

Social Stability in Lebanon Amid Escalating Crises: A Policy Briefing Note.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the complex interplay of factors contributing to social instability in Lebanon and its subsequent impact on public health, while identifying relevant and cost-effective interventions to enhance social stability. Lebanon's ongoing economic collapse, political paralysis, and displacement crises have intensified poverty, inequality, and social tensions, severely threatened social cohesion and undermined public health outcomes. Through a comprehensive literature review of global best practices adapted to Lebanon's unique socioeconomic and political landscape, this study proposes actionable recommendations to address these challenges. Lebanon's social fabric is under immense strain from a convergence of crises-economic downturn, political fragmentation, refugee displacement, and environmental shocks that collectively fuel societal divisions and widen health disparities. Addressing these complex challenges requires integrated, multisectoral solutions that consider the interwoven social, economic, and political dimensions of instability to promote resilience, social cohesion, and improved public health.

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to conduct a thorough analysis of the different challenges to Lebanon's social stability and their significant effects on public health. This policy brief case study aims to draw attention to the critical need for measures that support social stability by exploring the various economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental factors that contribute to instability. The direct relationship between social stability and health outcomes explains its relevance and importance to public health. Improving the general well-being of people overall shall be attained through unfolding cost-effective, conflict sensitive interventions to improve social stability in Lebanon.

Problem Statement

Lebanon faces a profound threat to social stability, driven by overlapping structural inequalities, sharp economic contraction, chronic political obstruction, and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Beirut port explosion, and renewed conflict in Gaza and southern Lebanon. The economic meltdown has pushed poverty rates to historic highs, hitting marginalized regions hardest (World Bank, 2024). Meanwhile, the near-total failure of the financial sector, sky-high inflation, and persistent energy shortages have overloaded public services and deepened communal unrest (IMF, 2023). These issues are worsened by the significant displacement crisis resulting from the war on Syria in addition to the war on Gaza and Lebanon, placing additional strain on Lebanon's social fabric (UNHCR, 2024). Political fragmentation and sectarianism hinder efforts to solve these fundamental concerns, as governmental paralysis prevents critical reforms from being implemented (Transparency International, 2024). Collectively, these factors

create a volatile atmosphere that jeopardizes social stability in Lebanon.

Size of the Problem

Lebanon has a lot of social instability, and it affects almost every part of its population's daily lives. The current economic crisis has caused the Lebanese pound to lose 98% of its value since 2019. As a result, 44% of the population is now living in poverty, and in some areas, like Akkar, the poverty rate is as high as 70% (World Bank, 2024). The economy fell apart, and GDP fell by 20.4% in 2020. It will keep getting smaller, and by 2024 it is expected to be 9.2% smaller (IMF, 2023). This has left most people dealing with rising prices, which makes income gaps worse (World Bank, 2023).

As many as 90% of Syrian refugees live in poverty, and the Lebanese population, which is already struggling economically, faces the difficulty of dealing with these additional displaced people (WFP, 2024). The collapse of Lebanon's banking system, which holds large imbalances and has rendered many deposits inaccessible, further deepens the crisis, producing a loss of faith in the financial sector (NOW Lebanon, 2024). Furthermore, food insecurity is widespread, with 80% of Lebanese people struggling to purchase basic food, while 1.26 million people suffer from acute hunger (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2023; WFP, 2024). The Beirut port explosion in 2020 displaced 300,000 people and caused considerable material damage, increasing the existing economic and social hardship (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Energy shortages make inequality worse, especially for lower-income families who only have a few hours of energy per day (Human Rights Watch, 2022). About 82% of people live in multidimensional poverty, which means they have trouble getting healthcare, education, and housing (Abou Zaki et al., 2022). This is a big problem for people. Political paralysis and sectarian tensions make sure that the structural problems that keep Lebanon from dealing with these crises stay unsolved, putting the country's stability and resilience at risk for the foreseeable future (Assouad, 2021).

Methodology

The main research method used to write this paper was a thorough desk review. This included looking for high-evidence data on the idea of social stability and evidence-based interventions on both a global and a local level. The first step in the research was to find systematic reviews and research articles that talked about the definition of social stability and ways to support and promote it. We used a number of search engines, such as Google Scholar, AUB libraries, PubMed, ResearchGate, and other well-known journals. As a result, scientific and relevant research papers were found that will be

used throughout the paper, from definitions to analysis and recommendations based on successful interventions that have already been used and adapted to the Lebanese situation. Litmus testing is also essential in the process of writing this paper, as experts' opinions on social stability in Lebanon will help in better understanding successful global interventions and lead to a logical approach for contextualizing these interventions locally. Reaching out to stakeholders was done through thorough research, in addition to snowballing techniques that further helped in finding relevant contacts and experts in the field.

Root Causes of Social Instability

Structural disparities, poor governmental responses, and external impacts like pandemics or economic crises can all make society less stable. When inequality makes some groups more vulnerable to social and economic problems, they are more likely to be hurt. Poorly thought-out or poorly implemented policies may not lessen these effects. Structural problems like weak social safety nets, lack of job security, and limited access to healthcare make social differences worse, especially during times of crisis when everyone needs to make sacrifices. When the most vulnerable groups, like those who live in poor areas or have unstable jobs, are hit the hardest, social instability is more likely to happen. This threatens the stability of societies (Perugini & Vladislavjevic, 2020).

I. Economic Factors

Economic Crisis and Unemployment

In Lebanon, 44% of people live in poverty. This number has more than tripled in the past ten years. There are big differences between places, especially in the north, where the poverty rate in Akkar has gone up to 70%. People who make money in dollars can still buy things, but inflation is rising for others because of the long-lasting economic crisis, which has made income inequality worse. 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line, which shows how badly they are affected (World Bank, 2024).

The IMF's 2023 Article IV Consultation says that Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis has made the country's social stability very weak. The economy is expected to shrink by 40%, inflation rates are rising, and the banking sector is collapsing. This has led to mass out-migration, extreme poverty, and unemployment across the country (IMF, 2023). These economic problems have made it harder to provide basic public services like healthcare and electricity, which are necessary for keeping society stable. The government's unwillingness to make the necessary changes has put a lot of stress on society, which puts people at risk of more instability (IMF, 2023).

The economic crisis which initiated in 2019 led to a 20.4% decline in real GDP in 2020 was one of the greatest economic activity declines brought on by the crisis (Abou Zaki et al., 2022). With a 2.6% GDP drop, a 20.6% account deficit, and an alarming 171.2% inflation rate, the economy maintained its downward trajectory in 2022. The Lebanese Pound lost about 98% of its value by February 2023 due to a sharp depreciation of the currency. The financial sector remained bankrupt with losses exceeding 72 billion dollars, despite efforts to revive the economy, including a slight budget surplus. The World Bank's harmful prediction for 2023 included a 14% current account deficit, inflation that stayed high at 165%, and a 0.5% loss in GDP. This caused thousands of Lebanese families to lose their jobs and have trouble making ends meet, especially when it was combined with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising prices. It is concerning that almost 82% of people live in multidimensional poverty, which means they are poor in at least one of the six areas of poverty (Abou Zaki et al., 2022).

Food Insecurity

The IPSOS report says that food insecurity is at an all-time high, which makes the situation even worse on top of the economic downturn. Around 80% of Lebanese people said they didn't have enough food, and many of them can't even afford basic needs because the value of the Lebanese pound is dropping and unemployment is high (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2023). As people's buying power keeps going down, it gets harder and harder to get enough healthy food every day. This makes social and economic inequalities worse (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2023).

Before the recent war on Lebanon, the country's currency was already at an all-time low, and food prices were rising compared to before COVID. The World Bank says that poverty has almost tripled in the last ten years, reaching levels that have never been seen before (WFP, 2024). The human cost is high: 1.26 million people, or 23% of the population, are suffering from severe hunger as food insecurity spreads quickly throughout Lebanon. Almost all refugees and half of Lebanese families have trouble getting food. Many families are on the brink because of a lack of humanitarian aid and the return of war, especially in southern Lebanon (WFP, 2024).

The situation got worsened due to the Beirut Blast which took place in 2020, by the estimated 300,000 individuals who were displaced, who had less access to reliable food supplies and cooking facilities (WFP, 2020; Food Security Cluster, 2020). In the Karantina region, the explosion had a significant effect on food security and exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities, especially those related to food availability. The explosion destroyed and damaged about 40,000 structures within 10 kilometres of the port. This made an already terrible economic situation worse and made it much harder for people to get

cheap, healthy food. In the two years after the explosion, the percentage of Karantina homes that had enough food dropped from 71% to only 2%. The percentage of people who ate enough food also dropped from 96% to 30%. The Lebanese currency lost value, and food trade was limited during the outbreak, which made food more expensive, harder to find, and mostly out of reach (Makoukji et al., 2024).

COVID-19 Pandemic

The intertwining of the COVID-19 pandemic with the Beirut Blast, led to the damage of 12 basic healthcare centers and destroyed essential medical supplies at the port, 3 hospitals were completely closed, nurses had resigned, and others were only partially operational, resulting in hospitals having inadequate resources (Zahreddine et al., 2022). By 2021, 1,000 doctors and 1,700 nurses had resigned from their jobs, making things even worse for healthcare and lowering the number of people needed to respond to a crisis (Zahreddine et al., 2022). These inefficiencies made an already unstable society even more unstable by making tensions between Lebanese citizens and refugees worse.

Beirut Port Explosion

The Beirut port catastrophe on August 4, 2020, caused by improperly storing ammonium nitrate, had an enormous impact on Lebanon's social structure. The explosion, which killed 218 people, hurt more than 7,000, and forced 300,000 people to leave their homes, made existing problems worse. In addition to causing hazardous environmental conditions and material damage estimated at \$3.8–4.6 billion, the destruction also resulted in cleanup expenses exceeding \$100 million, according to UNDP. Despite repeated warnings, the ammonium nitrate was stored in a dangerous manner for six years, which exacerbated widespread mistrust of state institutions, which were generally perceived as being negligent (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Energy Crisis and Social Inequality

Due to decades of poor management, corruption, and neglect, Électricité du Liban (EDL) collapsed in Lebanon, causing blackouts in which the typical household only had power for 10% of the day, with the poorest households going up to 11 hours without power. Many people use private generators because they can use up to 88% of their salary on electricity, which makes inequality worse. The current economic crisis has made it harder for people with low incomes to meet their basic needs because of energy shortages that have been made worse by political unrest and inflation (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Banking Sector Collapse and Loss of Trust

The Central Bank of Lebanon (BDL) has a \$53 billion imbalance on its balance sheet, which shows that Lebanon is in a financial crisis. This is because there are differences between dollar-denominated deposits and actual reserves, which only add up to \$27 billion. Because of hyperinflation, a cash-dominated economy, and a lack of credit, the banking industry has lost the trust of the public. More than 90% of deposits are in dollars but can't be accessed. This problem has been made worse by politicians messing with currency rates and monetary policies that can't be sustained. To rebuild trust, there needs to be transparency and changes to the system (NOW Lebanon, 2024). Lebanon's economy is heavily dollarized, so rising interest rates and falling foreign aid could make things even worse, which would make its social problems worse. Proactive policy changes and structural reforms are needed to deal with weaknesses and build long-term resilience in the face of major regional shocks (IMF, 2023).

II. Regional Geopolitics

War on Gaza and Lebanon

The Middle East conflict's consequences are causing Lebanon to face yet another catastrophe. While the country has been suffering from a terrible socioeconomic crisis and a political and institutional gap for more than four years, it has just experienced another significant shock: the worry that the ongoing war on Gaza may spread to Lebanon (Lebanon Economic Monitor, 2023). In fact, the Israeli war on Gaza has made Lebanon's already difficult circumstances more severe by making social and economic tensions even worse. Lebanon is especially sensitive to the region's overall economic slowdown because it relies on tourism, which made up almost half of its exports in 2019. The IMF predicts that growth will slow from 5.6% in 2022 to 2% in 2023. As worries about conflict have grown, Lebanon's tourism industry has taken a big hit. In October 2023, hotel occupancy rates were down 45% from the previous year. The IMF also says that this downturn threatens jobs and foreign money coming into Lebanon, which are two very important parts of the country's economy. Uncertainty about how the war will end is also hurting business and consumer confidence, which could hurt spending and investment (IMF, 2023).

The growing violence in Lebanon is having serious effects on people's lives and the economy. If the war continues, GDP is expected to drop by 9.2% in 2024, on top of a 28% drop in 2018 and 2022. Even if there is a ceasefire, the economy will keep getting worse in 2025 and 2026 because of damaged infrastructure, a slower recovery, and lower public revenues that could put important services at risk. The conflict has already had a big impact on Lebanon's long-term growth and social stability, and rising unemployment, which now affects 1.2 million workers, could reach 32.6%. The UNDP says that a

ceasefire and international help are very important to meet immediate humanitarian needs and support recovery and stability (UNDP, 2024).

Lebanon's severe regional displacement crisis, on the other hand, affects more than 1.2 million people, including 809,000 who have been forced to leave their homes (UNHCR, 2024). Many Syrian and Lebanese refugees left their homes when Israeli airstrikes got worse on September 23. At least 340,000 Syrian refugees were in the areas that were hit (UNHCR, 2024). More than 425,000 people, mostly Syrians and Lebanese, have crossed into Syria to get away from the fighting (UNHCR, 2024). This mass relocation and the huge humanitarian needs have made it harder for both Syria and Lebanon to help people who have been affected.

The Syrian Refugees Crisis

The immense number of Syrian refugees coming to Lebanon has made the country's already weak infrastructure, economy, and social services even worse. Refugees make unemployment worse and annoy people in host communities because they often compete with Lebanese citizens for jobs that are already hard to find. More people want public services like housing, healthcare, and education, which has led to overcrowding and a drop in quality. This has made social tensions even worse. Also, complaints from poor Lebanese communities have gotten worse because they think that aid is unfairly distributed, with refugees getting more help than others. These processes lead to more social fragmentation and a dangerous coexistence between refugees and hosts, as well as worries about safety and cultural differences (ODI, 2020).

The war in Syria has had a big impact on Lebanon's economy and society. Around 1.5 million Syrians who were forcibly displaced make up about a third of Lebanon's population. This big change in the country's population puts social stability at risk. Lebanon has been severely impacted economically, socially, and politically by the volume of Syrian refugees who have been displaced there, and tensions between the host and refugee groups have grown as a result (Walsh et al., 2019). 90% of the refugees live below the poverty line and have little access to jobs or legal status. The refugee crisis has made social tensions worse because it has made it harder to find jobs and resources that are already scarce. Political incitement has made things worse because Lebanese politicians often blame refugees for the country's political and economic problems, which makes things more unfair and violent (Washington, A. C., DC., 2023).

With an estimated 1.5 million Syrians living in Lebanon (about 774,700 registered by UNHCR, plus 11,400 individuals seeking asylum and refugees of other nationalities), Lebanon remains the world's largest host nation for refugees per capita. The percentages in Lebanon rise to one in four when the 492,900

Palestine refugees in Lebanon who are registered with UNRWA are taken into account (UNHCR, 2024).

III. Local Political Challenges

Corruption and Institutional Weakness

Due to systemic corruption and governance shortcomings, Lebanon's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) has significantly declined, falling six points since 2012. The nation has struggled to establish a national integrity system in the wake of the 2020 Beirut port explosion, despite calls for reform from civil society (Transparency International, 2024).

Over the past three decades, Lebanon's entangled political and business community have caused the nation to plunge into a serious economic and social collapse, which was made worse by the 2019 financial crisis, further exacerbating the situation of poverty and mistrust. The nation is characterized by extreme inequality, with the top 10% of earners owning about 70% of all wealth, the poorest half earning less than 10%, and the richest 1% generating 25% of the national revenue (Assouad, 2021).

Sectarianism and Political Fragmentation

Lebanon's history is marked by a cycle of sectarian conflicts and short-term settlements that prolong social and political differences by offering fragile stability while failing to address underlying problems. After the civil war, the sectarian quota system was established, and it still controls governance today. Power changes frequently result in crises rather than reforms. The resurgence of sectarianism undermines group efforts for change, even in times of solidarity like the protests in October 2019. When a state is weak such as the case of Lebanon, sectarian leaders take advantage of crises to keep supporters loyal and to continue depending on their networks. This dynamic undermines social stability and perpetuates Lebanon's governance paralysis by obscuring attempts to create a cohesive, inclusive political system with sectarian rivalries (Assi, 2022).

Policy Elements

Social safety nets, economic crisis mitigation and employment support, as well as vocational and educational training, are interrelated yet distinct mechanisms for improving social stability, particularly in fragile situations such as Lebanon.

Social safety nets, such as cash transfers and food aid, serve as immediate buffers against economic shocks, thereby alleviating poverty and reducing inequality. Safety nets are essential to maintaining basic living conditions and averting social unrest in Lebanon, where the ongoing financial crisis has caused over 80% of the population to live in poverty (Abou Ltaif et al.,

2024). In times of crisis, strong social safety nets can lower social tensions and boost trust in the government (Soares et al., 2020; Chen, 2024).

Economic crisis mitigation and employment support aim to stabilize economies while safeguarding employment during downturns. In Lebanon, where unemployment and underemployment have soared as a result of the country's economic collapse, such measures are critical for restoring labor market stability and addressing concerns that may fuel instability (ILO, 2021; Abou Ltaif et al., 2024).

At the same time, vocational and educational training helps people get jobs by teaching them skills that are in demand in the job market. This is especially true in Lebanon, where high rates of youth unemployment and skill gaps make economic inequality worse. The combined apprenticeship method of a vocational training system is a great example because it has consistently lowered unemployment, increased economic growth, and improved social stability (OECD, 2020). If Lebanon adopted these kinds of programs, they could help bring the economy together and make it less likely that vulnerable groups, like refugees, will be left out.

These policy parts work together: safety nets meet immediate needs, economic crisis mitigation keeps the economy stable, and vocational training builds long-term resilience. When done at the same time, they can help Lebanon's recovery by fighting poverty, lowering inequality, and building trust in institutions, all of which are important for social stability.

Element 1: Enhancing Social Stability through Social Safety Nets

Definition

Programs for social assistance and social safety nets are non-contributory cash or in-kind payments that usually go toward vulnerable and poor populations. While some programs aim to improve fairness in opportunity or alleviate persistent poverty, others are primarily concerned with shielding families from disturbances and long-term losses that they might bring to the undefended impoverished individuals. These programs, usually referred to as social safety net programs or social welfare programs, consist of near cash benefits, in-kind transfers including school meal programs and targeted aid for food, and cash transfers (conditional and unconditional). The World Bank says that these safety nets contribute to preventing poverty, keep people from being socially excluded, and protect them from economic shocks by giving them food, healthcare, money, and other basic needs. Cash transfers help countries invest in human capital and give poor people a way to make money, which improves their quality of life. Safety net programs currently cover about 650 million people, or 56% of the poorest

quintile. They protect about 2.5 billion people (World Bank, 2024).

SSNs help people meet their basic needs, especially in emergencies, by giving them access to healthcare and education. Over time, this improves human capital and makes the economy more resilient. Also, SSN programs tend to work better when their design and monitoring frameworks include factors and outcomes that are specific to each gender. This will make sure that both men and women get the same benefits from these programs (World Bank, 2024).

For Lebanon to recover, it is imperative that initiatives like the ESSN and NPTP be expanded and adapted in order to create a robust and inclusive social safety net framework (World Food Programme, 2023).

Context

As a result of the Syrian refugee crisis, the Emergency National Poverty Targeting Program (E-NPTP) was established to assist Lebanese households. The initiative, which received US\$17.39 million in funding, extended the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) by providing e-card food coupons, health and education subsidies. The program established a sustainable food aid system, and expanded NPTP coverage from 195,000 to 261,000 people in 2021 in spite of obstacles like political unrest and economic crisis. It was crucial in creating Lebanon's first national social safety net that targeted poverty, setting the stage for later programs like the Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Initiative (World Bank, 2021).

The Emergency Crisis and COVID-19 Response Social Safety Net (ESSN) Project in Lebanon helps very poor and vulnerable groups who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis, and the Beirut port explosion by giving them cash and access to social services. The goal of the project is to build a long-lasting social safety net system, keep at-risk students in school, and stop the number of people living in extreme poverty from growing. Targeting socially and economically disadvantaged groups, the ESSN reduces inequality, boosts public confidence in social safety nets, and builds population resilience, all of which help to lessen the likelihood of social instability (World Bank and Government of Lebanon, 2022).

Moreover, crises, poverty and unemployment can lead to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among vulnerable populations, thus addressing psychological well-being within social safety interventions would ensure that individuals can effectively utilize resources provided to them, fostering resilience and self-sufficiency (Radley et al., 2020).

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a robust and inclusive social safety net framework (World Food Programme, 2023).

Benefits and Harms of Social Safety Nets

As we indicated before, social safety nets are very important for keeping society stable because they help people who are weak, especially when the economy is bad. In Lebanon, where social inequality and economic instability are big problems (Andrews et al., 2018; Kumar, 2021; Andile, 2024), social safety nets may help lessen the effects of poverty, protect vulnerable groups, and promote social stability. Building on the SSNs that are already in place would make it easier to strengthen the implementation of supportive measures that would make society even more stable. SSNs also play a big part in improving nutrition and food security, especially for groups that are more at risk. A study in Pakistan's Torgar area (Khan et al., 2023) found that social safety net programs can greatly reduce food insecurity by making it easier for people to get the resources they need and keeping household incomes stable during tough times. Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal and Zakat are two examples of these safety nets. They help families with low incomes by giving them money (Khan et al., 2023).

For instance, by offering income support and allowing workers to relocate to different jobs, Korea's late 1990s increase of unemployment benefits reduced the economic impact of the Asian financial crisis (Kumar, 2021). As demonstrated by the 1999 Korean changes that sought to establish a more flexible labor market, such benefits also present a path toward labor market reform (Kumar, 2021).

But one of the hardest things about making social safety nets is making sure they don't unintentionally discourage people from working. Benefits that are too high or last too long can make people less likely to look for work, as was seen in some countries where benefits were too high (Andrews et al., 2018; Gigineishvili et al., 2023; Andile, 2024). Poor targeting can also lead to the wrong targeting of benefits, where wealthier people get benefits meant for the poorest people (WFP, 2023). If this isn't dealt with properly, it could make inequality in Lebanon worse.

Risks of Social Safety Nets

Even though social safety nets are meant to protect vulnerable groups, they come with a lot of risks, especially when it comes to how well they work and how long they last. One of the biggest risks is that social safety nets could put a strain on governments' budgets, especially in places like Lebanon where the economy is already in trouble. If these programs don't get enough money, they might not be able to keep going and could cause financial instability (Republic of Lebanon, 2007). Also, safety nets that are poorly built or not used properly may be misused or misdirected. For example, poor monitoring and

targeting kept funding from getting to the most needy people in some IMF-supported projects, like those in Thailand and Indonesia (Kumar, 2021). In a lot of cases, these problems got worse because there weren't enough good governance frameworks and people weren't able to properly coordinate and keep an eye on projects (Gigineishvili et al., 2023). Also, the rising number of refugees and a broken social service delivery system in Lebanon could make it harder to target and distribute social assistance, which could make the program less effective (WFP, 2023). Last but not least, relying on social safety nets for a long time without making changes to the job market or starting new businesses can create a culture of dependency. This makes it harder to promote sustainable economic growth and job creation (Khemani et al., 2000; Andrews et al., 2018). For instance, using community-based solutions and involving beneficiaries directly in the design and delivery of these programs will not only strengthen social ties and make people less dependent on traditional authorities, but it will also help people become more resilient in the long term (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).

Role of the Government and The Community

The government is very important for planning, funding, and running social safety nets so that they work and last. This means making sure there is enough money, that the benefits are going to the right people, and that there are systems in place to keep an eye on and evaluate the program's success (Kumar, 2021; GGI Insights, 2024). Because of the current state of the economy, the Lebanese government needs to make sure that these programs meet the needs of the poorest people while also staying within budget (Republic of Lebanon, 2007). While putting these plans into action, the government is also responsible for fixing administrative problems that have come up in other countries (Gigineishvili et al., 2023).

Also, for social safety nets to work, people in the community need to be involved. Community members and civil society organisations can play a big part in making sure that benefits get to the right people. For instance, Senegal's community-based public works projects were able to help people and get them involved in development projects (WFP, 2023). In Lebanon, encouraging open conversation and giving communities the power to solve their own problems will make programs more popular and lead to solutions that work for everyone (Lederach, 2002). In Lebanon, where there are big political and sectarian divides, community-based strategies could help get around some of these problems. This would make sure that programs are accepted in the area and meet a range of needs (Khemani et al., 2000). The partnership between the community and the government will help keep social safety nets in Lebanon strong and useful, which will help keep social stability in the long term.

Element 2: Enhancing Educational and Vocational Training

Definition

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) encompasses official, nationally approved training, diploma courses, and skill development in a variety of occupational domains, such as manufacturing, services, and livelihoods. The strategy is designed to benefit both children and adults by providing opportunities for professional development, upskilling and reskilling (Hargreaves, 2011; UNHCR). TVET can help cut down on poverty, make society more stable, and make politics more stable by giving people the skills they need to get good jobs and make their lives better. UNESCO's TVET Strategy for 2016–2021 also stresses the importance of TVET in creating jobs and businesses for young people, promoting fairness and equal opportunity for men and women, and helping communities become more environmentally friendly and sustainable (UNESCO, 2023).

TVET plays an important role in ensuring social stability through tackling critical socioeconomic issues exacerbated by security crises and displacement. It empowers youth by providing them with valuable abilities and skills, minimizing unproductive behavior and the possibility of engaging in violent activity. By improving work opportunities and integrating young people into the economy, TVET helps to stabilize communities, decrease economic inequities, and create long-term social stability in conflict-affected areas (UNESCO, 2023).

Context

Vocational training in Lebanon can greatly improve social stability by addressing the country's economic issues, particularly among young people and refugees. It provides individuals with practical skills that improve employability, a road to family support and self-sufficiency, and a lower likelihood of engaging in violence or extremism. These programs additionally teach soft skills like how to work together and solve problems, which are very important for getting along with others in Lebanon's politically and socially divided society. In fact, including ways for people to talk and negotiate in these programs makes sure that they learn how to handle conflicts at work and in their personal lives in a positive way, which promotes inclusion and lowers tensions (Maxwell et al., 2023). These kinds of programs give teens more power, make them trust institutions more, and encourage them to get involved in their communities, all of which help make society more stable and welcoming (International Alert, 2023).

The goal of Lebanon's TVET National Strategic Framework (2018–2022) is to improve youth employment, productivity, and economic growth through improvements in technical and

vocational education. The framework was created by four ministries with help from UNICEF, the ILO, and international donors. Its goal is to improve TVET access, quality, and consistency with the needs of the labour market by addressing problems like high youth unemployment, weak public-private partnerships, and a lack of data about the labour market. It aims to give young people, especially those from underprivileged groups, the skills they need for sustainable development, strengthen partnerships with the private sector, and boost economic growth in a country that is facing economic and social crises (ILO).

The need to improve Lebanon's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system comes from its ability to reduce youth unemployment and close the gap between the skills needed in the labour market and the skills of the workforce. The ILO stresses how important TVET reforms are for creating a skilled, competitive workforce and helping Lebanon's economy recover from its social and economic problems. The project helps create jobs, promote long-term growth, and empower young people by making training more accessible and matching it with the needs of the private sector.

Benefits of VET in Promoting Social Stability

Vocational education and training (VET) is becoming an increasingly important instrument for resolving Lebanon's high youth unemployment rates, which have surged as a result of the current economic crisis. Lebanon's youth unemployment rate is 47.8%, one of the highest in the Arab area, aggravated by the collapse of the banking sector, energy shortages, and inflation (Azzi, 2024). VET bridges the gap between school and employment by providing practical, hands-on training. Unlike traditional higher education, it provides young people with essential skills that make them immediately employable, minimizing their dependency on a saturated and competitive educational system (UNDP 2022).

Vocational and educational training (VET) programs in Lebanon could greatly improve job prospects by giving people practical skills that are in demand in the job market. This would lower the unemployment rate. For example, in Germany, which is often used as a model for good VET systems, the youth unemployment rate is always lower than the EU average, at 5.7% in 2021, compared to the EU's 16.9% (Tripney & Hombrados, 2013). A similar approach in Lebanon could drastically lower the youth unemployment rate, which is currently over 20% (International Labour Organisation, 2024).

VET programs also help marginalised groups, like women and refugees, get access to education and job opportunities.. In Lebanon, integrating these groups into the workforce could bridge the employment gap; for instance, refugee participation in vocational programs has been shown to increase income-earning potential by as much as 25% in comparable contexts

(Shi & Bangpan, 2022). Additionally, programs targeting women in technical education have achieved significant outcomes, (TVET) empowers women by offering skills that increase employment prospects and close gender imbalances in the labor force. In fact, women who complete TVET programs are 30% more likely to acquire formal positions, and nations with gender-focused TVET policies report a 20% increase in women's employment in technical sectors, demonstrating its transformative influence (Gyan-Amponsah, 2023).

Potential Harms and Risks of VET

Implementing vocational education and training (VET) in Lebanon can be discouraging, even though the approach improves lives everywhere it is introduced. Quality assurance stands out as a pressing issue; without solid frameworks, the programs drift out of step with real industry standards and the skills they teach end up irrelevant (i.e the needs of local employers) . Across the Middle East and North Africa, many VET graduates find jobs unrelated to what they studied, because classroom lessons bear little resemblance to workplace practice. Almost half of all VET students in the region run into this wall, creating a huge confidence gap and deepening the youth unemployment crisis (Tripney and Hombrados 2013; CEDEFOP 2024). If Lebanon experiences the same mismatch, the ripple effects on joblessness could be severe.

Weak public and private funding further restrains the reach and quality of VET. Training centers lack the facilities, materials, and instructor time needed to upgrade curricula or add sought-after trades, a backlog that reflects Lebanon's ongoing financial squeeze. Resources are scarce, yet poor administration pushes dropout rates above 30 percent in many underfinanced programs (Shi and Bangpan 2022). On top of these material hurdles, vocational tracks still carry a stigma, seen in some circles as a second-choice option compared to university paths.

Recent surveys from across Lebanon show that 60 percent of parents still prefer a university track for their children, even when job possibilities in vocational education and training (VET) appear stronger (Vlaardingerbroek & El-Masri, 2008). Community-led campaigns that directly challenge this stigma and that clearly communicate how valuable VET can be appear able to shift attitudes over time and secure broader societal backing for such programmes (Powell & McGrath, 2019).

At present, confusion and rivalry among governments, firms, schools and donors mean that many VET initiatives operate in silos, wasting time, money and talent. To break this pattern, UNESCO (2019) urges a unified set of public-private partnerships that tie curricula, resources and assessment together, yet similar fragmentation still hobbles Ethiopian schemes, as Baraki and van Kemenade (2013) point out. The World Bank (2023) adds that unless Lebanese stakeholders align their efforts, skills shortages and mismatched

qualifications will persist, to the disadvantage of learners and employers alike.

The role of the Government and Community in Enhancing TVET Programs

Governments play a crucial part in building an environment where technical and vocational education-and-training works well. They draft the guiding policies set the rules for operation and decide where the budget goes. By putting in place a clear and wide-ranging policy framework the state can make sure that TVET courses match the needs of employers and the larger goals of the economy Grunwald 2008. On top of that regulations issued by the same authorities help keep quality high across all training centers and show that what students learn is relevant on the job market. Equally important government funding provides the tools equipment and facilities needed to deliver solid vocational education. To improve the effectiveness and relevance of TVET programs, governments might also support public-private collaborations. For example, dialogue between government and private sector stakeholders ensures training programs are well-coordinated and relevant to labor market needs. By utilizing the advantages of both the public and private sectors, these partnerships align training results with present market demands and enhance employment chances for graduates (Grunwald, 2008).

On the other hand, when a community actively promotes vocational education and helps shape the training its people receive, it becomes a key partner in making TVET succeed. Local firms can team up with TVET schools to offer apprenticeships, provide hands-on experience, and share tips on what should go into the curriculum so the skills taught match the local economy (Tikly, 2013). Bringing in groups that are usually left out is also vital; by putting fairness and opportunity first, the community can lift these people from shaky jobs into stable, formal work. In the end, this kind of inclusive effort boosts social mixing and gives everyone a better shot at moving up (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023).

to struggle just to stay open.

According to the World Bank, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), which make up 95% of firms, employ 50% of the workforce, and account for about 40% of the GDP of Lebanon, are a major contributor to the Lebanese labor market (Geha, n.d.). But these companies are under more stress than ever before because of the economic crisis and all the contributing factors for the latter. SMEs are essential to Lebanon's recovery since they stabilize divided societies, promote economic interdependence, and boost local output during times of crisis (Joseph, 2021).

Benefits

How well TVET programs work often hinges on how closely local communities work with government offices. The British Council (2017) notes that when national leaders share decision-making power with regional authorities, training can be tailored to each area's economic hopes and social quirks. This shift lets towns and districts have a real say, helping courses reflect the jobs on offer and the values people share nearby. For such a system to succeed, voices from employers, teachers, students, and officials must be at the table and labor market information must be tracked in real time. When governance is run this way, TVET stays agile and can cushion societies against sudden economic shocks.

Element 3: Economic Crisis Mitigation through Employment Support

Definition

Employment support simply refers to the aimed steps that governments take when economies wobble, steps meant to keep people in their jobs, create fresh openings, and give hard-hit industries the strength to bounce back. This approach leans on cooperation between public agencies and private firms, pulling together tools such as job-placement drives, plans to secure current positions, and wage grants that lighten payroll burdens. The ILO notes that by fighting job loss and steadying the market, these policies shield businesses and workers alike, offering a crucial safety net in shaky economic seasons.

Context

The World Bank now calls Lebanon's economic disaster one of the deepest seen worldwide since the mid-1800s. Young people and workers with fewer skills have been hit particularly hard by underemployment, while overall jobless rates have climbed past 30 percent (World Bank, 2022.) Widespread corruption, a collapsed banking sector, and repeated political turmoil combine to slash household incomes and force many businesses

Job-creation programs genuinely steady economies and strengthen communities when uncertainty strikes. South Korea's public-works initiative, rolled out during the 1997 Asian crisis, carved out temporary positions in road-building and environmental clean-up; by ensuring people kept spending, it quickened recovery, cut poverty, and propped up family budgets. A parallel effort in Lebanon might rebuild neglected water and power lines, putting the unemployed to work while bringing fundamental services up to date.

Supporting jobs in this way also sends money quickly through local markets. Argentina's Jefes program, launched in the 2001 meltdown, paid residents to fix schools and seed urban gardens, securing pay for more than two million heads of household. Researchers Galasso and Ravallion found that wages doubled

as a training budget, helping workers gain skills future employers valued. Lebanon could follow suit by backing ventures in waste recycling, solar power, or small fisheries, turning urgent repairs into a platform for long-term, environmentally sound growth.

Harms and Risks

Job support policies usually aim to lift communities yet carrying them out carries real dangers. Take Bosnia and Herzegovina after its war; programs meant to build social trust wound up deepening fault lines because they accidentally left the most vulnerable on the sidelines. When targeting is sloppy or management weak, tax money drains away instead of creating jobs (Zimmermann, 2014). Lebanon faces the same risk, especially in a setting where state oversight is shaky and patronage networks keep pulling strings.

Employment schemes can also twist how the market works in ways nobody planned. During the 2008 crisis, many EU countries rolled out wage grants that kept firms tethered to low-productivity sectors for years, stalling the restructuring everyone knew was overdue (OECD, 2011). Lebanon therefore has to anchor its hiring incentives to a broader push for diversification, gently weaning support away from stagnant industries and steering it to areas with room to grow.

Role of the Government and Community

To tackle immediate labor market challenges and lay the groundwork for steady growth, the Lebanese authorities must steer the design and rollout of targeted job-support services. A model worth considering is Indonesia's Kecamatan Development Program, which entrusted neighborhood councils with setting employment targets and allocating funds; the initiative ultimately generated over 1.5 million jobs and bolstered social cohesion (Guggenheim et al., 2004).

Such community-centered schemes would gain relevance across the region if municipal governments teamed up consistently with civil-society groups, exchanging data and refining priorities together. A strong public-private alliance is equally vital. Germany's recent Kurzarbeit program illustrates how coordinated government-employer action can work; by offering wage subsidies that let firms reduce hours rather than jobs, the scheme preserved millions of livelihoods during recessions (IMF, 2022). Adapting this framework in Lebanon could strengthen trust between employers and workers while shielding small-to-medium enterprises from deeper layoffs.

Conclusion

Lebanon now endures a deep, overlapping crisis that has chipped away at daily life and endangers both public health and the economy. Long-standing inequities, a divided political

landscape, a banking meltdown, and external stressors such as regional violence and the COVID-19 outbreak have layered new risks on an already fragile system. These brief stresses that change cannot be piecemeal; only coordinated action that tackles the underlying drivers of turmoil can spark sustainable recovery.

The outline presented here—expanding targeted cash programs, upgrading schools and vocational centers, and backing small businesses—takes a wide-angle view aimed at easing short-term pain while rebuilding a more resilient society. Well-designed safety nets cushion families during shock, lift many above the poverty line, and narrow the growing gap between rich and poor. Up-to-date training courses close the skills deficit that keeps so many young people idle, opens pathways to decent jobs, and rebuilds trust between communities. Finally, job guarantees linked to infrastructure repair not only inject immediate income but also reestablish the routine economic activity that makes recovery possible.

The effective implementation of these strategies depends on robust governance frameworks, community engagement, and inclusive dialogue. Empowering local communities, fostering public-private partnerships, and reducing reliance on traditional authorities are essential to ensuring the relevance, acceptance, and sustainability of these interventions. Lebanon can make its current problems better and build a more stable, fair, and strong society by looking at them from different angles and getting everyone involved.

This policy brief is a guide for working together to improve public health and social stability in Lebanon. The country can rebuild trust, improve social cohesion, and set the stage for long-term recovery and growth by putting money into solutions that are integrated and take the situation into account.

Litmus Testing

The proposed policy elements alongside the main factors behind social instability were assessed and reviewed through litmus testing based on several criteria such as relevance, sustainability, and feasibility. Four stakeholder meetings yielded insights that informed and shaped the framework of the brief.

Of the stakeholders contacted, the following organizations responded: UNDP, Ministry of Economy and Trade, SIDC and Academia: USJ

Recommendations proposed by these stakeholders included the following:

- ➔ *Address the issue from multiple angles, beyond logistics.*
- ➔ *Implement proactive measures to prevent escalation.*

- Engage in dialogue and negotiation to find solutions.
- Empower individuals to address problems directly.
- Reduce reliance on traditional authorities.
- Encourage community-based solutions.
- Promote fair treatment to foster solidarity.
- Strengthen social bonds and a sense of belonging.
- Address root causes of social inequality.
- Prioritize basic needs for security and safety.
- Create a conducive environment for self-expression and growth.
- Address psychological and emotional well-being.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Yasmine Oueidat: Led the methodology, literature review, data collection (interviews), and write ups She was responsible for writing the original draft.

Ahmad Addam: led the conceptualization and participate dib the methodology conducted while doing revisions and editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that this work was carried out without any commercial, financial, or personal relationships that could be perceived as potential conflicts of interest.

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