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URBAN

DIGEST

LEBANON COUNTRY OFFICE

**PLACING CITIES AT THE
HEART OF LEBANON'S FUTURE
RECOVERY AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

CONTENTS

1

Introduction

2

First National Urban Forum of Lebanon

3

Renewed efforts towards the ongoing urban recovery of Beirut

4

The Beirut Municipal Social Cell – bringing governance closer to the people

5

Public spaces: A means to achieve an inclusive urban future for all

6

Maraach: the transformative power of urban regeneration in Bourj Hamoud

7

What's new since the last Urban Digest?

8

Fifteen years supporting Lebanon on the path towards sustainable urban development

9

Voices from cities: Interview with Mayor of Tyre, Hassan Dbouk

10

Upcoming

1. Introduction

More than two years have passed since the devastating Beirut Port explosion tore through Lebanon's capital city. Lebanon continues to face political deadlock with a caretaker government in power since the long-awaited parliamentary elections in May 2022. This in turn is seeing an ever deepening socio-economic and financial crisis, rendering basic services, education, health and many other sectors in despair.

With the current presidential vacuum, hopes on electing a new president are seen as the next step towards hopefully advancing on various reforms to stabilize and recover the nation. Needs of deep reform across the development spectrum, and particularly for vital basic services sectors including housing, transport and energy – amongst others are crucial to Lebanon's recovery from the ongoing compounded crises. These basic services form part of a greater need to revisit the urban development domain in the country, by returning, amongst multiple needs, to the basic principles of urban planning. By doing so, addressing key basic services sectors, this combined with the overall reform agenda, have the potential to see Lebanon out of the ongoing crises while setting the nation on a path towards sustainable urban development.

To table the discussion about the state of urbanization in Lebanon, as well as deep dive into the context of the above-mentioned sectors and recommendations for their improvement, UN-Habitat hosted the first National Urban Forum of Lebanon in March 2022.

In this edition of UN-Habitat Lebanon's Urban Digest, you can find updates on several of the agency's ongoing projects in the country, a wrap-up about the first National Urban Forum of Lebanon, a deep dive into Beirut's urban recovery and an interview with the Mayor of Tyre, Hassan Dbouk as he speaks of projects ongoing in the area to improve the capacity of the municipality and union of municipalities.

Thank you for reading!

UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme



2. National Urban Forum:

fostering a sustainable, inclusive and prosperous Lebanon

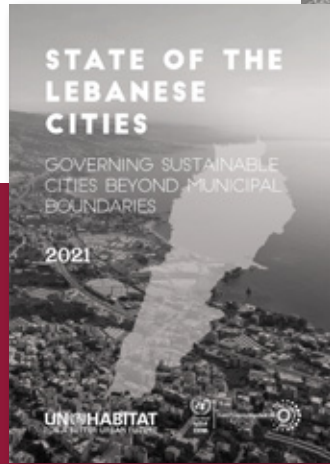
Under the patronage of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Najib Mikati, UN-Habitat and ESCWA held the first National Urban Forum (NUF1) of Lebanon in March 2022. The overall objective of the NUF1 in Lebanon was to concretely discuss the increasing urban challenges, considering the multiple ongoing crises in Lebanon, while articulating why an urban lens is indispensable to contributing to finding evidence-based solutions out of the current complexities, and to fostering a sustainable and prosperous Lebanon, ensuring inclusiveness of vulnerable groups who often risk falling behind. The Forum also aimed to:

- Increase understanding of the state of urbanization
- Increase understanding of the needs of those most vulnerable in urban settings
- Improve advocacy for urbanization that is well-managed

The Forum, themed, “Towards a more sustainable and inclusive future for Lebanese cities” forms part of UN-Habitat’s mandate to promote, discuss and bring about socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities, including an inclusive debate surrounding these issues.

The state of urbanization was clearly laid out during the Forum through the launching of the UN-Habitat-ESCWA State of the Lebanese Cities Report, a ground-breaking report that analyses 10 cities across 19 themes, identifying entry points for moving towards a more sustainable urban realm.





UN-Habitat-ESCWA State of the Lebanese Cities Report 2021

The State of the Lebanese Cities Report presents primary and secondary data and analysis across themes relevant to sustainable development in Lebanon as an overwhelmingly urban country. Following decades of rapid and unplanned urban expansion resulting in dire inequalities in access to services and infrastructure within and between cities which have been exacerbated by the compounded crises emerging since 2019, the question is how inexorable urban growth can be harnessed as a force for sustainable development and for upholding human rights such as those to adequate housing, water and sanitation.

The report advocates for an urban bias to policy deliberations about crisis response and recovery in Lebanon. This would imply steps towards governance rescaling to whole-of-city level anchored on collaborating municipalities and city plan-making; and a functioning national spatial development framework. Together these city and national components would articulate the long-range direction for short-term responses. Such an institutional landscape would help catalyse localization of the 'urban' sustainable development goal (SDG) 11 and related SDGs and contribute to an increasingly inclusive and sustainable future for communities in Lebanon.



The Forum's first day was centred on discussions around urban data in Lebanon, unpacking the significance of urban data generation and evidence-led decision-making for urban crisis response and longer-term development of Lebanese cities. The UN-Habitat-ESCWA State of the Lebanese Cities Report – that features multisectoral data and analysis and focuses on 10 major cities in Lebanon across themes relevant to sustainable development – was launched on the first day of the National Urban Forum of Lebanon.

Through a technical deep dive on the second day, the forum held dedicated thematic sessions on transport, housing and energy. A [Declaration](#) was read-out concluding the forum, capturing a series of action-oriented commitments and suggestions.

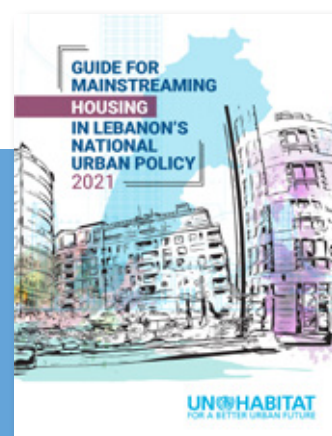
The technical sessions also launched three reports on housing and transport, as part of UN-Habitat's [National Urban Policy \(NUP\) programme](#) and following the publication of a [diagnosis report](#). The reports offer critical policy recommendations for reforming the transport and housing sectors and responding to immediate needs and long-term goals.



1. Guide for Mainstreaming Transport and Mobility in Lebanon's National Urban Policy

The transport sector in Lebanon is considered one of the most unsustainable in the Middle East region, due to weak governance structures and regulatory frameworks, the absence of a modern and reliable public transport system, and a car-friendly culture dominated by large old-model polluting cars. Lebanon lacks an integrated and inclusive transport system, with mostly informal public transport services and very limited infrastructure for alternative transport means.

This guide proposes a set of policy orientations, recommendations and priorities to transition the transport sector in Lebanon to a sustainable future by helping to improve the state of mobility and the provision of transport services across the country. It is structured under the commonly adopted Enable-Avoid-Shift-Improve policy formulation framework for sustainable transport and mobility. The policy recommendations outline the necessary steps for designing and implementing a national transport strategy.



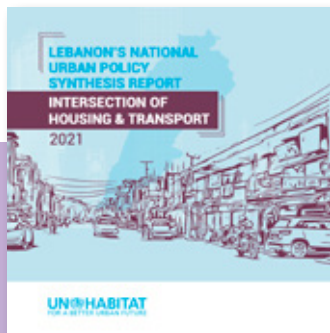
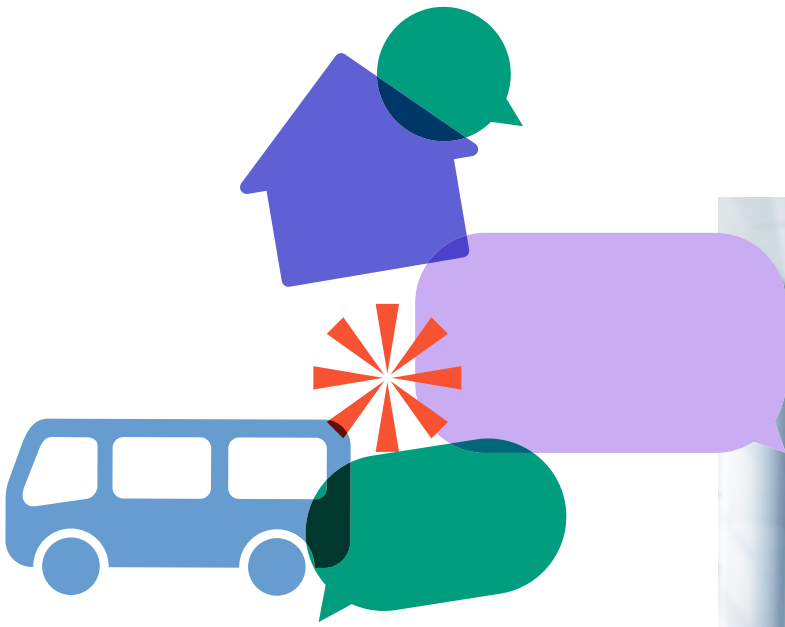
2. Guide For Mainstreaming Housing in Lebanon's National Urban Policy

Access to affordable, adequate and secure housing presents a major challenge in Lebanon, especially in big urban centres. The housing sector is characterized by a persistent housing-income disconnect and supply-demand mismatch. Besides long-standing issues, the sector's challenges have also exacerbated due to the multiple crises facing the country – protracted Syrian refugee crisis, 2020 Beirut Port explosion, and the ongoing, protracted socio-economic crisis.

This guide outlines the necessary policy orientations in order to design and implement a future national housing strategy. After providing an analysis of the housing sector, the guide identifies three major housing policy priorities:

- 1) Tighten the regulation and organization of land and real estate markets
- 2) Diversify the channels of housing finance and delivery
- 3) Regenerate the existing formal and informal housing stock

It also provides an action plan that converts them to actionable programmes, instruments and interventions. It proposes 21 recommendations with short-term initiatives while also laying the groundwork for longer-term policy goals.



3. Lebanon's National Urban Policy Synthesis Report: Intersection of Housing and Transport

Based on the two above guides that detail how to mainstream housing and transport–mobility into a future [National Urban Policy \(NUP\)](#) in Lebanon, UN-Habitat has prepared a synthesis report that provides insights into the interlinkages between the two sectors. The report also briefly discusses the additional considerations brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic on these two sectors in Lebanon, as one example of a crisis that has policy implications.



3. Renewed efforts towards the ongoing urban recovery of Beirut

Reviving Beirut's vibrancy and urban fabric by recovering housing and creative and cultural industries

Project name

Beirut Housing Rehabilitation and Cultural and Creative Industries Recovery

Location

Beirut

Funding amount

US\$ 12.75 million

Duration

2022-2024

Donor

Lebanon Financing Facility

On 25 February 2022, UN-Habitat signed an agreement with the World Bank to implement the project [Beirut Housing Reconstruction and Cultural and Creative Industries Recovery](#).

The US\$ 12.75 million grant – financed through the Lebanon Financing Facility – will allow UN-Habitat to support the housing, creative, and cultural sectors in the aftermath of the 2020 explosion at Beirut Port, the third-largest non-nuclear explosion ever-recorded. The explosion impacted 70,000 homes and affected more than 300,000 people.

The project is [one of the Lebanon Financing Facility's \(LFF\) funded projects launched](#) by Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati, donors of the LFF, the World Bank, and representatives from UN-Habitat at the end of February 2022.

Many of the neighbourhoods heavily damaged by the Beirut Port explosion are located in historic areas of Beirut and were home to residents of all income levels and demographic backgrounds. This project will prioritise complex, climate-resilient repairs of severely damaged vacant residential heritage buildings in these historic neighbourhoods within 5km of the epicentre of the explosion. It aims to rehabilitate 31 buildings and to provide technical assistance for rental support.

The project will also provide technical assistance and 150 grants to affected cultural entities and practitioners, prioritising women and women-led entities, operating in targeted cultural and creative industries to provide them with incentives to continue cultural production in neighbourhoods affected by the explosion.



Managing rubble left by the Beirut Port explosion: a duty to Lebanon's environment

Project name

Rubble to Mountains

Location

Beirut

Funding amount

US\$ 350,000

Duration

2021-2022

Donor

Jointly funded by UNICEF and UN-Habitat

As part of UN-Habitat's multiple ongoing efforts to contribute to a resilient urban recovery of Beirut, identifying a long-term and sustainable solution for the construction and demolition waste (CDW) generated from areas affected by the Beirut Port explosion remains a priority. Subsequently and together with partners, the Rubble to Mountains (R2M) consortium in Lebanon was established in August 2020.

The consortium consists of representatives from the American University of Beirut (AUB) Neighborhood Initiative, Development Inc., Governor of Beirut, Municipality of Beirut, Lebanese Reforestation Initiative (LRI), UN-Habitat and UNICEF and in collaboration with Arc-en-Ciel (AeC).









The initiative has already reached key milestones in its approach, which include:



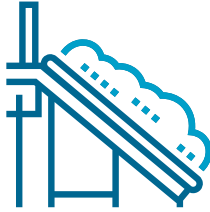
Diverted CDW from being dumped into the sea or in almost saturated landfills.



Mobilized and trained more than 4,000 volunteers to collect, safely sort, and store more than 15,000 tons of glass waste and 150,000 tons of debris.


Hired a global architecture, engineering, planning, and technology firm – IBI Group – to conduct CDW sampling, testing as well as air and wastewater monitoring for the sorting, crushing and disposal operations. 26 CDW samples were tested at laboratories in Canada and the Netherlands for the detection and to guide the proper handling of Asbestos¹, 11 air samples were also tested. Accordingly, the **“Bakalian Waste Storage Site Sampling Methodology and Analytical Report”** was drafted.




Developed remediation and site management plans for the safe storage, sorting, treatment and crushing of the stockpiled debris which were documented in the **“Guidelines for Managing Asbestos at the Bakalian Disposal Site”** report shared with all concerned stakeholders.



Developed the **“Quarry Rehabilitation – Asbestos Management Technical Input”** report to inform quarry restoration efforts using the CDW.



Produced 30 public benches from the rejects of glass and plastic (RoGP) material, ready to be installed in Beirut’s public spaces.



Received and safely handled an average of 45 tons of daily CDW generated by the ongoing rehabilitation works from the blast affected areas.

In line with national/international practices, the consortium submitted an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to the Ministry of Environment for the treatment of the Beirut Rubble Management (BRM) site with the support of the Engineering, Design and Environmental Services S.A. (EDESSA). A hybrid public hearing event was held at AUB on 1 April 2022 to inform the public of the outcomes of the project’s EIA, verify the findings in relation to the reality of the situation, and confirm that the stakeholders are part of the decision-making process. Pending EIA approved, site operations will resume.

¹ Asbestos is a group of six naturally occurring minerals that cause health-related risks.

A selection of streets in Karantina now seen as public and inclusive spaces

Project name

Rehabilitation of the National AIDS/TB programmes facilities in Lebanon, ensuring continuity of care and prevention in response to COVID-19

Funding amount

US\$ 300,000

Donor

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

Location

Beirut

Duration

2020-2021

In March 2022, UN-Habitat and CatalyticAction, inaugurated several innovatively rehabilitated sidewalks in the neighbourhood of Karantina, close to the Beirut Governmental Hospital, the National HIV and TB Centre and Karantina Public Park.

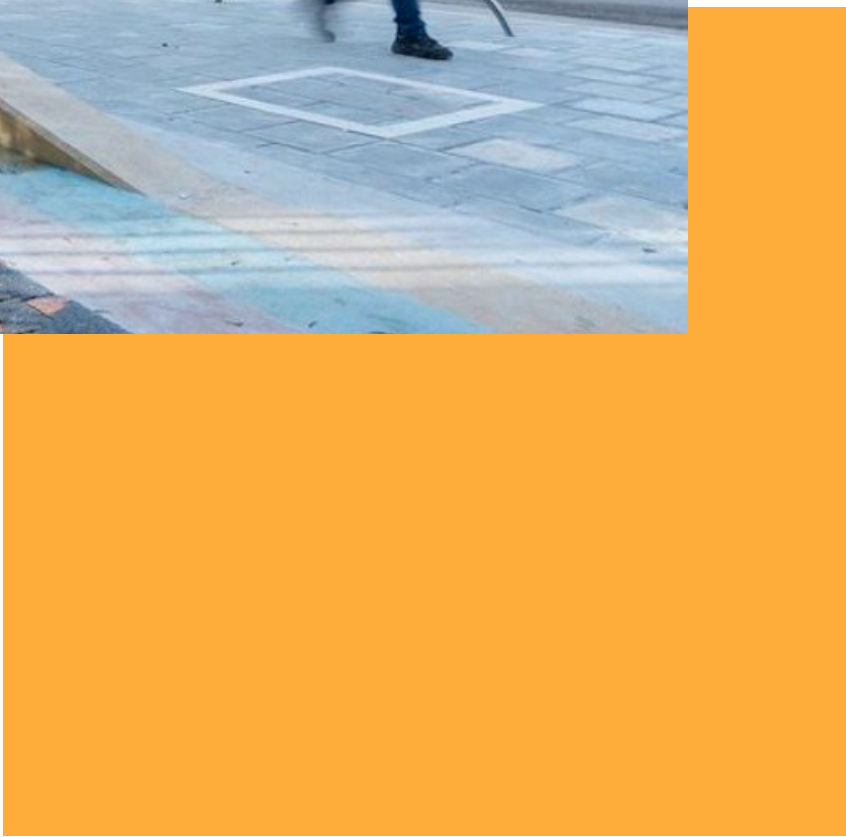
Funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Fondation de France, the project focused on making Karantina's streets more pedestrian and family friendly by slowing traffic, improving existing sidewalks, and making the area greener. This was done by creating pedestrian crossings, building access ramps, a new roundabout, speed bumps, road markings and planting trees. A new sidewalk was implemented that features a long colourful concrete bench for people to gather and children to play, where cars once parked. The design interventions for this project were guided by a participatory approach ensuring input from the local community around their needs, visions, and aspirations for the space.

This initiative is part of UN-Habitat's wider Sida-funded project that supported the only National HIV and Tuberculosis (TB) Centre in Lebanon restart its operations after it was severely damaged by the Beirut Port explosion. UN-Habitat rehabilitated the Centre ensuring it regained structural stability, is easily accessible to the public and uses renewable energy so it does not rely on the national power grid.

“Beirut was previously known for its public spaces, but with rapid unplanned urbanization, these spaces have decreased. We must all work to create new public spaces and revive existing ones, as they are the beating heart of the city and provide people a space to relax and interact with their neighbours. These interventions are crucial. We should all join efforts to improve the quality and increase the number of public spaces in the city, and support the local community to protect them,”

said, Judge Marwan Abboud, Governor of Beirut.





4. The Beirut Municipal Social Cell

– bringing governance closer to the people

Project name

Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC2CM)
Targeted City Action - Beirut

Location

Beirut

Funding amount

US\$ 61,000

Duration

2020-2021

Donor

European Union & Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

UN-Habitat and the Municipality of Beirut launched the Municipal Social Cell (MSC) in March 2021 which aims to mitigate social and protection issues encountered by vulnerable host and migrant populations within the city of Beirut targeting 8,500 direct beneficiaries. The Municipal Social Cell was established as one of the Targeted City Actions (TCAs) for Beirut under Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC2CM), co-funded by the European Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The initiative aims to enhance the engagement and commitment of the Municipality of Beirut in addressing social and protection issues encountered by vulnerable populations settled within vulnerable neighbourhoods of Beirut.

The Municipal Social Cell has organised many community interventions targeting priority sectors: security, health, personal and professional development; identified during its community consultations. The Municipal Social Cell worked with several stakeholders to implement these interventions such as awareness-raising sessions on mental health, drug-abuse prevention; and, women's health, as well as, training sessions for youth development.

"Beirut's Municipal Social Cell was one of the most successful entities that entered the poor and rich neighbourhoods of Beirut. After several meetings between the Municipal Social Cell and the Sabra and Tamliis Communities, and through a participatory approach, Beirut's municipal social cell carried out several environmental, health, educational, and awareness activities. It brought people together and comforted them. In fact, Beirut City is truly in need for such a dynamic unit," said Imane Moukahal, Beneficiary.



“The Municipality of Beirut did not focus much on social issues. The Municipal Social Cell opened a channel for the Municipality of Beirut to hear vulnerable communities’ needs and challenges. Better targeted projects could come out from the data collected by the Municipal Social Cell, hopefully addressing key social and protection issues in Beirut,”

said Jamal Itani, Mayor of Beirut.



5. Bringing communities together through public space design

Project name

Urban Connections: Public Spaces Planning for Inclusive Communities

Location

Bar Elias, Bebnine and Mhamara Akkar and Bekaa

Funding amount

US\$ 227,000

Duration

2021-2024

Donor

United Nations Development Account, UNDA

Lebanon hosts [1.5 million](#) of the [6.6 million](#) Syrians who have fled their country since the onset of the war in 2011, with [around 840,000](#) registered with UNHCR as of the end of January 2022. According to the [Lebanon Crisis Response Plan's 2021 population package](#), Syrians and Palestinians constitute around 60 and 38 per cent of the total population of Bekaa and Akkar governorates, which are near the Lebanon–Syria borders, respectively; these are the highest and third-highest proportions, respectively, among all governorates.

The large population increase since the Syrian crisis began has exerted additional pressures on the already existing deficiencies in the provision of adequate and accessible housing, public services, and livelihood opportunities, among others. With limited institutional, financial and human resources and capacity, local authorities face difficulties in responding adequately to these challenges, especially in regions highly affected by these developments.

As an essential component in cities, public spaces are key enablers of human rights, providing opportunities for social interactions, promoting inclusion, and building social cohesion between host and migrant communities. However, [access to adequate and well-managed public spaces in Lebanon is insufficient](#), due to the lack of proper urban planning rules and regulations, the proliferation of private and uncontrolled development, and the increase of people living in Lebanese cities (including the influx of Syrian refugees), among others.

In this context, UN-Habitat initiated a project titled “Urban Connections: Public Space Planning for Inclusive Communities,” through funding from the United Nations Development Account (UNDA). The project focuses on facilitating the process of local authorities and host and refugee communities jointly designing a public space as a means of improving social cohesion. It also aims to foster local economic development by enabling local authorities to provide a safe, beneficial and upgraded living environment for all. Through participatory planning approaches and public space quality assessments, the project aims to improve policies, develop strategies and plans and enhance local capacity for creating accessible, inclusive, profitable and safe living environments in selected cities in Western Asia (Lebanon) and cross-border urban agglomerations in Latin America.





SDG Target 11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Focusing on the border areas of Abdeh (Akkar Governorate) and Bar Elias (Bekaa Governorate), UN-Habitat will take the lead of implementing the following main activities, among others:

Capacity development workshops for representatives of local authorities and communities

Regional knowledge and learning exchange (country-level meetings-tours)

Cross-regional knowledge and learning exchange (Lebanon and Latin America)

1 report on migration and relevant urban policies covering the Lebanese and Latin American contexts

2 neighbourhood-level public space assessments

3 site-specific public space assessments

3 Technical architectural/engineering designs of public spaces, developed through the analysis of assessment findings and

8 community engagement participatory workshops

Policy recommendations for the Lebanese context and

1 document on guidelines, tools and policy recommendations covering the Lebanese and Latin American cases

In March 2022, UN-Habitat Lebanon held a hybrid event to launch two local coordination committees, representing the communities of Bar Elias and Abdeh, that were formed to support the implementation of some of the above-mentioned activities.

By enhancing local capacities to design inclusive public spaces, this project not only provides long-term social and economic benefits to vulnerable communities, but also offers them the knowledge and tools they can apply for other similar purposes in the future.



6. Maraach: the transformative power of urban regeneration in Bourj Hammoud

Project name

Improving the well-being of host & refugee population through enhanced environmental & hygiene conditions in Maraach neighbourhood in Greater Beirut

Location

Maraach, Bourj Hammoud

Duration

2021-2022

Funding amount

US\$ 1,415,000

Donor

Polish Aid

Today, Maraach, one of the most densely populated areas in the Middle East, sees the benefits of integrated and multi-sectoral urban regeneration efforts. Maraach, once considered one of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods of Bourj Hammoud and across Greater Beirut, is now perceived as a progressive neighbourhood in the area.

How did this happen? With generous funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and the Government of Japan, UN-Habitat and Polish Centre for International Aid (PCPM), in close coordination with the Municipality of Bourj Hammoud (MoBH) and local stakeholders and partners, succeeded in alleviating poverty and improving the urban conditions of the neighbourhood. Through using participatory planning methods and community-based decision-making processes, the project helped promote an integrated response that secured multi-sectoral benefits of interventions to targeted residents.

In total, 90 buildings, in 5 streets including 300 residential units were upgraded through a multisectoral and community-led approach. Additionally, almost 100 persons have benefited from the cash-for-work programme which allowed them to apply their skills in the rehabilitation process while working to improve their community.



“I live in Lebanon with my family fleeing the war in Syria. Due to my family’s economic situation, I couldn’t pay my university tuition fees. Through my experience in the rehabilitation of the electrical wires for the past 3 months, I was able to secure the needed amount for my tuition fees and gain skills in a new field. I would like to thank, UN-Habitat, and PCPM for this opportunity!”

said Alaa Soultan, one of the beneficiaries of the Maraach project.

As part of the project’s environmental sustainability component, a photovoltaic (PV) solar system has been designed and installed on the roof of a Karasun Manuk Community Centre to provide clean electrical power generation. This resulted in the production of energy that is lighting up the streets in the alleyways of Maraach, thus contributing to increased safety, economic opportunities and closing the gap in electricity provision in the area.

In June 2022, UN-Habitat brought together the donors and local community on a tour of the alleyways to mark the end of the project. The closing event included a tour inside the alleyways of Maraach, where officials met with beneficiaries of the project and heard their first-hand perspective on how the project has helped improve their lives and that of the wider community.

Following the successful completion of this project, UN-Habitat and Polish Aid will be expanding this project through a second phase, by providing additional renewable energy solutions for 3 additional public facilities in Greater Beirut, thereby contributing to enhanced health, safety, and security conditions of all population groups residing in the targeted areas.



7. What's new since the last Urban Digest?

Resilient Water Solutions Against Climate Change in Jordan and Lebanon: an update

Project name

Resilient Water Solutions Against Climate Change in Jordan and Lebanon

Funding amount

US\$ 6,986,754

Donor

Adaptation Fund

Location

Zahle

Duration

2021-2025

In October 2021, UN-Habitat in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched a regional project aimed at increasing the capacity of displaced persons and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon to manage water scarcity caused by climate change.

The project, which is funded by the Adaptation Fund at a value of nearly US\$ 14 million, will run for four years and is implemented in partnership with the governments of Jordan and Lebanon through their ministries of environment as well as other national ministries, local authorities, civil society, and the private sector in target areas.

The project is unique in that it aims to solve a cross-border problem through rainwater harvesting, treated wastewater reuse, efficient irrigation, and permaculture all while focusing on the engagement of marginalized and vulnerable communities. The project also includes intensive training activities aimed at ensuring the sustainability of project outcomes.

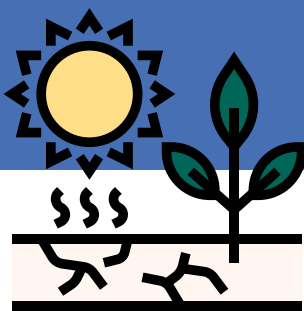




Innovative aspects of the project include the:

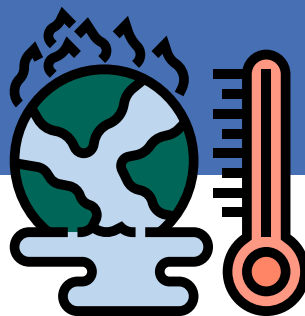
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Establishment of local observatories to enhance evidence-based and climate change mainstreamed decision-making



2

Development of a model and associated online module aiming at urban risks and vulnerabilities assessment and management in cities with widespread stress from the influx of refugees



3

Development, in cooperation with ESCWA, of a knowledge management platform and a Community of Practice including policymakers, practitioners and researchers to share the knowledge gained through the project and facilitate its replication



The Arab region is one of the most vulnerable regions of the world to the negative effects of climate change and is now considered the planet's most water-scarce region. By 2030, the effects of climate change are expected to reduce renewable water resources by another 20 per cent due to declining precipitation, rising temperature, as well as over-extraction and pollution of groundwater.

At the same time, the region is home to the world's largest population of refugees and displaced people, with Lebanon and Jordan ranked as the largest and second largest refugee-hosting countries per capita. Rapid urbanization and population growth are adding strain on dwindling natural resources, with over 75 per cent of the Arab population expected to live in urban areas by 2050. The project was launched after an inception workshop in October 2021, with the participation of the ministers of environment from Jordan and Lebanon, and who will chair respective national project steering committees, and other key stakeholders, in order to outline and endorse the project's work-plan and implementation process.



Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project: an update

Project name

Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project

Location

National

Funding amount

US\$ 8,530,952

Duration

2019-2022

Donor

EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis

The Municipal Empowerment and Resilience project (MERP), a joint UN-Habitat and UNDP initiative, aims to strengthen the long-term resilience of subnational authorities in Lebanon as well as host communities, refugees and displaced persons. The project is funded by the European Union through the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, 'Madad Fund' and focus in the North, South and in Mount Lebanon.

In strengthening local resilience, MERP takes an explicit governance approach through six core activities, namely:

- 1) support to national level,
- 2) basic services and local economic and development
- 3) municipal finance
- 4) capacity development and training
- 5) social stability, and
- 6) community awareness raising/communication which is embedded across all activities.

In this edition of the newsletter, updates on core activities 1) support to national level and 5) social stability are featured:

Support to national level

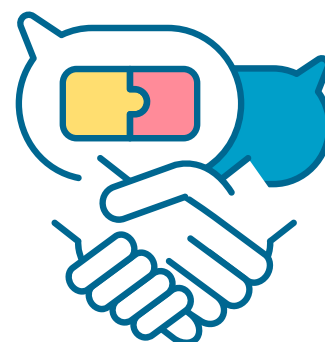
The Directorate General of Local Administrations and Councils (DGLAC) plays a crucial role in enabling local authorities in Lebanon to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. DGLAC is tasked to support over 1,100 municipalities and 50 unions of municipalities with capacity-building, technical assistance and evidence-based planning, among other. However, since its inception in 2000, DGLAC has faced chronic challenges, including understaffing, underfunding and limited use of information technology.

To address the challenges, MERP conducted a thorough review of the directorate and supported DGLAC in the development of a vision, mission and accompanying values. The review generated concrete and realistic short, medium and long-term policy recommendations. A key recommendation was to strengthen the visibility of DGLAC among municipal and other stakeholders. MERP is implementing an innovative and cost-efficient WhatsApp-based solution that will facilitate communication between DGLAC and local authorities. The solution is a first step in a larger strategy to launch the online presence of DGLAC and automate key processes and procedures. The support also includes the development of an interactive website and social media platforms together with a supporting communication and visibility strategy.

Based on the recommendations of the review, MERP also supports DGLAC in organizing quarterly panel discussions, or 'talk shows' for municipal stakeholders and local and international development partners on key topics pertaining to local and municipal development. In 2021, two episodes were broadcasted, the first focused on [updating the municipal law](#) and the second discussed avenues to [generate revenue within the current economic crisis and featured municipal examples and lessons learnt](#). In 2022, four additional episodes are planned as part of this series, the first episode in 2022 was on [strengthening the role of Mokhtars in supporting local communities](#).

Social stability and mediation work

Within the overall aim of developing mechanisms for social stability, MERP supported capacity development in mediation and the establishment of mediation units at the Union of Tyre Municipalities, the Federation of Municipalities of the Northern and Coastal Matn, and the Urban Community Al-Fayhaa. Forty-three participants from diverse backgrounds, including community members from different backgrounds completed the mediation training. This support included the enrollment of six municipal/union staff members and community members who completed more than eight months of intensive mediation training courses, in a mediation diploma training at one of the prestigious universities in Lebanon to become legal mediators. In future, it is hoped that these mediation units will play a key role in supporting unions and municipalities in local conflict resolution.



8. Fifteen years supporting Lebanon on the path towards sustainable urban development



Last year, UN-Habitat [marked its fifteenth year of working in Lebanon](#). Established in 2006, the UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme has supported Lebanon's response and recovery efforts to several crises, including the 2006 July War, the Syrian displacement crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut Port explosion and the ongoing protracted socio-economic crisis. These emergency efforts have been undertaken in parallel to applying UN-Habitat's mandate of promoting socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities – at both national and local levels.

Nearly 90 per cent of Lebanon's population lives in urban areas. However, Lebanon has long failed to address the challenges that are associated with rapid urbanization. This is where UN-Habitat's technical know-how and expertise has been of particular importance. Since 2006, UN-Habitat has implemented more than 50 projects, totalling around US\$ 80 million, [focusing on multi-sectoral approaches to the cities and urban communities in Lebanon](#). This ranges from neighbourhood upgrading, housing reconstruction, shelter provision, basic services upgrading to urban planning, innovative public space projects and climate change mitigation.

UN-Habitat's continued commitment to Lebanon, its citizens, and its residents in improving urban well-being remains. Urban challenges have only increased in Lebanon, considering the multiple ongoing crises in the country – including, how unplanned and poor urbanization has contributed to the daily struggles of communities across the country. The [United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework \(UNSDCF\)](#) was signed this year and is meant to strengthen the existing and ongoing cooperation between the Lebanese Government and the United Nations on promoting the principles of sustainable development, and build the foundations for a prosperous and inclusive Lebanese society, where no one is left behind.

As part of the wider United Nations family in Lebanon, UN-Habitat will continue to advocate for sustainable and well-managed urbanization as it has the potential to lift people out of poverty and address their basic needs – including housing, energy, transport, water and more.

9. Voices from cities:

Interview with Mayor of Tyre, Hassan Dbouk



Please share a bit of background/context on the City of Tyre from an urban perspective.

The city of Tyre has a rich heritage essence from an urban perspective, which is a precious legacy from its ancient history. That is why Tyre plays an essential role as a hub of tourism in Lebanon.

The city has the potential to play a good role but it has been neglected in the past and currently due to the country's situation and the municipality's weakened state. Consequently, this has limited the urban development process affects all aspects of development in Tyre.

The [Regional Technical Office \(RTO\)](#) has made urban development one of the priorities to build the future and secure better living conditions and environment for the residents of the city and the region.

Conceptualized by UN-Habitat following the 2006 July War, RTOs address the need to enhance the capacities of local authorities in their rebuilding efforts. The RTO approach has provided 14 unions of municipalities with technical support to enhance local governance and capacity building of local authorities, channelling UN-Habitat's normative expertise to local authorities, through strategic partnerships with municipalities.

How and when did the Union of Tyre Municipalities and Municipality of Tyre begin working with UN-Habitat?

UN-Habitat is an international organisation that works to help communities and institutions by securing appropriate conditions for people and developing municipalities' work in this field.

In 2014, UN-Habitat began its cooperation with the Union of Tyre Municipalities to enhance its capabilities by establishing an RTO to support the technical capabilities and develop its work through several empowering projects and training for staff. Since then, the funding for the RTO and tools have been secured through UN-Habitat from donors. Also, the logistical support, follow-up process and performance evaluation for the RTO were conducted in cooperation with UN-Habitat. The RTO has added value to the Union. It is considered a unique experiment and opportunity full of best practices for the Union.

The Municipality of Tyre hosts a Regional Technical Office (RTO), a UN-Habitat conceptualized tool that assists municipalities across Lebanon with technical support to enhance local governance and capacity building of local authorities.

How has the RTO supported the Union of Tyre Municipalities and Municipality of Tyre in responding to and addressing challenges facing Lebanon including COVID-19 and the socioeconomic crisis?

Overall, the RTO is a very effective tool in supporting municipal work, especially for small municipalities. These municipalities would often seek support from paid technical offices for them to manage their projects and do feasibility studies.

The RTO has supported the needs of the municipalities in terms of studies, executive documents, monitoring, and sometimes assist in securing funding for projects by communicating with local and international donors and coordinating these efforts under the supervision of the existing units within the Union (the Administrative Chief Office and the Financial Department).

The RTO has and continues to contribute to securing better living conditions for every resident. It also intervened, where necessary, by effectively supporting the community face the COVID-19 crisis in cooperation with the Crisis Management Unit in the Union of Tyre Municipalities through monitoring the cases and helping confirmed patients communicate with relevant organisations, as well as, providing advice and mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

The RTO also helped reduce the impact of the economic crisis on individuals and societies by preparing policies for the marginalised and the most vulnerable residents, referring them to the relevant organisations. The RTO communicated with the organisations and provided them with all possible assistance to help them carry out their work.

Despite the lack and scarcity of funding in urban development due to COVID-19 and the severe economic crisis facing Lebanon, the RTO has made it easier for the municipalities through its continuous technical support.

Which projects are currently ongoing in Tyre that are supported by UN-Habitat?

Currently, UN-Habitat is supporting the following projects:

1. Regional Technical Offices in the Municipality of Tyre and the Union of Municipalities of Tyre
2. A city-to-city partnership between Zurich and Tyre, which is supporting one of the RTOs, including the implementation of soft and hard mobility interventions, and the exchange of technical expertise between the two cities.
3. The [Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project \(MERP\)](#), aims to better living conditions for marginalised segments of society by raising the quality of the urban services provided by the municipalities and union of municipalities. Within the MERP project's call for Municipal and Union Basic Service and Local Economic Development Projects in Lebanon, projects were submitted by the Municipality of Tyre and the Union of Tyre Municipalities.

The Municipality submitted a proposal for the rehabilitation of El Hesba Market that has been selected for implementation. The Union of Tyre Municipalities' "Dar Sour" project was selected to empower small farmers by giving them a space to sell their products directly to the consumer, allowing them to determine their selling prices, identify their profits and mitigate the impact of their losses.

UN-Habitat has helped the Municipality of Tyre facilitate the City-to-City partnership between the cities of Zurich and Tyre that has implemented a soft mobility project that has installed bikesharing stations. Could you please provide more insight into what the objective of this project is and what you hope its impact will be on the community?

In December 2017, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Municipality of Zurich and the Municipality of Tyre with the help of UN-Habitat. The cooperation seeks to support host communities and displaced Syrians, many ideas that were developed after several visits by experts from Zurich to the City of Tyre, the most important of which are:

- a) Establishing the Regional Technical Office in the Municipality of Tyre
- b) Mutual visits to facilitate knowledge and experience exchange
- c) A soft mobility project that is working to improving connectivity across the city in an eco-friendly way

The soft mobility project provides a unique solution for transportation within cities. It is an exceptional model for enhancing mobility within cities in Lebanon that can be presented to other cities across the country.



 **TOUR** *in* **SOUR**



10. Upcoming



Moving beyond rehabilitation in Beirut's recovery

As UN-Habitat Lebanon continues to advance its efforts in supporting Beirut's urban recovery, a new project entitled: "Ensuring safe public spaces and adequate housing for all within the City of Beirut" was recently signed. Funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and in close coordination with the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA), the Railway and Public Transportation Authority (RPTA) as well as the Municipality of Beirut. The project will enhance the housing conditions for vulnerable populations affected by the Beirut Port explosion, especially in the vicinity of the old train station in Mar Mikhael and increase access to safe and inclusive public spaces within the train station, while also reviving the urban fabric of the city.

Furthermore, another one of UN-Habitat Lebanon's key urban recovery projects, "Support for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of most vulnerable urban areas in Beirut impacted by the port explosion" has just been completed. All of the project's components supported some of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods impacted by the Beirut Port explosion to better recover, rebuild, enhance resilience to future shocks, and revive communities through a participatory approach.

The project's components include:

- Reviving the Rmeil Cluster:

- a) Fully restoring and strengthening 11 multi-story buildings of heritage-value (9 are being fully restored, while 2 are being propped and strengthened).
- b) Developing the skills of 100+ men and women to take part in the rehabilitation work.

- Rehabilitating key public spaces affected by the explosion:

- a) Improving the operations and functions of the Beirut Fire Brigade Centre.
- b) Rehabilitating and reactivating two public spaces: William Hawi and Laziza parks.
- c) Upgrading three alleyways in Maraach neighbourhood in Bourj Hammoud.

- Installing 15 handwashing stations to mitigate COVID-19 community transmission

Urban October

Every October, UN-Habitat hosts "Urban October" to promote a better urban future throughout the entire month. Two international days fall within Urban October:

World Habitat Day – first Monday of October

Theme: Mind the gap. Leave no one and no place behind.

Hosting city of global observance: Belikiser, Turkey

Attention will be drawn to growing inequalities and vulnerabilities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, climate and conflict. As well as, showcase the role that cities and local governments play on the frontline in response to crises and emergencies, as well as, planning for an inclusive, resilient and green future.

World Cities Day – 31 October

Theme: Act local to go global

Hosting city of global observance: Shanghai, China

Stakeholders and partners will be brought together to share their experiences and approaches to local action. What worked and what is needed to empower local and regional governments to create greener, more equitable and sustainable cities.



Through generous support from funding partners, and collaboration across a wide range of local and national authorities, civil society organizations, academia, the private sector and United Nations sister entities, UN-Habitat is able to implement its normative and operational mandate in Lebanon.



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