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Guiding Package

**Topic 1:** Encouraging assistance in the reconstruction and recovery of Lebanon’s economic potential

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**Table of content**

1. **Abstract**…………………………………………………………………………..2
2. **Introduction**……………………………………………………………………...3
3. **Key Terms**………………………………………………………………………..5
4. **Background Information**………………………………………………………6
5. **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**……………………………...8
6. **UN Involvement**………………………………………………………………...14
7. **Possible Solutions**……………………………………………………………..17
8. **Guiding Questions**……………………………………………………………..18
9. **Useful Links**……………………………………………………………………..19
10. **Bibliography**…………………………………………………………………….20

**Abstract**

Inflation[[1]](#footnote-0) occurs when prices rise, decreasing the purchasing power of a certain currency. Many countries have experienced it over the past few decades, each country experiences and handles it differently.

Recently, a tragedy has been unfolding in Lebanon, inflation has driven the currency to historical lows. The crash highlights a grave economic crisis that has left more than half the population to live under the poverty line. The case of Lebanon is dissenting quickly in the economic crisis and it was ranked by The World Bank as one of the world's most financial crises in the last 150 years. Lebanon is rapidly losing all their resources consequently running out of basic necessities. Lebanon has already been suffering from an economic crisis, with the spread of the Covid-19 Pandemic the situation in Lebanon has increased the level of inflation drastically, with the lockdown that was imposed, businesses and companies going out of business, prices rising, Lebanon’s economic state was only deteriorating even more. As of July 2021, Lebanon’s inflation has skyrocketed as the country’s financial and economic crisis spirals out of control, with politicians doing very little to mitigate its impact.

**Introduction**

 As Lebanon continues to fall deeper into a financial crisis, the possibility of bankruptcy[[2]](#footnote-1) is something that a lot of people are concerned about. Unlike an individual or an organization that is declaring bankruptcy, it’s not a simple matter when a country does the same thing. A national insolvency is not just a case of representatives going to court and firing their claim. Rather, the situation can trigger serious economic consequences both nationally and internationally. In the past, the Lebanese government has required aid from foreign investors and global institutions such as the IMF[[3]](#footnote-2). Many Lebanese citizens fear that this aid will no longer be available. If the IMF stops funding Lebanon, then the country will crash down, and people will probably starve to death.

 The crisis is mostly the result of 3 decades of financial mismanagement by successive governments following Lebanon’s civil war[[4]](#footnote-3) (from 1975 to 1990). The situation has been made even worse because of the global pandemic, and the billion dollars of damage caused by last year’s deadly blast in Beirut Port.

The government of Lebanon, has defaulted on its loans and failed to repay its debts. Sometimes, this is because of mismanaged finances, and other times it’s because of war. The country goes so deep into debt that it defaults on its loans, Lebanon has accumulated an amount of debt equivalent to 150% of national output, one of the world's highest burdens. Its electricity plants can't keep the lights on and Lebanon's only reliable export is its human capital.

Citizens’ lives have been turned upside down; imported fuel has gotten more expensive, power cuts from the grid have stretched from a few hours a day to as long as 23 hours, the price for generated power is nearly 10 times higher than what it was before, the supply of medicines is now unreliable, some medicine has even completely disappeared, the healthcare system has deteriorated, wages have dropped forcing doctors and nurses to migrate. As poor refrigeration and bad quality food has increased; illnesses, food poisonings and Covid cases have increased, yet doctors and nurses are being driven out of the country. This crisis has hit the poor hardest, limiting complete access to any service or goods.

Prices are rising exponentially and limiting the Lebanese people's access to any essentials; the price of food has been hiked five times this year alone. Citizens are also getting much less for their money (salaries) because of record inflation.

The outraged Lebanese civilians are demanding for their government to solve the economic crisis quickly. The Lebanese government is now talking about collapse, with ministers and government officials resigning, saying that there will not be a soft landing. Meaning that if the issue isn’t resolved as soon as possible, then people will starve to death. Which is why Lebanon is imploring for international aid.

**Key Terms**

**1- Inflation:** Inflation is the decline of [purchasing power](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/purchasingpower.asp) of a given currency over time. A decline in purchasing power can be reflected in the increase of an average [price level](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/price_level.asp) of a [basket of selected goods](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/basket_of_goods.asp) and services in an economy over a period of time. The rise in the level of prices means that a unit of currency effectively buys less than it did before.[[5]](#footnote-4)

**2- Hyperinflation:** Hyperinflation is a term to describe rapid, excessive, and out-of-control general price increases in an economy. While [inflation](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/i/inflation.asp) is a measure of the pace of rising prices for goods and services, hyperinflation is rapidly rising inflation, typically measuring more than 50% per month.[[6]](#footnote-5)

**3- Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** Total market value of the goods and services produced by a country’s economy during a specific period of time. It includes all final goods and services that have been produced minus the value of the goods and services needed to produce them. It is used throughout the world as the main measure of output and of economic activity.[[7]](#footnote-6)

**4- Bankruptcy:** Bankruptcy is a state when a community is unable to honour its financial obligations or make payment to its creditors, it files for bankruptcy. A petition is filed in the court for the same where all the outstanding debts of the company are measured and paid out if not in full from the company’s assets.[[8]](#footnote-7)

**Background Information**

 In a country once billed as the “ Switzerland of the Middle East” due to its financial stability during the 50s and the 60s, and it’s capital, Beirut, which was previously a beacon for so much tourism that it was known as the “Paris of the Middle East''. Lebanon today, is a victim of one of the world’s worst economic crises since the 1800’s. Life is a daily struggle. Food, fuel, and medicine are unaffordable, and over half the population is below the poverty line.

 After Lebanon’s civil war ended in 1990, Lebanon rebuilt through tourism, foreign aid and large donations from the Gulf Arab states such as: Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Another major source of income for the country was the form of remittances from the millions of Lebanese in the diaspora who sent money back home from across the world. However, the political instability across the Middle East and the Arab world in the past decade has had a major effect in decreasing these remittances, and consistent financial mismanagement by the ruling elite dragged the country deeper and deeper into debt.

 Soon, the Gulf states also began to hold back the funding as Iran appeared to exert greater influence across Lebanon by Hezbollah. By 2018, the government's failure to deliver political and economic reforms meant a huge amount of foreign aid and investments was being withheld from abroad. Finally, in 2018, mass protests erupted, driven and created by a generation of youths disenchanted by a political elite that had failed them time and time again. Since fall 2019, the Lebanese pound has lost 90 percent of its value and annual inflation in 2020 was 84.9 percent. Then, came 2020, the explosion at the Port Beirut, followed by the Covid-19 pandemic. For a country that was already on the track and dangerously close to a financial disaster, those were the last strike.

 Since 2019, the Lebanese pound has lost more than 90% of its original value and plunged three quarters of residents into poverty. Lebanon’s minimum wage has not changed, but hyperinflation[[9]](#footnote-8) as a result of the Lebanese pound crashing has pushed food prices up by 400%. Medicine subsidised by the government is running out. There are massive electricity shortages and even those relying on private generators don't have enough fuel to run them, there are massive cues for fuel, and many are surviving on a few hours of electricity a day.

 A recent report from The World Bank has estimated that the Lebanese economy will shrink by a massive 10% this year. With the country's GDP[[10]](#footnote-9) dropping exponentially.

Lebanon’s Economic Monitor (LEM) is a project made by the world bank, in order to follow Lebanon’s economic situation. As The Deliberate Depression ([LEM - Fall 2020](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/publication/lebanon-economic-monitor-fall-2020)) already laid-out, policy responses by Lebanon’s leadership to these challenges have been highly inadequate. The inadequacy is less due to knowledge gaps and quality advice and more the result of:

i) a lack of political consensus over effective policy initiatives.

 ii) political consensus in defense of a bankrupt economic system, which benefited a few for so long.

**Major Countries Involved**

The United States of America: Lebanon and the United States’ history began since independence in 1943 and has been marked by periods of political turmoil interspersed with prosperity built on its position as a regional center for finance and trade.[[11]](#footnote-10) In 2018, major U.S. exports to Lebanon were vehicles, mineral fuel and oil, products of chemical industries, machinery, electrical instruments, prepared food, beverages and tobacco, and vegetable products, essentials that were disappearing in Lebanon. The U.S. and Lebanon have signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement to help promote an attractive investment climate, expand trade relations, and remove obstacles to trade and investment between the two countries, as it has a high chance of rebuilding Lebanon’s economic relations. The long-standing U.S. Generalized System of Preferences program allows Lebanon to export select products to the United States without paying duties or customs. As of August 2020, the government has yet to implement economic reforms necessary to reduce overall debt and put the country on a good and stable economic footing. Shortly after the anniversary of the Port Beirut blast, US president Joe Biden announced a pledge of 100$ million in aid for Lebanon (that is on top of the 560$ million in humanitarian aid that the United States has provided to Lebanon over the last two years).

The Republic of France: France, the former colonial power, has since Independence kept a friendly relation between it and Lebanon, often providing them support. Since the Port Beirut explosion, France stood up as the figurehead of the country’s reconstruction. France’s conditional aid was accompanied by the threat of withholding the financial bailout and imposing sanctions on the country’s elite. France has organized an international fundraiser for Lebanon, timed to match with the first anniversary of the deadly explosion in Port Beirut. A conference that was supported and directly financed by the United Nations, during this conference France’s goal was to; respond to the needs of the Lebanese people whose situation is deteriorating every day. France has also tried to help Lebanon through addressing the roots of the problem, they have repeatedly called on Lebanon to assemble a pro-reform government before international lenders deliver urgent financial support to Lebanon.

The Federal Republic of Germany: Politically and economically, Lebanon and Germany were interlinked for centuries. A positive relationship between Lebanese and Germans shaped the diplomatic relationship between both states to this day[[12]](#footnote-11). Since the Port Beirut explosion, Germany made available a further €40 million to support people in Lebanon Foreign Minister Maas pledged this sum today. Humanitarian assistance projects will benefit from 13 million Euros of this sum, with a further 7 million Euros going to stabilisation, crisis prevention and peacebuilding measures. In addition, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development will provide 20 million Euros to tackle the COVID‑19 pandemic and the repercussions of the Beirut explosion. However, a real, long-term improvement in the situation can still only come with the formation of a new, effective government in Lebanon which undertakes to implement the reforms demanded by the people.

The People’s Republic of China: Since 2013, relations between China and Lebanon developed steadily and practical cooperation in various fields kept moving forward[[13]](#footnote-12), trade ties are also already strong, with 40 percent of Lebanese imports coming from China. China has [lately](https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/lebanon-looks-to-china-as-us-arabs-refuse-to-help-in-crisis/) worked to establish itself as a viable alternative to Western partnership. After the port explosion, China rushed to contribute supplies to Lebanon, a move repeated globally that attracted the name of “donation diplomacy”. China sent a group of its Lebanon-based U.N. peacekeepers to assist Beirut with medical expertise. Chinese businessmen have offered to invest in Lebanon’s faltering electricity grid, which sees regular blackouts for the country’s citizens. Since the beginning of the economic crisis, China has offered to help end Lebanon’s electrical power crisis through its state companies, an offer the government is currently considering due to its dire need of help. In addition, Beijing has offered to build power stations, a tunnel that cuts through the mountains to shorten the trip between Beirut and the eastern Bekaa Valley, and a railway along Lebanon’s coast. Unfortunately, this situation has been called an “either-or” choice between China and Lebanon’s Western partnership, so China has not been able to truly help Lebanon in a clear and direct way.

**Major Organizations Involved**

World Bank Group: The World Bank Group is the reason the world knows about this issue. It has been making calculations and estimations about where this economic crisis could take Lebanon, it’s consequences for the future of the country, and the causes of it. With the help of the United Nations, the World Bank group has shined a light on the issue and brought delegates from all around the world together, to find solutions for the issue. This has been successful, since the United States agreed to make donations to Lebanon. In August 2021, the World Bank Group gave Lebanon a 216$ million loan that would provide assistance for more than 160,000 families, and nearly 200$ million of it will go toward providing cash assistance to around 786,000 individuals through a prepaid electronic card.

The Lebanese Red Cross (LRC): The Lebanese Red Cross was established in 1945 as an independent national society. A year later, it was recognized as a public non-profit organization and as an auxiliary team to the medical service of the Lebanese Army. In 1947, it became a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and joined the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In addition, the LRC is a founding member of the Secretariat General of the Organization of the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies. The Lebanese Red Cross Society is now led by volunteers, whose mission is to provide relief to victims of natural and human made disasters, and help people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies, and to mitigate the suffering of the most vulnerable. The LRC is providing ambulance services to citizens who have been seriously injured from the blast. Unfortunately, limited resources mean that at least one in five emergencies is left untreated. Every year, the organization responds to [more than 140,000 calls](https://supportlrc.app/donate/index.html). With the decimated major port in Beirut, Lebanese citizens have lost a major source of goods, including food. Food prices are expected to increase as a result.

The Amel Association: Amel Association is a Lebanese, non-sectarian, non-profit and non-governmental organization, created by Kamel Mohanna in 1979, in response to the second Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in 1978. Being active both on emergency projects as well as longer term development projects, it aims to provide support, aids with physical and psychological health to the most in-need populations in Lebanon (locals or foreigners), through its 24 centers and 6 mobile clinics in the most disadvantaged areas of Lebanon. In 2010, it established Amel Association International and opened representation in Geneva. Since 2010, Amel has had a consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and has been a member of the Collective of Lebanese NGOs, the Collective of Arab NGOs, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, the Global Coalition for Social Protection, and many other networks. One day after the explosion, the organization mobilized in Beirut to help. It is providing [food and hygiene kits](https://amel.org/amel-on-frontlines-in-response-to-beirut-tragedy/) as well as medical support. It is currently asking for money and other forms of donations from countries and private individuals. The organization operates a few primary health care centers in the city. These are continuously in need, even months after the explosion as people slowly begin recovery. This is especially true for those who suffered serious but non-life-threatening injuries.

**UN Involvement**

During February of 2021, The ECOSOC committee has come together to discuss the financial challenges that Lebanon is currently facing. The committee has come to the agreement that there should be donations made by the United Nations itself to help out the Lebanese citizens. These donations involve financial, medical, and nutritional aid. The delegate of Iran has suggested that: “donations be made as soon as possible, since this financial crisis could cause a huge number of immigrants to spread through the middle east, and cause other kinds of problems that would be harder to solve”.

“The explosion at the Beirut port has accelerated a lot of things, that's for sure”, said Deputy Special Coordinator Najat Rochdi, who is also [UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/profiles/najat-rochdi-0) for Lebanon, speaking to reporters at the UN in Geneva, referring to the [deadly blast](https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1073252) last August that killed around 200 and devastated the city.

She said necessary political reforms had not been carried out “on time”, despite widespread warnings over the looming economic and financial crisis, that “a lot of analysts had already predicted…We're not talking about something that takes us by surprise today. I think everyone knew about it”.

Until now, the United Nations has taken three main actions concerning the Lebanese crisis. Firstly, it provided for a seat around the table, and an agreement to talk about the issue with other countries of the world. These discussions have however helped Lebanon at some point, since it has encouraged the United States to donate $1.7 billion to them, to temporarily help Lebanon.

Secondly, UNICEF despite major challenges has mobilized to respond to the economic crisis, the impact of COVID-19 and the aftermath of the Beirut explosions. It has launched an integrated child grant to support up to 70,000 children, and is working with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and national authorities on a national social grants programme. They have scaled up efforts to address malnutrition and provide mental health support to vulnerable children, particularly children engaged in child labour and other negative coping mechanisms. Spent $6.9 million in the first quarter of 2021 to secure water services for up to 4 million people. Is supporting the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, and has supported isolation centres, provided personal protective equipment (PPE) and infection prevention and control (IPC) kits since April 2020. Unicef is also supporting the rehabilitation of a hospital’s children and maternity wards and schools damaged by the Beirut port explosions. They have provided psychosocial first aid to children and caretakers affected by the explosions, distributed critical humanitarian supplies, saved vaccines from the damaged central warehouse, and engaged youth in a community-based response that involved cash-for-work. Moreover, they are seeking $565 million to address the overwhelming needs in Lebanon following the deadly explosion that happened in Beirut[[14]](#footnote-13), and the financial crisis.

 Lastly, the UN world food programme, the world’s largest humanitarian organization, saves lives in emergencies and uses food assistance to build a pathway to peace, stability and prosperity for people recovering from conflict and disasters. The United Nations’ World Food Programme is providing necessary sustenance to those in Beirut who may need it at this time. And as a result of the blast, many have lost their primary source of income, leaving them to go hungry without any alternative resources. The WFP provided [50,000 people with “cash assistance”](https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-provides-cash-assistance-50000-people-affected-devastating-beirut-blast) in September. The families received a little more than $1,000 a month for six months.

**Possible Solutions**

1- Establish an empowered economic emergency steering committee

2- Improving the public and private sector debt.

3- Encouraging international and foreign investments as well as fundings

4- Encourage tourism in Lebanon to help rebuild the economy.

5- Create campaigns promoting Lebanese products and local currency

**Guiding Questions**

1. Was your country affected by Lebanon’s economic crisis?
2. Where does your stand on this exact crisis? Did your country aim to send help to Lebanon once faced with the economic crisis?
3. How did Lebanon reach this financial and economic crisis after having one of the biggest economies in the Middle East?
4. What are solutions that can solve this problem from its roots?
5. How did this economic crisis affect the citizens and the social sector of Lebanon?
6. How could this crisis have been prevented?
7. What have the organizations done until now to solve this issue? Have these efforts shown improvements?

**Useful Links**

* Resolving Lebanon’s financial crisis: <https://www.lecommercedulevant.com/article/29577-resolving-lebanons-financial-crisis>
* Assistance for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/documents/2020/resolution-1996-32.pdf>
* Lebanon’s Economic Crisis: A Ten Point Action Plan for Avoiding a Lost Decade: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2020/01/06/lebanon-s-economic-crisis-ten-point-action-plan-for-avoiding-lost-decade-pub-80704>
* Lebanon’s economic crisis explained: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwmY6OElAtk>
* How Europe Can Help Lebanon Overcome Its Economic Implosion: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/lebanon/219-how-europe-can-help-lebanon-overcome-its-economic-implosion>

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5. Definition of “Inflation”: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/i/inflation.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Definition of “Hyperinflation” : <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/hyperinflation.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Definition of “GDP” : <https://www.britannica.com/topic/gross-domestic-product> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Definition of “Bankruptcy”: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/bankruptcy> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Key Terms Definitions [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. GDP: Gross Domestic Product is the total market value of the goods and services produced by a country’s economy during a specific period of time also in Key Terms Definitions [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. U.S Department of State: “U.S-LEBANON RELATIONS”. <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/lebanon/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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13. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China: “ China and Lebanon”. <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2843_663676/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. For more information on the deadly explosion in Beirut visit <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/copy-of-beirut-explosions> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)