

## Double crisis: effects of a pandemic and economic crisis on Lebanon's most vulnerable adolescents

Authors: Sally Youssef, Nicola Jones, Agnieszka Małachowska with Marcel Saleh<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Following the detection of the first covid-19 cases in February, the government of Lebanon declared a state of 'general mobilisation', enforcing a night curfew, shutting down most public and private institutions, and closing the land and sea border crossing points and the Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport. Educational institutions were also closed, exacerbating the challenges faced by young people in education who had already endured frequent interruptions to their schooling since October 2019 as a result of anti-government protests. In late April some measures were eased, and schools and educational institutions are expected to reopen in early June. While the number of confirmed cases is moderate (911 as of 18 May), this is likely in part due to low testing rates.

In Lebanon, the lockdown came amid nationwide protests against the deteriorating economic situation and rampant corruption and mismanagement of the ruling political class.<sup>2</sup> Although the protests were interrupted by the lockdown,



smaller rallies erupted in the country as a result of increasing poverty and the lack of social assistance available to people affected by the covid-19 pandemic and the worsening economic crisis.

In response to growing calls to ensure that national and international responses to the covid-19 situation are inclusive of all social groups, including refugee communities, and context-tailored, this policy brief draws on virtual qualitative interviews with vulnerable young people in Lebanon to better understand the compounded effects of the pandemic and the pre-existing economic and political crisis facing the country. It is part of a cross-country series designed to share emerging findings in real time from qualitative interviews with adolescents in the context of covid-19. The young people involved are part of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme's longitudinal research in the Middle East, East Africa and South Asia. More specifically, this brief draws on data from 60 telephone conversations with vulnerable 15–19-year-old Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese adolescent boys and girls, including married girls, held in April and May 2020 (see also Box 1).

### Box 1: GAGE Lebanon participatory research sample

In 2019, GAGE launched a participatory research project with older adolescent boys and girls (aged 15–19) in Lebanon to explore adolescents' access to services and programming, factors behind the digital divide and economic empowerment, as well as issues around social cohesion and voice and agency. The adolescents involved in the research include married adolescents or those at risk of early marriage, out-of-school adolescents or those at risk of dropping out of school, and adolescents at risk of joining and involved with armed forces. GAGE's sample includes adolescents from the most vulnerable communities in Lebanon, including vulnerable adolescents from the Lebanese host community, Syrian refugee adolescents living in both informal tented settlements and collective shelters from the Baalbek region, and Palestinian refugee adolescents living in Ein el-Hilweh refugee camp in the South Governorate. The participatory activities carried out with the adolescents include participatory photography and peer-to-peer research activities. Since the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic, the GAGE programme has continued its participatory activities and qualitative research with the adolescents virtually.

## What do young people know about covid-19?

GAGE's findings show that adolescents in Lebanon have relatively good knowledge about the sources of transmission, preventative measures and basic symptoms of the virus, though some hold misconceptions around these, notably that the virus does not infect people with strong immune systems. Girls in general demonstrated better knowledge than boys and a greater adherence to protective measures, in part because of expectations around the caring roles they play within the household. Adolescents primarily rely on news broadcasts on local TV channels to get information, followed by social media outlets, especially WhatsApp groups, Facebook, YouTube and to a lesser extent Instagram. Some of the participants are dependent on what they hear from their parents or friends. Married Syrian girls, who lack access to mobile phones due to social norms that forbid married women in their community from owning them, reported that they have very restricted access to their husbands' phones and mainly rely on TV and information they hear in their community. This did not, however, seem to affect the girls' general knowledge about the virus, although some had better information and demonstrated a greater awareness than others.

Knowledge of the sources of the virus varied among the participants, with many – especially girls – relating the spread of the virus to divine intervention to make people more pious and closer to each other, as explained by a 16-year-old Lebanese girl: *'I think that God sent us this virus so that people would get together and realise that there is no difference between them because the virus does not distinguish between people based on colour, age or status.'* A 17-year-old Syrian girl also noted: *'We are not afraid of the virus because we believe that it was sent by God to test people's piety so that they would pray and read the Quran.'* Many girls, especially from the Lebanese and Palestinian communities, also noted that they are more religiously observant now as it gives them emotional relief. A 15-year-old Palestinian girl explained her experience as follows: *'I feel bored and desperate due to the lockdown and our financial situation; prayer and supplication gives me comfort.'*

Some adolescents, however, believed that the virus is a result of conflict between China and the United States, and that it was purposely manufactured in one of these countries. An 18-year-old Lebanese girl stated: *'I believe that the*

▶ We had to move to a new house because we could not pay the rent. We cannot go out or visit our relatives and friends because our neighbours are scared that we have corona. When they see us outside they call the police, they are annoying us a lot.

(A 16-year-old Syrian boy)

*whole thing [Corona pandemic] is just a Chinese game to overpower America [the United States] economically.' Another 16-year-old Lebanese girl stated 'America did this [spread the virus]! They are spreading the virus across the world via toxic gases.'*

The general lack of knowledge about the exact origin of the virus has created confusion among adolescents who are trying to understand where the sudden outbreak came from or possibly base their explanations on information they hear or receive from their immediate community or on social media. Adolescents also expressed high levels of anxiety about their lack of knowledge regarding how to treat the virus.

## What behaviours have adolescents adopted in response to the pandemic?

Adherence to regulations around social gatherings and the guidance on increasing social distancing and hygiene varied among adolescent respondents across communities as well as by gender within the same community. Although the majority of the adolescents have relatively good knowledge about the regulations and protection guidance introduced, it has been challenging for many adolescents to abide by them. Girls from the Lebanese and Palestinian communities were generally more observant of the rules and remained isolated in their homes, although many Palestinian girls admitted that they continued to visit friends, albeit less often and for a shorter time. Palestinian adolescents in general believed that the threat was lower in Ein el-Hilweh Camp as there were no detected cases there and it is already isolated from the rest of society. As a result, life inside the camp has not changed markedly, although girls were more likely to be isolated in their homes than prior to the onset of the pandemic, whereas boys explained that they still went to work and spent time outside the house.

The Syrian boys who live in collective shelters in host communities, who are mainly daily-wage workers, lost their source of income with the suspension of construction and public works activities during the lockdown. They were also isolated in their homes and feared that they would be targeted by the local authorities or community if they went outside given deteriorating social cohesion in the context of the broader economic and political context. A 16-year-old Syrian boy stated *'We had to move to a new house because we could not pay the rent. We cannot go out or visit our relatives and friends because our neighbours are scared that we have corona. When they see us outside they call the police, they are annoying us a lot. We stay at home and we close the windows so that they would not see us.'* Such incidents were also reported by the Syrian girls who face increasing discrimination after the spread of covid-19 in the Lebanese society where they are being viewed as a threat. A 17-year-old girl reported, for example, that she was the subject of verbal harassment when she left her home to get supplies: *'I went to the local market next to us and a Lebanese woman asked me to stay away from her because I am infected with the corona virus, she told me: "You Syrians are infected with the virus." I was*

▶ I went to the local market next to us and a Lebanese woman asked me to stay away from her because I am infected with the corona virus, she told me: "You Syrians are infected with the virus." I was upset but I could not do anything.

(A 17-year-old Syrian girl)



▮ I can't buy gloves, I can't buy a face mask ... We are not able to afford bread to eat, how can we buy face masks and gloves? If we will die because we do not buy the gloves and the masks, then that will be it.

(A 17-year-old Syrian boy From Baalbek)

*upset but I could not do anything. She started asking me to leave the shop. They [the Lebanese] think we do not care, we do not know, and we do not understand these things, they think we are savages.'*

By contrast, some Syrian girls from informal tented settlements who work in agriculture still go to work, although for shorter working hours and at different shift times. The girls who still work have become the only breadwinners in their households and said that they now work early in the morning (starting at 5.00am and returning at 11.00am) out of fear of being caught by the authorities and penalised. Working girls also admitted that they had not received any guidance at work as to how to protect themselves. Moreover, although their camp is isolated and they are forbidden by the local authorities from moving outside, the residents in the camp still socialise together while following physical distancing rules.

It is important to note that many adolescents emphasised that adhering to the protection guidance is financially challenging, especially when they are struggling to pay for food and rent. A 17-year-old Syrian boy stated *'I can't buy gloves, I can't buy a face mask ... the cost of the gloves and the face masks used to be 2,000 [Lebanese pounds], now the cost is 20,000. We are not able to afford bread to eat, how can we buy face masks and gloves? If we will die because we do not buy the gloves and the masks, then that will be it.'*



## How have adolescents been affected by the government's response to the pandemic?

We now turn to a discussion of the multidimensional effects that the government's response to the pandemic is having on young people, and how these intersect with the effects of the ongoing economic and political crisis.

### Closure of schools

One of the first measures taken in response to the pandemic was the closure of educational institutions. Education in Lebanon had already been interrupted by the social upheaval that culminated in nationwide protests and temporary closure of schools. The covid-19-related closure saw a shift to long-distance education, with the Ministry of Education creating digital lessons that were broadcast on the state-owned TV channel and shared on YouTube. Some in-school adolescent respondents also mentioned different online methods that their schools had adopted to continue education, for example, through WhatsApp or peer-to-peer software platforms. However, others in our sample were not receiving any long-distance schooling and they highlighted that online education was difficult to access due to limited internet

► **The school is sending us lessons on WhatsApp, but most of the time I cannot follow them because I do not have a mobile phone. I stopped studying because I could barely understand my lessons in class so how am I supposed to understand them on the mobile phone?**

(A 15-year-old Lebanese boy)

connectivity, restricted access to devices and difficulties adapting to the new methods of teaching. A 15-year-old Lebanese boy reported: *'The school is sending us lessons on WhatsApp, but most of the time I cannot follow them because I do not have a mobile phone. I stopped studying because I could barely understand my lessons in class so how am I supposed to understand them on the mobile phone?'* Adolescents also reported that they are not receiving sufficient explanation of their lessons and that they are struggling with the online education format. This was in turn linked to fears about drop out, especially in the context of the worsening economic climate. A 15-year-old Lebanese girl stated: *'It has become very difficult for me to study and I am afraid I cannot go back to school at all due to the financial situation.'* Fears

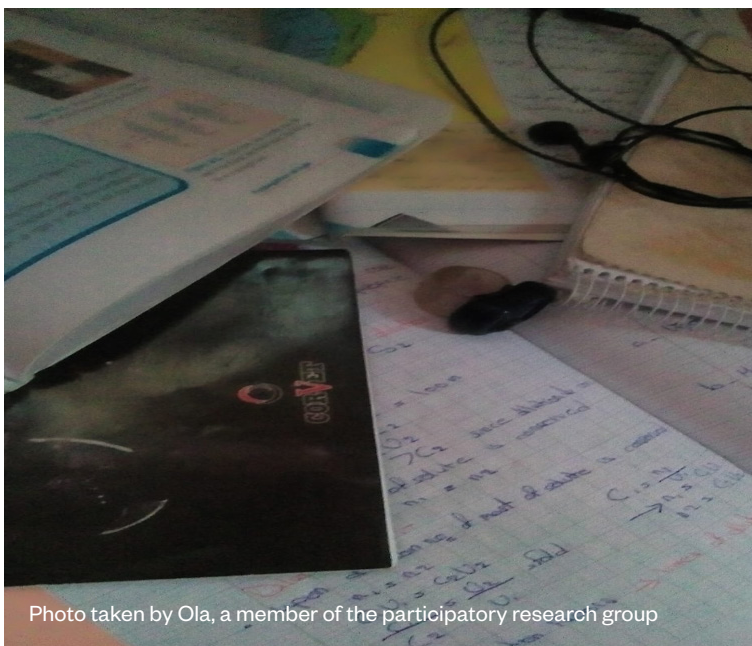


Photo taken by Ola, a member of the participatory research group

**Ola, a 16 year-old in-school Palestinian refugee girl from Lebanon**

*'Knowledge is light and a weapon for every girl in our community, but not all girls have access to education. I feel blessed for being in school but I am currently facing great difficulties with the long-distance learning that is mainly done through WhatsApp. This education method has caused us severe stress and depression. We are given more lessons and homework than we usually get at school without explaining them to us and we are left to study by ourselves with little support from our teachers. I am not able to understand my lessons alone and I do not know how to use the applications that the teachers are using to share the lessons. If education continues online without any solutions, it will become an obstacle in our lives instead of being an opportunity.'*



about not being able to go back to school were heightened among refugee adolescents as demonstrated by a 19-year-old Palestinian girl: *'This situation affects us a lot as it has put us in the middle of nowhere ... We are not studying now and I do not know if I will ever be able to study again. I already had to stop for two years because my family did not have the money and it has been already hard for me to pay the fees this year and now our situation is even worse.'*

## Psychosocial distress

Adolescents reported high levels of psychosocial distress stemming from the measures undertaken to minimise the spread of the virus and intersecting with the broader economic and political crisis in the country (see also Box 2). Adolescents reported feeling *'distressed', 'depressed', 'anxious', 'scared'* and *'suffocating'* as well as having a *'bad psychological status'* and a constant *'strong desire to cry'*, reflecting the impact of the pandemic coupled with the economic crisis on young people's deteriorating psychological well-being. A 16-year-old girl stated: *'My father is sick and we worry about his health, we are always anxious at home and are very cautious not to catch the virus. Our financial situation is bad, no one goes to work now and we have no income, we are not able to buy enough food. I constantly feel depressed. I try not to look nervous so that my dad would not feel sad, but I always have pain in my head.'* Similar to the Lebanese adolescents, the Syrian adolescents reported worries and fears related to the worsening economic situation and the isolation inside their camp. A 16-year-old Syrian girl stated *'I feel I am suffocating and I always want to cry. It is no longer the same. We cannot see our relatives and go out of the camp.'*

### Box 2: Intersecting stresses affecting adolescent psychosocial health

Multiple adolescent respondents emphasised that the combination of the pandemic and political and economic crises was exacting a high psycho-emotional toll. A 15-year-old Palestinian girl for example noted: *'Now I have to stick my face to the phone all day listening to voice notes that the teachers are sending and following links and videos on applications that I do not know how to use. This is causing me a lot of stress and I always feel my head is spinning. The teachers are increasing the amount of lessons compared to what they usually did in school, giving us more homework, and they are not helping us or replying to our questions. I cannot understand the lessons by myself and the stress from this is too much for me especially with the situation of my family [financial hardship]. All this is making me feel I am choking from inside and paralysed. I do not see anyone outside and stay at home all the time. I feel I am trapped.'*

For the Palestinian girls who already had very limited mobility, the lockdown has resulted in further restrictions on their movement and the loss of the very few activities that they were allowed to do outside. A 19-year-old Palestinian girl explained *'We feel sad and oppressed at home. It is true that we were not doing anything big with our lives, but we were doing something, at least we were able to visit our friends and our neighbours.'*

Their anxieties were further fuelled by intra-household tensions. The majority of the participants from different communities reported increasing tensions and family problems as families were obliged to stay at home together under lockdown. Adolescents indicated that stress over the economic hardship is the main driver for these problems. A 15-year-old girl reported: *'My psychological status became bad because I stopped buying many things. The current conditions have affected us too much. My family started skipping many of our needs to be able to pay the rent and the internet fees. We are skipping a lot of food due to the increasing prices. We have a lot of fights and problems in our family because they [the parents] worry about how they can meet our needs. I no longer have the mood to do anything; I just sleep to escape these conditions.'* Similarly, a 16-year-old Lebanese girl noted: *'The tension has increased dramatically in the current situation. We are all at home suffering from a bad psychological state. My father is very nervous, and we are all nervous and sad, we try to hide the nervousness but it shows on our faces. The reason for the tension in my family is the worry about tomorrow and surviving.'*

**▮ I feel I am suffocating and I always want to cry. It is no longer the same. We cannot see our relatives and go out of the camp.**

(A 16-year-old Syrian girl)



Photo taken by Zeina, a member of the participatory research group

### Zeina, a 17 year-old Syrian refugee girl who was married at 16

*'Life was hard already and it is becoming even harder with this pandemic. My conditions are becoming more intolerable with time. I am struggling with my first newborn and I do not know what to do when he cries. My mother is in Syria and cannot be with me to help with the baby due to the lockdown. My husband is out of work and always fighting with me because he is stressed over our financial situation. The prices of everything have become very high and we cannot buy anything. I worry about not being able to get milk and diapers for my son. I am so tired of life and I cannot get out of my depression. Life has become a black hole and we are trapped inside it.'*

## Economic poverty and food insecurity

The worsening conditions in Lebanon that were exacerbated by the lockdown have resulted in food shortages and an inability to meet other basic needs like medicine for chronically ill family members and sanitary pads for girls. Most adolescents reported that their families had either decreased the quantity of food, stopped buying some food items due to increasing prices or were unable to buy food at all, resorting to what they have at home. Worryingly, adolescents repeatedly stated: *'Dying from the virus is better than dying from hunger,'* which reflects the severity of the deteriorating situation among all communities in Lebanon. A 17-year-old Lebanese boy stated, *'We are not able to buy food like before, we cannot buy meat, chicken or canned food, we just eat from what we have from our pantry food. My mother is very ill and we cannot buy her medicine, and neither can we recharge our phones.'* Similarly, a 16-year-old Syrian boy reported, *'We cannot buy food anymore because we are not working and we do not have money. We only eat bulgur every day.'* Most Syrian and Palestinian adolescents reported not being able to buy vegetables and fruits anymore because they are too expensive and many are relying either on potatoes or grains and legumes such as bulgur, lentils and rice as the basis of their meals. The Syrian girls explained how they have started baking bread at home as they can no longer afford to buy it.

The interviews revealed that young people have high levels of anxiety about their futures given price hikes, depreciation of the Lebanese pound and ever-decreasing purchasing power. An 18-year-old Syrian boy explained: *'We are heading towards an unknown path, we cannot turn back and we will die in both cases either from the virus or from hunger if the lockdown continues. Now the price of tomatoes increased from 1,000 [Lebanese pounds] to 2,500, the prices of vegetables have increased dramatically.'* A 19-year-old Lebanese girl echoed this feeling: *'Our financial situation is no longer the same, we do not buy everything we need as we used to before especially since the price of the dollar has risen [the appreciation of the US dollar], we do not know when this situation will end.'*

Such worries are amplified for working boys, especially Syrians who are the main breadwinners in their families. With the lockdown, many workers, especially daily workers, lost their incomes and had no alternative resources or savings. The Syrian boys were extremely anxious about their households' survival and were resorting to borrowing money for food and rent. The majority of the boys who live in collective shelters reported that they had had to change their place of residence

▮ **We are skipping a lot of food due to the increasing prices. We have a lot of fights and problems in our family because they [the parents] worry about how they can meet our needs. I no longer have the mood to do anything; I just sleep to escape these conditions.**

(A 15-year-old girl)





A Syrian refugee boy walks in an informal tented settlement in Lebanon's Bekaa valley © Russell Watkins/DFID

during the lockdown due to their inability to pay the rent. An 18-year-old Syrian boy explained, *'The conditions are difficult in particular during this period of time [the lockdown]. It is difficult more than I can describe to you. I am the main breadwinner in my family and I am not working and we do not have money. I borrow money when I can to get food for my family and on top of everything we were evicted from our house, we moved to small house with two rooms only and we are 11 members in my family.'*

**Box 3: Lebanon's fragile economic and political environment pre-covid-19**

Prior to the covid-19 pandemic, the World Bank had projected that poverty rates in Lebanon would rise to 50% in 2020 owing to the worsening economic situation and a sharp increase in youth unemployment, which was already high.<sup>3</sup> The covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these negative forecasts, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) now projecting that the Lebanese economy will shrink by 12% in 2020 amid the country's worst financial crisis in decades.<sup>4</sup> As the country slipped further into crisis, protests that had begun in October 2019 resurfaced as citizens expressed their frustration at soaring prices (an increase of 50% on basic items including food and medicine), the Lebanese pound's 60% loss in market value and the informal capital controls imposed by the banks that prevented depositors from accessing their funds. The protests descended into violence between citizens and the Lebanese Army, with banks the main target of the protestors.

At the end of March, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) declared that it would provide a one one-time cash payment of 400,000 Lebanese pounds (equal to US\$140 at the market rate at the time) to the most vulnerable households registered with the country's National Poverty Targeting Programme. However, in mid-April, MoSA announced that it had postponed the distribution of aid due to errors in the household lists.<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch has warned that *'millions of Lebanese residents are at risk of going hungry'* during lockdown in the absence of a government assistance plan. The gaps are being partially filled by local initiatives providing food and hygiene kits for vulnerable families. However, these initiatives cannot reach all families in need since their funding is limited and entirely based on donations.<sup>6</sup>



Photo taken by Ahmad, a member of the participatory research group

**Ahmad, an adolescent Palestinian boy in Ein el-Hilweh Camp**

*'I had to buy a lot of merchandise for my barber shop out of fear that the price would double the next day. I don't own this shop, I have to pay its rent the first of every month. I have been losing money recently, and I might have to close shop if the economic crisis and pandemic continues. My father and I are the only sources of income in the house. He is a taxi driver, we come with 20,000 Lebanese pounds every day, sometimes we can't afford gas for the car. I can say we are definitely not eating as we used to, especially meat and chicken, which has skyrocketed in price recently.'*



## Increased domestic burdens for adolescent girls

Adolescent girls in particular are bearing additional domestic burdens with their already limited mobility further restricted by confinement at home. Almost all girls reported spending more time on housework and cooking, but the change was more dramatic for the married Syrian girls facing additional care work responsibilities for family members and children, some of whom are also still working in the fields to maintain an income for their families. Married girls also reported more marital tensions ensuing from the increased financial pressure now that their husbands are out of work and at home all the time. These tensions were also reported with in-laws and neighbours, as explained by a 17-year-old Syrian girl: *'There is a lot of tension at home, all men are sitting at home without work and we are all nervous and fighting all the time. The men's demands never end at home and they release their anger at us, even though we are working outside and doing everything at home while they sit all day without doing anything. We are restless ... working and cooking all the time.'*

Being confined at home was even more stressful for girls with children who have had to adapt to the whole family staying at home and the increased housework that entails, in addition to childcare. Some of these girls reported that the pressure of the increased duties had led them to be more violent with their children, as a 17-year-old Syrian girl described: *'I am always nervous, shouting at the children. They used to play outside, but now they are with me all the time while I am working and baking. I am not able to handle all of this and sometimes when I get nervous I lash out at my children hitting them to relieve my anger.'* Married girls with children were also very concerned about accessing medicine and healthcare for their children as well as being able to afford milk and diapers.

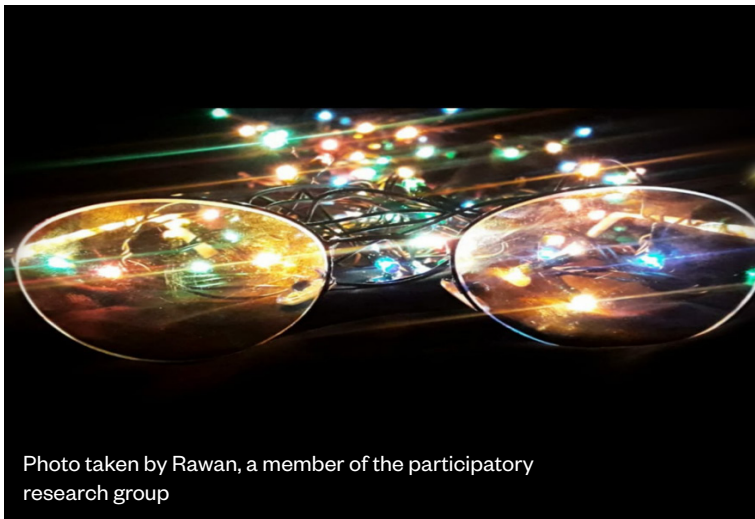


Photo taken by Rawan, a member of the participatory research group

### Rawan, a 19 year-old Palestinian refugee girl from Syria

*'Since the quarantine started and my school closed, I have nothing to do during the day. I study in a vocational school that has not been giving us online lessons. The tension at my home increased due to the stress over our financial situation, especially with the increase in the price of food and vegetables. My father and brother are not working and my parents keep fighting over buying food. My mother is angry all the time because she cannot get enough food for us. To escape these tensions, I sleep all day and stay up all night to enjoy some quietness alone.'*

## How do adolescents view the government's response?

The majority of the adolescents interviewed supported the measures taken by the government to prevent the spread of covid-19 and consider that these measures are important to protect them. Many even suggested that stricter measures should have been taken earlier, especially in relation to banning flights, with some directly blaming the spread of the virus on the government's reluctance to act to contain it earlier. Even though the participants were supportive of the lockdown and the measures implemented by the Lebanese government, they were also very concerned about the lack of action taken to support those who have been left without an income or the means to meet their basic needs. A 16-year-old Lebanese girl explained, *'The procedures taken by the government are very important and needed to protect the people, but in other countries the governments ask their people to stay at home and send them everything they need to their houses. How are people supposed to live without an income? Everything is expensive, the food, the sterilisers and the face masks. The government should secure the needs of the people and provide food and cash assistance for them to stay at home.'* The Syrian adolescents in particular were also worried about the presence of authorities in their area

► The procedures taken by the government are very important and needed to protect the people, but in other countries the governments ask their people to stay at home and send them everything they need to their houses. How are people supposed to live without an income? The government should ... provide food and cash assistance for [the people] to stay at home.

(A 16-year-old Lebanese girl)

and feared that they would be targeted and harassed if they left their homes. Some of the Syrian boys thought that the lockdown was unnecessary in their area as there were no positive cases detected there, and thought that the government should end the lockdown in their community and isolate them so that they could work and survive. For the Palestinian adolescents, as Ein el-Hilweh Camp falls outside the rule of Lebanese authorities, many adolescents, particularly girls, have criticised the local Palestinian authorities inside the camp for not taking steps to enforce the safety procedures and support the 'starving' families locked inside the camp.



Photo taken by Loulou, a member of the participatory research group

#### Loulou, a 15-year-old in-school Lebanese girl

*'Since the quarantine started, I feel very depressed at home. I am not going to school or leaving the house and our financial situation is becoming very dire. I feel sad most of the time and worry about my future and if I will be able to go to school again due to my family's financial situation. I am also very worried about my family because we are not able to buy enough food especially after the prices have dramatically increased. My mother cries by the window every day because she is worried about us and about our future, it makes me sad to see her this way.'*

## What are key priorities for young people in this context?

Our qualitative interviews revealed complex and diverse realities of the adolescents in Lebanon and identified several key priorities in the context of the pandemic and the economic crisis in the country.

1. **A well-coordinated and wide-reaching national social assistance plan is urgently needed.** More households are slipping into poverty and hunger, and thus it is critical to reach not only the vulnerable households registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs but all households affected by the covid-19 pandemic and ongoing economic crisis. Such a plan must be sustainable over the long term and should prioritise giving families at risk access to social safety nets rather than simply a one-off cash payment. The government must also work to provide hygiene kits free of charge to citizens and residents alike.
2. **More coordinated action to provide social protection by UN agencies and donors to support the refugee population is essential, especially in light of growing social discord.** Global agencies should scale up their assistance to refugees to meet their growing need for food and hygiene kits during this time.



3. **More support is required to implement the five-phase plan to end the lockdown given widespread economic vulnerability.** While the Lebanese government has already started reopening according to this plan, it must make sure that social distancing measures are applied and that hygiene kits are provided to workers, including gloves and face masks. During the reopening phases, it is critical that guidance on safety measures is disseminated properly among all the communities in Lebanon, including isolated communities such as the Syrian refugees in informal tented settlements.
4. **Clear public messaging about the virus, how it is spread and what protection measures to take is critical, and must include targeted outreach to young people.** The government, UN agencies and local organisations must coordinate the dissemination of information horizontally and vertically among communities, using various methods to reach everyone – especially those who lack access to reliable sources of information.
5. **Information and access to health services must be expanded and wide reaching.** Information about health services operating during the pandemic and the hotlines supplied by the Ministry of Health must be disseminated more widely and should be promoted on local TV channels and on social media platforms to increase knowledge among adolescents. The government and relevant agencies must increase provision of free healthcare and medication, which are currently expensive and difficult to access, for all communities in all regions.
6. **Given high levels of psychosocial distress, investment in adolescent psychosocial support is critical.** Adolescents' psychosocial well-being has been tremendously affected by the current situation, with signs of mental distress apparent in many adolescents (including suicide ideation). Psychosocial support services need to be available for adolescents and youth in different communities, delivered through a combination of online platforms and community workers.
7. **To ensure more inclusive uptake of the long-distance learning programmes, more guidance and mentoring support is needed.** Students face different challenges related to access to the internet and digital devices in accessing the governmental virtual education platform, and this is compounded by a lack of support from teachers. Recognising that Lebanon lacks a robust educational system, the government should nevertheless work on providing free internet access to students and training teachers on techniques they can adopt to facilitate distance learning in order to mitigate educational disruption.

---

## Endnotes

- 1 Suggested citation: Youssef, S., Jones, N., Małachowska, A. with Saleh, M. (2020) 'Listening to young people's voices under covid-19. Double crisis in Lebanon: effects of a pandemic and economic crisis on Lebanon's most vulnerable adolescents.' Policy brief. London: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence.
- 2 Amnesty International (2020) 'Lebanon protests explained'. 17 January 2020. Webpage. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/lebanon-protests-explained/>.
- 3 World Bank (2019) 'World Bank: Lebanon is in the Midst of Economic, Financial and Social Hardship, Situation Could Get Worse.' 6 November 2019. Webpage. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/11/06/world-bank-lebanon-is-in-the-midst-of-economic-financial-and-social-hardship-situation-could-get-worse>.
- 4 Reuters (2020) 'IMF sees crisis-hit Lebanon's output shrinking 12% in 2020.' 15 April 2020. Webpage. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/lebanon-crisis-imf/imf-sees-crisis-hit-lebanons-output-shrinking-12-in-2020-idUSL5N2C361P>.
- 5 Ministry of Information (2020) 'Financial aid to families in need postponed: ministry.' 14 April 2020. Webpage. Available at: <https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/en/47827>.
- 6 Human Rights Watch (2020) 'Lebanon: Direct covid-19 Assistance to Hardest Hit.' 8 April 2020. Webpage. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/08/lebanon-direct-covid-19-assistance-hardest-hit>.