

The Failure to Fulfill Economic and Social Rights in Lebanon

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Lebanon has experienced decades of pervasive corruption, poor governance, and chronic mismanagement of public funds, ultimately leading to the 2019 economic collapse. In the years that followed, the Lebanese government failed to pass much needed financial and political reforms, resulting in widespread violations of social and economic rights obligations. The consequences include rising poverty, lack of access to healthcare and education, reduced social security protections, and an overall deterioration of the quality of life, with more vulnerable groups being disproportionately impacted.

Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

The widespread corruption among Lebanon's political elite, coupled with the government's ineffective response to the 2019 economic collapse, have led much of the population into poverty and insecurity. This amounts to violations of Lebanon's international obligations to provide an adequate standard of living for all without discrimination, as per the country's obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Years of financial crimes and impunity, as well as the misuse and mismanagement of public funds, have resulted in one of the worst economic collapses in modern history, and what the World Bank has called a "deliberate depression." Hyperinflation followed, with the Lebanese pound losing 98 percent of its value, depleting people's savings and the value of their wages. This was followed by a series of informal decisions on capital controls and a failure by the government to implement urgent financial reforms to stabilize the situation. While fiscal transfers out of Lebanon were prohibited due to the liquidity crisis, investigations revealed that at least \$6 billion was transferred abroad, most likely by the powerful and well connected political and financial elite.

Lebanon's endemic corruption, poor governance policies, and mismanagement of public funds led to the tripling of poverty rates between 2012 and 2022, with over 40 percent of the population living in poverty while over 82 percent experienced multidimensional poverty.

Moreover, Lebanon's housing policies benefit the political and financial elite who have capitalized on real estate investments, while much of the general population is left without affordable housing and shelter. For example, property owners are not required to pay a tax on vacant properties, incentivizing the hoarding of property by the upper class while aggravating the shortage of affordable housing. The Lebanese government has also failed to support its population in the face of crises and emergency situations, from the Beirut Port explosion to the attacks by Israel. Amid these crises, civil society has had to fill the gaps in humanitarian aid and services due to an inadequate government response.

Right to Social Security

Lebanon's failure to ensure its population's right to social protection violates its obligations under Article 9 of the ICESCR.

Lebanon lacks a universal social protection system, and the largest public contributory scheme, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), faces several shortcomings. It covers only formal sector employment, meaning informal laborers (including migrant workers) and those who are unemployed are not covered, and it discriminates against non-Lebanese in the benefits they can or cannot access. This also disproportionately excludes women who are much less likely than men to have employment in the formal economy. Due to the lack of adequate monitoring and oversight, the NSSF also suffers from fraudulent underreporting. As a result of the economic collapse, the NSSF lost

94 percent of the value of its assets, leaving it unable to adequately cover social protection needs.

Right to Health

Faced with an economic crisis of its own making and the shrinking of already limited and fragmented social protections, the Lebanese government has opted to respond to these deteriorating circumstances by reducing or cutting state support for healthcare. These have included reducing pharmaceutical subsidies and cutting funding to the Lebanese Red Cross, making it increasingly difficult for the population to access their healthcare needs, which violates Article 12 of the ICESCR.

Access to quality, affordable healthcare has become increasingly challenging because of excessive privatization, mass exodus of qualified medical practitioners, and the rising cost of healthcare. Even those who have health insurance have often struggled to benefit, as coverage has shrunk and out of pocket costs have increased.

Marginalized groups have been disproportionately impacted as a result of indirect discrimination and systematic inequalities. Refugees, migrant domestic workers, and stateless persons remain excluded from Lebanon's national healthcare system and face additional barriers stemming from the absence of legal identity and residency documentation.

Right to Education

The Lebanese government has chronically mismanaged and underfunded the public school system, leading to the deteriorating quality of education and capacity. With poverty rising, more families are transferring their children from private to public schools, which are under-resourced and unable to adequately support the growing student body. Yet, the government has not increased its support for public schools, though it continues to heavily subsidize private schools. The rise of poverty also corresponds with increased rates of child labor and decreased school enrollment rates.

Lebanon dedicates half of its education budget to funding private schools at the expense of affordable education for every child. In times of emergency or conflict, the government has failed to provide adequate support, with public school students estimated to have lost over half of their in-person school days between 2019 to 2023.

Refugees, migrants, and stateless children face disproportionate barriers to education, including bureaucratic obstacles, limited school capacity, and discriminatory practices—all exacerbated by the lack of proper documentation or legal status. Often, stateless children are denied school enrollment altogether.

Recommendations

- Respect, protect, and fulfill the rights to health, education, social security, and an adequate standard of living for the population, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- Limit austerity measures to those strictly necessary for the public good, and prioritize increased public investment in education, healthcare, social security, and housing to meet international standards and rebuild depleted sectors.
- Implement the necessary policy reforms to combat corruption and to ensure good governance practices, while passing laws and policies to address and manage the economic collapse.
- Move away from excessively privatized, fragmented, and exclusionary systems in housing, education, healthcare and social protection, and instead build quality, universal, tax-funded, and shock-responsive public services that ensure inclusion and equal access for all.
- Develop emergency preparedness to provide for people's basic needs without discrimination in moments of crisis.