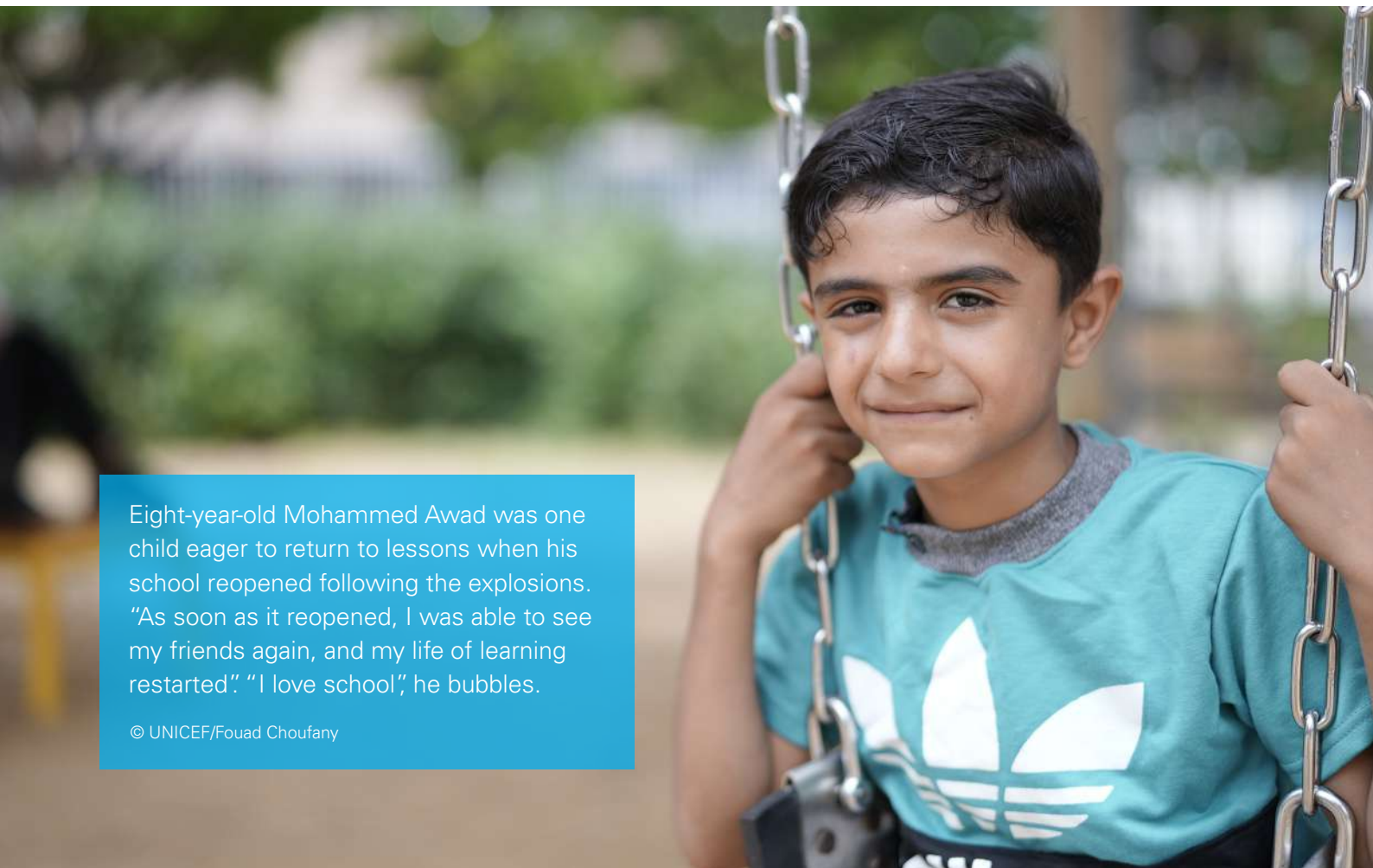
Marilyn, 12

Faten, a 36-year-old single mother of three, embraces her children in their new apartment in Beirut on July 15 2021. Their previous home was badly damaged by the port explosions, and the children traumatised. The family is one of many to have received psychosocial support through UNICEF in the aftermath of the explosions.

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**UNICEF and partners are supporting the most vulnerable children who are at greatest risk of falling through the cracks.** Our focus is on minimizing the impact on children most at risk, including those living in devastated neighbourhoods or temporary accommodation, where the risk is heightened by high population density, economic hardship and low coverage of social service, as well as vulnerable groups, including girls and children with disabilities.



Eight-year-old Mohammed Awad was one child eager to return to lessons when his school reopened following the explosions. “As soon as it reopened, I was able to see my friends again, and my life of learning restarted.” “I love school”, he bubbles.

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## UNICEF and partners:

- Are rehabilitating Karantina Hospital’s children and maternity wards.
- Rehabilitated the Central Supply and Drugs Warehouse and its cold chain.
- Provided essential nutrition supplements to 45,700 children under the age of 5.
- Are rehabilitating 13 private and public schools and refurbishing 90.
- Provided access to safe sanitation for more than 197,000 people.
- Reconnected buildings to the public water system, reaching more than 23,000 people.
- Reached more than 35,000 children, women and caregivers with quality child protection and interventions focused on gender-based violence.



- Engaged more than 1,900 youth in a community-based response, about half of them as part of cash-for-work programmes. The young people removed debris, carried out minor repairs, and prepared and distributed meals to vulnerable families.
- Engaged young people to support production of 23,154 masks and distribute them to affected families and frontline workers.
- Provided a one-off emergency cash grant to support 80,000 vulnerable people, including more than 60,000 children.
- Conducted awareness-raising activities on key healthy and protective behaviours, including COVID-19 preventive measures.

## Funding needs

UNICEF is extremely grateful for the generous contributions received from public and private partners, who supported the humanitarian response to the explosions.

While the response has now shifted from a humanitarian to a recovery phase, further flexible and timely funding is essential so UNICEF can continue responding to the urgent needs of children and their families who have been left more vulnerable than ever as the country struggles with multiple shocks.

UNICEF is expanding its programme to respond to the needs of 540,000 children facing the escalating crisis hitting Lebanon, including children affected by the explosions. UNICEF needs at least US\$85 million over the coming five months to scale-up its life-saving services, including water for over 4 million people; essential social protection services; mental health support for children; help children to return to education and learning; health – including vaccination and COVID response; nutrition; child protection and youth development and education programmes.



**“Children's lives are at risk as the escalating crisis is leaving most families unable to afford their basic needs. UNICEF is calling on the international community and the Government to redouble their efforts to unite and protect vulnerable children and their families in Lebanon to ensure we do not lose a generation.”**

Yukie Mokuo, UNICEF Representative in Lebanon

**UNICEF pays tribute to the children who lost their lives, and those who lost a loved one in the Beirut Port Explosions in August 2020. We also honour the mothers and fathers who grieve the loss of a child.**



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