



The Future of Lebanon's Children

A foresight analysis of macro trends and the policy choices that will shape the future of children and the country at large.

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Introduction



Lebanon's children are growing up in a period of profound uncertainty. Their future will be shaped by a complex combination of global transformations – technological, environmental and geopolitical, as well as by the legacy of recent regional and domestic crises. After years of economic challenges, institutional erosion, and renewed exposure to regional conflict, Lebanon's capacity to protect and invest in its next generation stands at a crossroads. While many of the pressures Lebanon faces are structural or externally driven, the future of Lebanon's children also depends on national choices: the policies adopted, the investments made, and the capacity to build resilience in the face of persistent fragility.

This report takes a forward-looking perspective on what Lebanon could look like for children by 2050, under different trajectories of action or inaction in key areas that have a direct impact on child rights and on socio-economic development at large. The report is based on the conceptual foundation of UNICEF's *State of the World's Children (SOWC) 2024*¹, which calls for a renewed long-term vision for children in a context of global uncertainty. Adopting the SOWC's core structure, the report connects macro-level trends with child-level outcomes and considers how policy decisions made today will influence Lebanon's development trajectories. In line with the SOWC approach, the analysis of this report applies elements of the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSP) framework², using it both to interpret risk patterns and to construct scenario-based narratives of Lebanon's future.

The report is organized into four sections. Section 1 provides a global outlook on the future of children, highlighting how three major megatrends – demographic shifts, climate and environmental stress, and frontier technological changes – are reshaping childhood worldwide. Section 2 applies this global lens to Lebanon, exploring how these trends are manifesting in the national context and intersecting with local vulnerabilities and institutional capacity. These megatrends, drawn from the State of the World's Children 2024, are used to frame Lebanon's long-term development trajectory. Section 3 explores key dimensions affecting child and societal development in Lebanon, namely child survival, education, poverty, and conflict. The final section summarizes the key points that emerged in the report into a call for action for stakeholders in Lebanon.

The report highlights several urgent priorities for national action. Chief among them is the need to restore and protect basic services, particularly health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and child protection, ensuring they are inclusive, shock-resilient, sustainable, and climate-ready. It calls for the full implementation of Lebanon's social protection strategy, including the introduction of a child grant and stronger support for children with disabilities. Investment in learning, skills, and youth engagement is emphasized as critical to reversing brain drain and restoring opportunity. These priorities form the core of a forward-looking agenda for children, provide a foundation for Lebanon's long-term recovery and stability, and are essential for rebuilding the weakened social contract between the citizen and the state. Reaffirming Lebanon's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted 35 years ago, is central to this vision, serving as a compass for ensuring that every child not only survives but thrives in the decades ahead.

1 UNICEF, *State of the World Children 2024*.

2 For an outline of the SSP and the approach used in this report, refer to Annex – Methodological Note.

SECTION 1

Three global megatrends: global outlook to 2050



Around the world, the lives of children are being reshaped by deep and accelerating structural transformations. The UNICEF *State of the World's Children (SOWC) 2024* identifies three global megatrends as critical transformations redefining the context in which children live, learn, and grow: **demographic shifts, climate and environmental crises, and frontier technologies**³. While these dynamics are global in nature, their effects are mediated by national institutions, local inequalities, and the capacity of systems to respond.

The global **child population** is stabilizing at just over 2.3 billion, but its geographic distribution is shifting markedly. Sub-Saharan Africa is undergoing a demographic transformation that makes it on track to account for nearly 40 per cent of all the world's children by mid-century. In contrast, many countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including Lebanon, are entering a stage of demographic maturity, characterized by declining fertility and a gradually aging population. These transitions bring challenges such as rising dependency ratios, but they also open opportunities to invest in human development and human capital. Realizing the potential of this demographic moment requires timely and sustained investment in children and adolescents, particularly in quality education, skills development, and systems that support a healthy and productive transition to adulthood.

The **climate and environmental crisis** is emerging as a defining force that will increasingly affect and shape societies while deepening vulnerabilities, especially among already disadvantaged populations. Children are more exposed than ever to the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, including heatwaves, water scarcity, air pollution, and other hazards. The number of children living in areas of high heat stress is projected to rise globally from 500 million today to over 2 billion by 2050. These environmental shocks not only pose direct physical risks, but they also disrupt education, strain health systems, and undermine household livelihoods. For children, the consequences are cumulative: interrupted learning, malnutrition, displacement, and rising psychosocial stress threaten to limit their development and long-term wellbeing.

At the same time, the **technological transformation** is accelerating. Digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and green innovations are some of the key technological changes that are transforming societies, while offering powerful tools, including to enhance education, healthcare, and other public services. For children, these advances hold the promise of more personalized learning, early diagnosis of health conditions, and expanded access to knowledge and opportunities, including in remote or underserved areas. Technology also enables faster, more data-driven responses to emergencies and better targeting of social support. Yet these opportunities remain unequally distributed, and the risks, ranging from exclusion and exploitation to algorithmic bias, are mounting, particularly where digital governance is weak or inequitable⁴.

In this rapidly changing landscape, the future of childhood depends not only on external forces, but on national policy choices. The sections that follow apply this global framework to the Lebanese context, looking at how each of these megatrends is unfolding nationally and what they mean for the country's children in the decades ahead.

3 From the long list of trends shaping the world, the SOWC identified these three megatrends as critically important. For more on megatrends see: European Strategy and Policy Analysis System, 'Global Trends Reports'; PwC, *Megatrends: Five global shifts reshaping the world we live in*, 2022.

4 For a more in-depth analysis of how digital technologies are reshaping childhood, see UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World and Policy Guidance on AI for Children* (2021).

SECTION 2

How the megatrends are shaping Lebanon's future



The global megatrends analyzed in the SOWC 2024 – demographic transition, climate and environmental shocks, and technological transformation – are deeply relevant to Lebanon's context and they are shaping the lives of children living in the country. Each of these forces is already interacting with Lebanon's complex national context, deepening existing challenges while creating new opportunities for reform and resilience. This section applies the global framework to Lebanon's reality, exploring how these structural trends will shape the prospects of children over the coming decades. In doing so, it highlights both the risks and the policy choices that will determine the extent to which Lebanon can harness these forces for inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development.

Building on this analysis, each megatrend points to clear and urgent policy directions. Lebanon must invest in young people to counter demographic decline and brain drain; strengthen climate-resilient basic services to protect children from rising environmental risks; and close the digital divide to harness technology for inclusive development. These priorities will shape whether the country's future is defined by resilience or rising inequality.



Demographic transition

Lebanon is undergoing significant demographic changes that are shaped by the interplay of long-term demographic dynamics and the consequences of the shocks faced by the country in recent years. Looking at the long-term trend, Lebanon exhibits declining fertility and mortality that are typical of countries approaching the demographic maturity stage, characterized by stable or declining population. The other key feature of today's demographic of Lebanon stems from the socio-economic shocks that have further increased youth migration, possibly accelerating the reduction of fertility due to economic precarity. The combination of the long-term demographic transition with the effects of the domestic shocks determine the country's unique demographic profile and shape the challenges and opportunities that it is facing.

Lebanon's fertility rate has substantially declined over recent decades reaching a more advanced stage of the long-term demographic transition⁵. The total fertility rate (TFR) has decreased from approximately 2.5 births per woman in the year 2000 to 1.6 in 2025⁶. Such decline is forecast to continue with Lebanon estimated to reach a TFR of just 1.24 in 2050⁷ (Figure 1). While a declining fertility rate is expected as the country completes its transition to the demographic maturity stage, the extent and speed of such decline are influenced by various factors including related to political stability, economic and livelihood conditions, social policies and overall opportunities for people in Lebanon.

The country has a long history of migration with Lebanese people migrating in other countries in search of better opportunities. However, the scale of migration is on the increase as is the number of international emigrants from Lebanon⁸. Economic instability and limited employment opportunities have led to significant emigration of Lebanese youth and professionals. This "brain drain" has been pronounced also in crucial sectors like healthcare and education, where the departure of skilled individuals undermines the quality and availability of essential services. The exodus of educated youth not only depletes the country's human capital but also hampers prospects for economic recovery and development⁹.

Concurrently, Lebanon's population is aging. The median age of the population has increased from 23 years in the year 2000 to 28.6 years in 2024 (Figure 1). The proportion of individuals aged 65 and above has been steadily increasing, reaching approximately 10 per cent of the total population in recent years¹⁰. These trends

⁵ The demographic transition is a change in patterns of population growth, from high rates of fertility and mortality to low rates of fertility and mortality.

⁶ United Nations population division estimates. See Data portal.

⁷ Ibid.

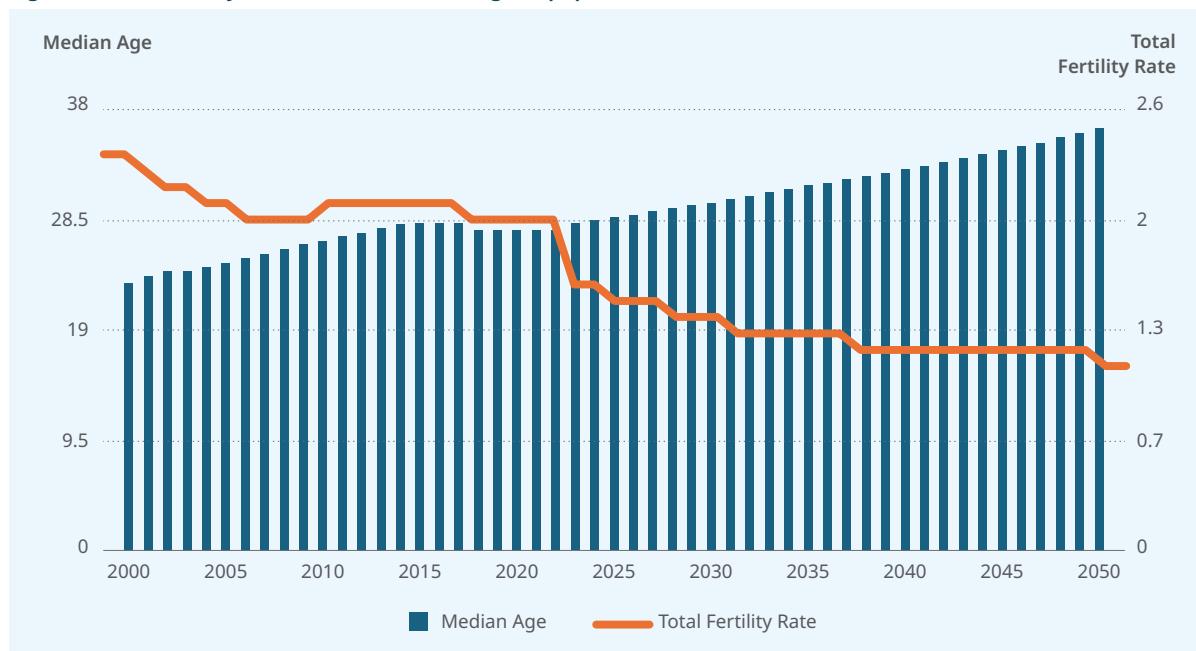
⁸ Link: [International Data | Migration data portal](#).

⁹ World Bank. Lebanon Poverty and Equity Assessment: Weathering a Protracted Crisis. 2024.

¹⁰ World Bank databank: query 8 April 2025.

are set to continue in the coming years, placing additional pressure on social services and healthcare systems, and increasing the urgency of reforms to support the growing elderly population.

Figure 1. Total fertility rate (TFR) and Median age of population, Lebanon 2000-2050.



Source: United Nations population division estimates and projections.

Current projections indicate that the absolute number of working-age individuals (15–64 years) will maintain a residual, although modest, upward trend through 2050, owing largely to demographic momentum and the current age structure. However, the combination of declining fertility rates and youth emigration increasingly negatively affects the size of the workforce. These dynamics indicate that Lebanon's potential to reap the benefits of a demographic dividend is decreasing. A demographic dividend occurs when a country has a higher proportion of working-age individuals relative to the population who are dependent, typically leading to economic growth. However, Lebanon's current demographic trends suggest that this window of opportunity is fast narrowing, with projections indicating that the demographic window may close by 2028¹¹.

Lebanon also hosts a substantial number of refugees and migrants due to regional conflicts, further complicating its demographic landscape. As of June 2025, Government estimates indicate that there are approximately 1.4 million Syrian refugees¹² and 250,000 Palestinian refugees¹³ in Lebanon. While these populations contribute to the labor market, it is important to strengthen public services and infrastructure to ensure equitable access for all.

Lebanon needs to prioritize policies and investments to address the current demographic shift and to capitalize on what is left of the country's demographic dividend. This means, first, retaining and investing in its youth through expanded opportunities in education, skills, and employment, particularly in sectors aligned with future economic transformation. Second, reforms are needed to make essential services more inclusive, efficient, and responsive to demographic realities, including aging populations and shifting dependency ratios. Third, governance reforms are critical to improve institutional capacity and public trust, particularly in areas affecting children and young families.

While the full demographic transition will unfold over decades, policy decisions made in the next few years will define whether this shift becomes a source of resilience or risk. Without decisive action, Lebanon risks entering a period of demographic contraction marked by growing inequity, weakened human capital, and rising social and fiscal pressures.

11 Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Demographic Profile of the Arab Region Realizing the Demographic Dividend. Beirut 2016. (see pages 24-28).

12 UNHCR Data Portal.

13 UNRWA, February 2025.



Climate and environmental crises

Lebanon is increasingly exposed to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, with children among the most affected and vulnerable. The Children Climate Risk Index (CCRI)¹⁴ provides a robust conceptual framework to assess these impacts. The CCRI is composed of two pillars: *exposure* (Pillar 1) which measures the degree to which children are exposed to climate and environmental hazards, and *vulnerability* (Pillar 2), that captures their sensitivity and capacity to cope.

Children in Lebanon have high levels of *exposure* to multiple compounding climate-related risks. Water **scarcity** is ranked by the CCRI as 'extremely high risk' with a score of 9.4 out of 10. Lebanon is a water-scarce country, and declining rainfall over recent decades has exacerbated the situation¹⁵. This has also led to overexploitation of groundwater resources at unsustainable levels, while coastal aquifers suffer from seawater intrusion. Water scarcity and drought can have severe repercussions for children, including food insecurity caused, for example, by crop failure and livestock deaths, and increased poverty. A reduction in availability of fresh water for drinking and hygiene also directly contributes to higher incidence of water-borne and hygiene-related diseases, as evidenced by the cholera outbreak in October 2022.

High temperatures and heatwaves are a growing concern. Lebanon has experienced rising frequency of heatwaves, including severe events with prolonged temperatures above 40°C in inland regions such as the Bekaa Valley. Urban areas such as Beirut are also suffering from intensifying heat island effects, driven by loss of vegetation and poor infrastructure. By the end of the century as many as 65 per cent of all days could be categorized as 'hot days'¹⁶ compared to a current average of 15 days per year. Greater exposure to heatwaves increases children's risks of heat-related illness and places significant stress on their health and well-being¹⁷.

Vector-borne diseases are ranked as a 'medium risk' by the CCRI (5.2 out of 10), and it is expected to rise as higher temperatures and changing rainfall patterns create more favorable conditions for disease-carrying mosquitoes and other vectors. Children are particularly vulnerable due to their developing immune systems and higher exposure during outdoor activities or inadequately protected housing. The rising incidence of these illnesses would further stretch the capacities of households and public health systems to cope.

Environmental pollution presents an additional threat. Lebanon's CCRI scores are 8 out of 10 for pesticide pollution and 6.1 for soil and water pollution. These forms of environmental pollution pose a serious risk to children's health and development. Exposure to pollutants can impair respiratory and neurological functions, hinder physical and cognitive development and compromise access to safe food and water. These risks are particularly acute for poorer communities, where access to clean environments and essential health services is generally more limited.

The threat of overlapping hazards affects an increasing number of children in Lebanon, especially those in vulnerable communities. These hazards often interact and reinforce each other, producing compounding negative effects that are greater than the sum of their parts. Such cumulative impacts make it more difficult for families and communities to recover from shocks and to build long-term resilience.

The severity of hazards affecting children varies substantially across the regions in Lebanon. While children's exposure is high, their *vulnerability* can be reduced through resilient systems and services, including the capacity and readiness of systems and communities to deliver climate-resilient essential services. This is the focus of the second pillar of the CCRI, that provides a measure of the capacity to protect children through essential services, Health and Nutrition; Education; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); and Social protection. Across all of these four dimensions, Lebanon faces growing challenges in ensuring children's **climate-resilient access to services**. These challenges are explored further in Section 3 of this report.

¹⁴ UNICEF (2021). *The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index*.

¹⁵ Climate center. Lebanon climate fact sheet, 2024.

¹⁶ WHO and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 2022.

¹⁷ For an overview of the impact of heatwave on children, see: UNICEF, *The Coldest Year of the Rest of their Lives: Protecting children from the escalating impacts of heatwaves*, 2022.

As climate and environmental risks intensify, Lebanon must act to reduce children's exposure and vulnerability by strengthening the resilience investments in systems that protect children from escalating threats. This means expanding access to climate-resilient essential services, strengthening adaptive social protection, and integrating child-sensitive priorities into disaster preparedness and climate finance strategies. Children should also increasingly be enabled to act as agents of change. Ensuring that adaptation efforts are inclusive of children and young people's needs and voices, particularly in planning for education, health, and local infrastructure, will be instrumental in reducing long-term harm. Without such actions, climate shocks risk compounding existing inequalities and trap the most vulnerable children into cycles of deprivation and lost opportunity.





Frontier technologies

Frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), digital platforms and green energy, are reshaping economies and societies worldwide. The opportunities associated with technological advancement are real, but so are the risks of deepening exclusion and violation of children's rights. As Lebanon grapples with long-standing governance and service delivery challenges, frontier technologies offer a largely untapped resource to support the country's human development and economic recovery.

Digitalization is among the most tangible dimensions of technological transformation, shaping how people learn, work, and interact. Lebanon has a relatively widespread mobile network with an estimated 92 per cent of the population covered by 4G¹⁸ and an internet penetration of 78 per cent¹⁹. However, the benefits of the digital economy are generally concentrated in a narrow segment of the population²⁰. Full digital transformation requires more equitable access to digital tools and solutions and a more widespread availability of digital skills and awareness. Recent reports²¹ emphasize that frequent electricity outages, increased costs of mobile data, and inflation have further constrained access to digital services, particularly in low-income and refugee-hosting areas in the country. These disparities are particularly relevant in the area of education, where gaps in curricula and school equipment constrain the provision of adequate digital skills, in a context in which digital tools are increasingly required. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, students from lower-income families faced significantly higher challenges due to inadequate access to necessary technologies and stable internet connections²². A challenge that has exacerbated itself as a result of the recent conflict with Israel, when the lack of reliable internet connection resulted in many students suffering learning losses²³.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming economies and societies worldwide, offering opportunities to exponentially enhance productivity, improve public services, and address complex challenges. Lebanon ranks 105th globally in the International Monetary Fund's AI Preparedness Index, with a score of 0.42 out of 1. This ranking reflects limitations in digital infrastructure, data availability, and institutional capacity.²⁴ Lebanon lacks a comprehensive AI policy and faces challenges in integrating AI technologies into its economic and social frameworks. The lack of updated digital infrastructure, coupled with economic constraints, hinders the development and deployment of AI solutions. Education and workforce development are critical components of AI readiness. While Lebanon boasts a high percentage of students enrolled in STEM²⁵ subjects, there is a need to update curricula to include competencies essential for the AI era. The Government has recently announced investments in generative AI and digital public infrastructure, including modernizing government services and enhancing transparency²⁶.

Green energy technologies, such as solar panels, decentralized microgrids, and battery storage, offer significant potential to enhance the delivery of essential services like education and healthcare, particularly in the context of Lebanon's persistent power outages. The country has witnessed a substantial increase in solar capacity, from virtually none in 2010 to over 690 megawatts by 2022, driven largely by private initiatives and community-level projects²⁷. Despite progress in renewable energy adoption, Lebanon lacks a comprehensive national strategy to scale decentralized renewable energy solutions for public service delivery. While the

18 World bank. 2020 data.

19 Kemp, S. (2020). Digital 2020: Lebanon. DataReportal.

20 American University of Beirut. *The Digital Economy as an Alternative in Lebanon: Opportunities and Barriers. Policy Brief, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs*, 2020.

21 World Bank (2024). Lebanon Poverty and Equity Assessment [p. 45–46], 2024. // Human Rights Watch. Lebanon Electricity Crisis Exacerbates Poverty and Inequality, 2023.

22 SMEX (2020). *Remote Learning and the Digital Divide in Lebanon*.

23 ESCWA, UNDP, ILO, UNICEF, and UN Habitat. The socioeconomic impacts of the 2024 war on Lebanon.

24 AI Preparedness Index (AIFI) - AI Preparedness Index.

25 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

26 See April 2025 article with statements from the Minister of State for Technology and Artificial Intelligence.

27 Notably, organizations like UNICEF have completed the solarization of 150 primary healthcare centers, ensuring the continuity of critical services such as immunizations amid the ongoing electricity crisis.

government has developed action plans like the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP), implementation has been hindered by political and economic challenges. The country's energy sector faces difficulties in compiling energy data, leading to an incomplete energy balance, and the energy data that is available is often outdated²⁸. While a decentralized renewable energy law (Law 318/2023) was introduced to increase the development of decentralized renewable energy solutions, gaps remain in the regulatory framework, including the lack of an adequate and up-to-date standardization and certification system²⁹.

If Lebanon can strategically harness the potential of frontier technologies, it could unlock critical gains in human development and service delivery. This requires prioritizing foundational investments in digital infrastructure, ensuring reliable internet and electricity, especially in schools, clinics, and underserved areas. Strengthening digital inclusion through the education system is also essential, including the integration of digital skills in curricula, teacher training, and expanding access to digital learning resources. Regulatory framework and investments in decentralized green energy solutions would help improve continuity of services in the face of power disruptions. Deliberate efforts are required to promote equity in access and use, ensuring that technological benefits extend beyond urban and high-income areas to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.



28 International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Renewable Energy Outlook: Lebanon. 2020.

29 The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies: Regulating the Energy Transition: Lebanon's New Law on Distributed Renewable Energy. 2024.

SECTION 3

Lebanon's children in the world of 2050



The structural forces shaping Lebanon – demographic change, climate stress, and technological transformation, are not only testing institutions and changing societies; they are fundamentally reshaping children’s life trajectories. This section explores four critical domains that will determine the well-being and opportunities of Lebanon’s children over the coming decades: child survival and health, education and learning, poverty and inequality, and conflict. Drawing from the global analytical framework of the State of the World’s Children 2024 and inspired by the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSP) foresight approach³⁰, this section highlights how Lebanon’s future development pathways will be shaped by today’s outcomes in these foundational areas. Whether Lebanon’s children thrive, survive, or are left behind will depend on urgent action across these domains.

Following the approach used in the SOWC 2024, this section looks at the future trajectories of children in Lebanon using three development scenarios based on the SSP framework (see Figure 2). Whenever data is available, the analysis includes comparisons on how the country will evolve under the three scenarios.

Figure 2. Key characteristics of the three development scenarios used in the analysis

Scenarios	Key Features
Rapid development (SSP1): Sustainability and Inclusion	Strong investment in education, health, and social protection; reduced inequality; environmental resilience; inclusive governance.
Medium development (SSP2): Middle of the Road	Moderate improvements in services; persistent inequalities; partial resilience; uneven access to opportunities.
Stalled development (SSP3): Stagnation and Exclusion	Weak governance; limited investment in children; rising poverty and inequality; growing social fragmentation.

The sections that follow point to critical areas for action: restoring essential health and nutrition services; transforming the education system to ensure inclusive, future-oriented learning; strengthening social protection to reduce poverty and vulnerability; and protecting children from the compounding effects of conflict and displacement. These priorities form the backbone of a sustainable recovery pathway – one that places children at the centre of national development.



Child survival and life expectancy

Lebanon has made important strides in reducing child mortality over recent decades. Neonatal and infant mortality rates declined from approximately 30–35 per 1,000 live births in the 1970s to around 7 per 1,000 by the mid-2010s³¹. However, this trend has recently reversed: estimates indicate that infant mortality rose to approximately 11 per 1,000 live births in 2023³². This regression reflects the fragility of essential systems and public services challenges under sustained pressure from multiple crises and, more recently, conflict and war.

30 The Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSP) are a set of standardized global scenarios used in climate and development foresight. They describe plausible alternative futures based on varying assumptions about economic growth, social inclusion, environmental protection, and governance. The demographic and human capital projections used in this report are drawn from the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, which applies the SSP framework to produce national and global forecasts.

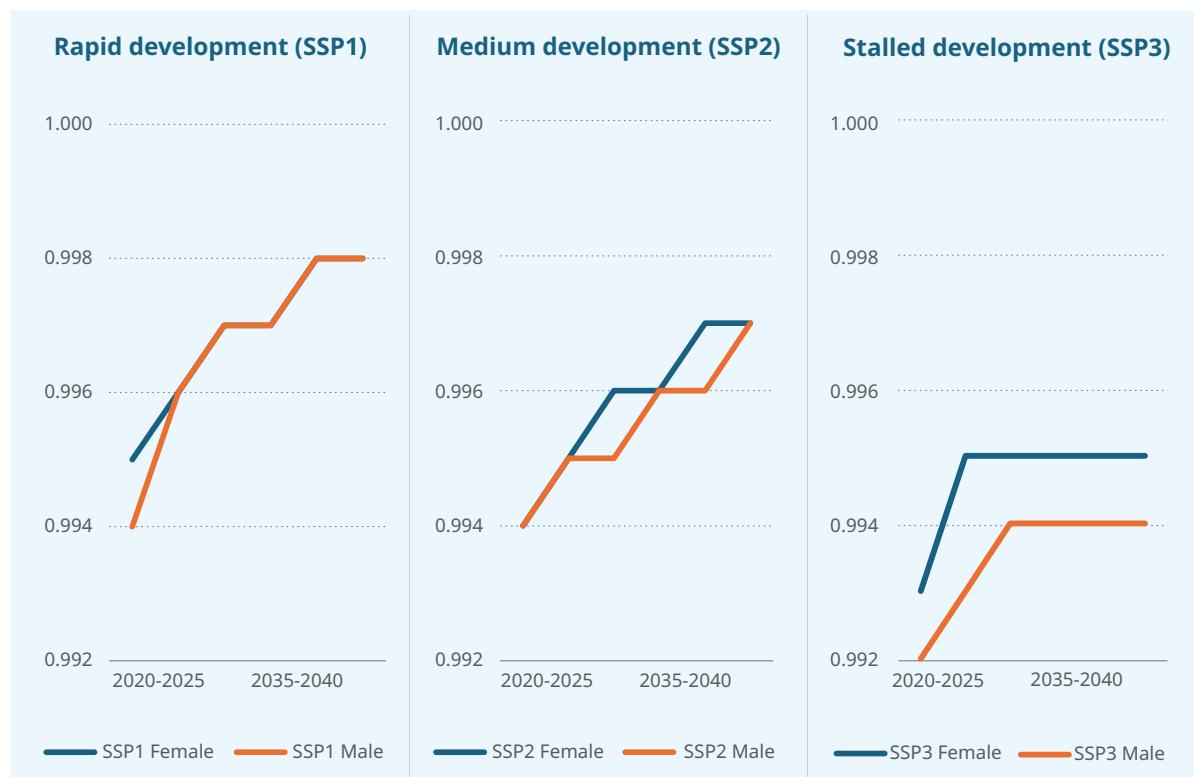
31 UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (CME): [CME databank](#) queried in April 2025.

32 Ibid.

Children's survival is not only shaped by immediate health risks, but also by the broader environment in which they are born and grow. Food insecurity, declining healthcare quality, and exposure to shocks are contributing to a rise in early childhood stunting and wasting³³, while adolescent overweight and obesity are increasing. These patterns are becoming more visible as economic vulnerability and service disruption deepen. Lebanon's protracted crisis has also eroded access to preventive care, with long-term consequences for child development. The negative impact of climate change and environmental degradation will increasingly deepen the current challenges.

The country has the potential to counter and even reverse these negative trends and ensure that all preventable deaths are avoided and children can survive and thrive. In a scenario of rapid and inclusive development (SSP1), where sustained investment is made in public health, nutrition, and essential services, Lebanon could achieve a newborn survival rate of 99.8 per cent by 2050 (Figure 4). In contrast, under a stalled development scenario (SSP3), where services continue to erode, the survival rate would stagnate near 99.4 per cent for female and 99.5 per cent for male.

Figure 3. Newborn chance of survival, Lebanon 2000-2050.



Source: Wittgenstein Centre. [Human Capital Data Explorer](#). Queried in May 2025.

Pursuing adequate policy choices would yield large improvements also in overall life expectancy. As shown in Figure 5, under the rapid development scenario (SSP1), life expectancy at mid-century would reach 89 years for women and 85 for men - a 10-year increase compared to current estimates. By contrast, in a stalled development scenario (SSP3), life expectancy would plateau at 83 years for women and 79 for men. These gains reflect the cumulative benefits of investing in child survival, preventive health, and equitable access to essential services throughout the life course.

33 IPC, [Integrated Food security phase classification](#), January 2025.

Figure 4. Overall life expectancy, three scenarios. Lebanon 2000-2050.



Source: Wittgenstein Centre. [Human Capital Data Explorer](#). Queried in May 2025.

These projections highlight a critical juncture for Lebanon. Achieving the rapid development scenario (SSP1), characterized by near-universal newborn survival and substantially extended life expectancy by 2050 - requires deliberate, timely, and sustained policy choices. Progress toward this goal hinges on Lebanon's capacity to place children at the center of social and economic planning, recognizing that the country's long-term resilience depends on the decisions made today to protect and support its youngest generation.

To move in this direction, Lebanon must prioritize comprehensive, child-centered investments in health, nutrition, and basic services. The health system should be strengthened around a fully resourced and accessible primary healthcare network that serves as the first point of contact for women and children. Universal access to essential health services must be guaranteed without financial hardship, with a particular focus on ensuring high-quality maternal and newborn care and scaling up immunization to eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases across all communities. Local health networks and frontline workers should be supported to deliver an integrated continuum of care that includes prevention, treatment, and early stimulation.

Efforts to improve child nutrition and development must adopt a systems approach, aligning policies and investments across sectors – including food, health, education, WASH, and social protection. Lebanon should accelerate the integration of high-quality nutrition and early childhood development services into inclusive platforms such as daycares, primary healthcare centers, and social development hubs. In parallel, food systems must be reformed to ensure that all children have access to healthy, safe, affordable diets, while harmful marketing practices and the spread of ultra-processed foods are curtailed through public regulation and responsible business practices.

Reliable access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene services must be ensured for all, with a focus on vulnerable groups and climate resilience. These essential services, along with support for responsive caregiving and family-friendly workplace.



Education

Education in Lebanon is at a critical inflection point. Once a cornerstone of human capital and national identity, the education system has been deeply strained by years of compounding crises. The combined effects of economic collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, and most recently the conflict-induced displacement of over half a million students, have disrupted access to learning for an entire generation³⁴. The ongoing crisis has also strained the capacity of both public and private schools. Rapid shifts between systems, driven by affordability rather than choice, have left schools overwhelmed and unevenly resourced. Teachers, whose real incomes have plummeted due to inflation and currency depreciation, are struggling to remain in the profession. Many classrooms lack the most basic infrastructure, including heating, electricity, and safe water.

Public education has suffered from underfunding, with Government spending among the lowest in the region, ranging between 2 and 3 percent of GDP³⁵. In addition, widespread teacher attrition, and infrastructural decay have amplified long-standing inequalities and undermined the system's capacity to deliver inclusive, quality education.

These disruptions are not short-term setbacks, they threaten to erode the country's development prospects for decades. Learning losses are accumulating across all levels of education, disproportionately affecting the poorest children, those with disabilities, girls, and refugees. A UNICEF survey conducted in late 2023 found that 16 per cent of families had resorted to sending their children to work to cope with income loss, pushing children further out of school and into exploitative or hazardous environments³⁶. The risks of child labour, early marriage, and long-term exclusion from education have risen sharply.

Yet education remains one of the most powerful levers for recovery and resilience. Schools are more than places of learning; they are protective spaces that offer stability, psychosocial support, and hope. Investing in an inclusive and adequately financed education system would yield profound returns: equipping young people with the skills to participate in society, contributing to economic renewal, and rebuilding trust in public institutions.

Scenario analysis illustrates what is at stake for Lebanon (Figures 6 and 7). In a stalled development trajectory (SSP3), the share of young adults who have attained primary and post-secondary education level education could stagnate around the current levels, 11 per cent and 37 per cent respectively, entrenching inequality and limiting future earnings. In contrast, a rapid development path (SSP1) could raise educational attainment dramatically by 2050, with only 2 per cent of youths whose highest level of attainment is primary education (figure 6) and a growing share achieving post-secondary education (61 per cent in 2050, Figure 7).³⁷

³⁴ ESCWA, UNDP, ILO, UNICEF, and UN Habitat. The socioeconomic impacts of the 2024 war on Lebanon.

³⁵ World Bank. *Lebanon Public Finance Review: Ponzi Finance?* 2022.

³⁶ UNICEF. Trapped in a downward spiral: The unrelenting toll of Lebanon's crisis on children, December 2023.

³⁷ *The decline in the share of youth with only primary education in the rapid development scenario (SSP1), reflects upward progression, as more young people advance to secondary and post-secondary levels attaining higher levels of education.*

Figure 5. Percentage of young people aged 20-24 whose highest level of attainment is primary education. Three scenarios. Lebanon 2020-2050.

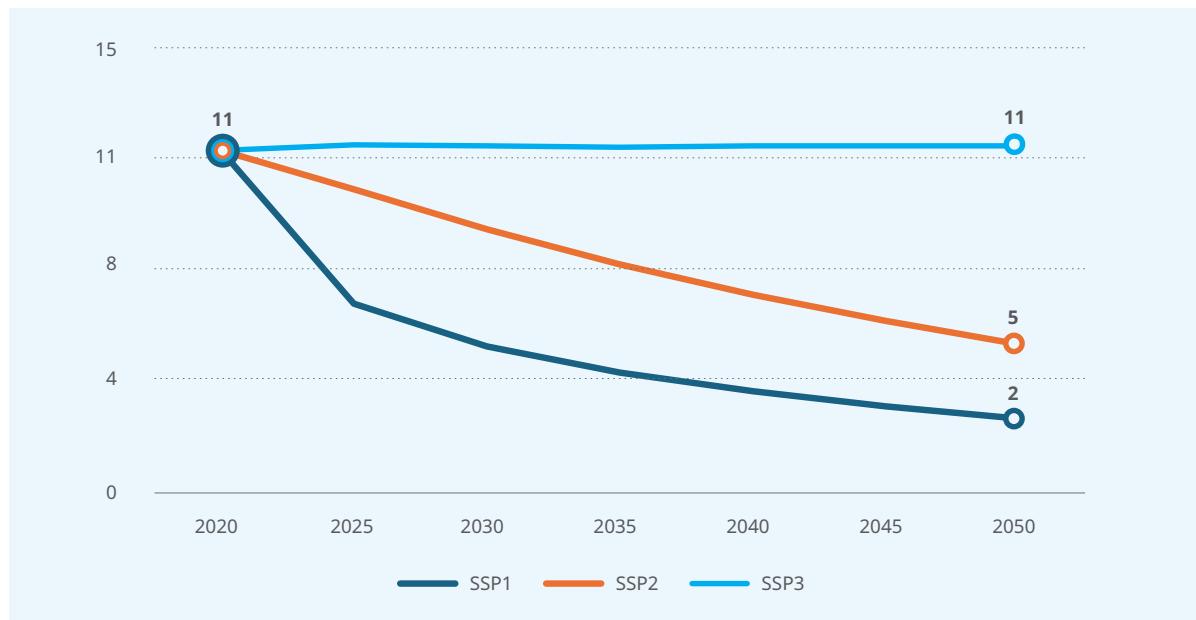
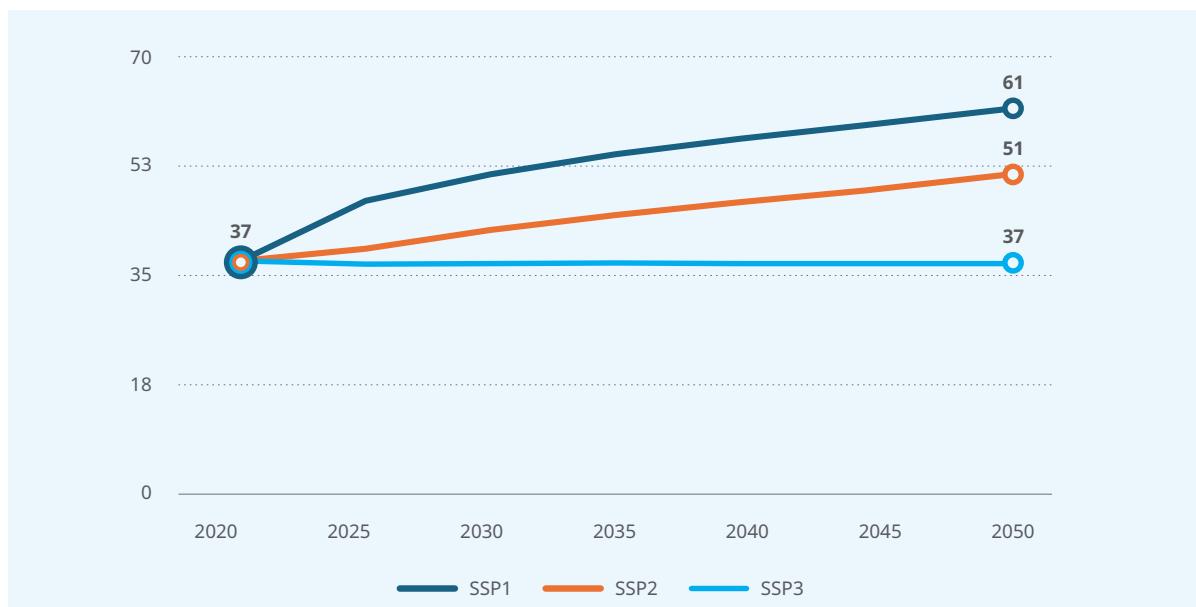


Figure 6. Percentage of young people aged 20-24 years whose highest level of attainment is post-secondary education. Three scenarios. Lebanon 2020-2050.



Source: Wittgenstein Centre. [Human Capital Data Explorer](#). Queried in May 2025.

The education trajectories outlined in the scenario analysis underscore what is at stake for Lebanon. Reversing learning losses and expanding opportunities for future generations will require sustained, systemic reform. Lebanon must prioritize the restoration and transformation of its education system, ensuring it is inclusive, resilient, and capable of equipping learners for a changing world. This starts with guaranteeing access to safe and functional learning environments for all children, regardless of background, status, or ability. Investments are needed to rehabilitate infrastructure, particularly in public general and vocational schools serving the most vulnerable communities, and to ensure reliable electricity, water, and internet connectivity – foundations for both traditional and digital learning.

Teachers must be supported by ensuring adequate compensation, professional development, and psychosocial support for teachers to restore morale, improve retention, and deliver quality learning. Reforms should also

focus on modernizing curricula to build foundational, transferable, life and digital skills from early grades through adolescence. Expanding the use of ed-tech, especially for remote or displaced learners, and mainstreaming inclusive education practices are critical to reaching the most marginalized groups.

Creating safe learning environments also means strengthening child protection within the education system. Lebanon must scale up school-based prevention strategies to address violence, bullying, and psychosocial stress, while ensuring that learners have access to supportive services and referral pathways. Schools should be safe spaces where children feel protected and respected, both physically and emotionally.

Public financing for education must be increased and protected, with a clear commitment to equity and efficiency. This includes ensuring that refugee and vulnerable Lebanese children have equal access to learning opportunities and support services.

Education as a Pathway to Youth Engagement

Lebanon's large youth population – nearly one in four people – is coming of age in a context of disrupted schooling, shrinking economic prospects, and limited public voice. Beyond academic recovery, education must also equip adolescents and youth with the skills and confidence to shape their own futures and contribute to national renewal.

This means embedding life skills, 21st century skills, civic learning, and psychosocial support into secondary and vocational education, with particular attention to adolescent girls, children with disabilities, and refugee youth at risk of exclusion. Schools and TVET centres can serve as platforms for participation and peer leadership, connecting learning to real-world engagement and strengthening social cohesion in divided communities.

Realizing this vision requires modernizing curricula, expanding student-led initiatives, and creating safe spaces for voice and collaboration. These investments will help ensure that education in addition to transmitting knowledge also builds the next generation of engaged and resilient citizens.





Poverty and Inequality

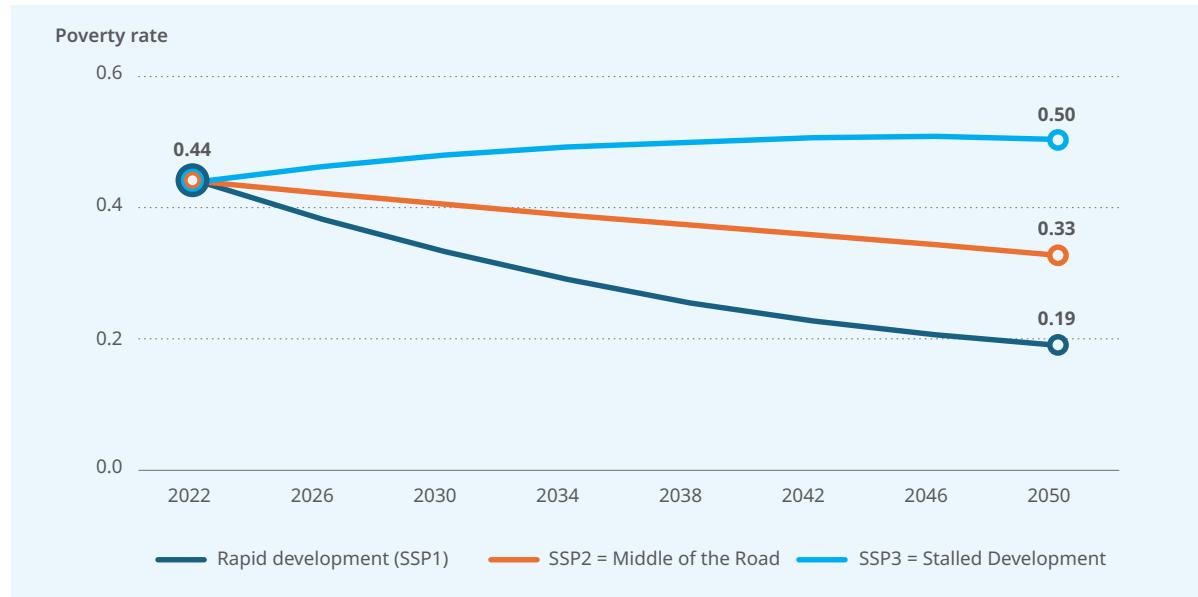
Lebanon's successive crises have turned a long-standing economic fragility into a systemic shock. The collapse of the currency, steep declines in household income, and the continued erosion of public services have pushed millions into poverty, exposing children to deeper and more widespread deprivation. Inequality has widened, weakening social cohesion both within communities and between host and refugee populations, and straining the foundations of Lebanon's social contract. Both the scale and depth of poverty have dramatically expanded.

While nationally representative post-crisis data remain unavailable, World Bank surveys from 2022 estimate that monetary poverty reached 44 per cent in five of the country's governorates, a sharp rise compared to pre-crisis levels³⁸.

Children are especially vulnerable to the multi-dimensional, long-term effects of poverty. Income loss increases the risk of school dropout, child labour, child marriage, malnutrition, and reduced access to healthcare and protection services. *The State of the World's Children 2024* underscores that multidimensional poverty often begins in early childhood and persists throughout the life course when left unaddressed. Without a structural response, today's poverty will become tomorrow's intergenerational trap.

To explore how monetary poverty might evolve over the coming decades, Figure 8 presents the results of a simulation of poverty trajectories for Lebanon³⁹ under the three distinct SSP development scenarios used in this report. The simulation provides illustrative poverty outcomes based on different evolution of growth and inequality in Lebanon.

Figure 7. Projected Monetary poverty rate in Lebanon under different development scenarios (2022–2050)



Source: Author's calculation based on GIP model simulation⁴⁰.

38 World Bank. 2024. *Lebanon Poverty and Equity Assessment 2024: Weathering a Protracted Crisis*.

39 This simulation uses a log-linear Growth–Inequality–Poverty (GIP) model to estimate changes in monetary poverty based on elasticities of poverty with respect to GDP per capita and the Gini coefficient. A methodological note is included at the Annex of this report.

40 This is the only projection in the report based on national simulation. All other scenario data draws from international projections described in the SOWC 2024.

Under a rapid development scenario (SSP1), characterized by sustained economic growth and gradually declining inequality, the poverty rate could fall from 44 percent in 2022 to 19 percent by 2050. In contrast, under a stalled development scenario (SSP3), where economic growth is weak and inequality continues to rise, poverty could increase to over 50 percent. The middle-of-the-road scenario (SSP2), which assumes moderate growth and moderate increase in inequality, results in a modest decline in poverty, reaching 33 percent by mid-century.

The three trajectories of poverty reflect different combinations of economic growth and inequality. These variables are in turn shaped by policy choices. While economic growth is essential to reducing poverty, its impact is significantly weakened when inequality remains high.

Social protection systems can play a vital role in decreasing inequalities, safeguarding communities, including children, from the impact of poverty and crisis and in decreasing multi-dimensional poverty. The social protection system in Lebanon has developed substantially over the past years, yet it remains fragmented, underfunded, and largely unprepared for rapid scaling or for responding effectively to shocks and crises. Prior to 2019, non-contributory social assistance accounted for just 7 per cent of social protection spending, with most resources captured by regressive subsidies and contributory schemes focused on formal employment⁴¹. Targeted programmes such as the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP) reached only a fraction of those in need and suffered from outdated data systems and limited administrative capacity.

The 2023 endorsement of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) marks a critical opportunity. If fully implemented, the strategy could lay the foundation for a more inclusive, disability- and gender-responsive, and shock-adaptive system – capable of protecting children, families, and vulnerable workers during both normal and crisis periods.

To move toward the SSP1 trajectory, Lebanon must:

- Scale up child-sensitive cash transfers, starting with a national child grant, aligned with UNICEF's vision for universal child benefits by 2050.
- Ensure that persons with disabilities have access to dedicated social allowances and services and economic inclusion.
- Expand shock-responsive safety nets that can be rapidly deployed in times of crisis.
- Integrate social protection with basic service delivery, linking social grants to improvements in health, education, nutrition, and early childhood development.

While national choices will largely shape Lebanon's trajectory, external conditions – such as regional stability and global economic trends – will also matter. But even under constraint, deliberate, equity-focused policy decisions can shift the country toward a future in which no child grows up in extreme poverty, and every child has the opportunity to thrive.



Conflict

Conflict is not just a separate risk; it is a cross-cutting factor that undermines all other domains discussed in this report. It disrupts services and livelihoods, deepens poverty, derails education, and threatens child survival. As shown in the SSP scenarios, the persistence or resolution of conflict will significantly influence Lebanon's broader development trajectory and children's long-term outcomes.

Lebanon's children are growing up in a context of persistent fragility. The escalation of hostilities along the southern border in late 2023 has added an acute conflict risk on top of an already protracted economic and institutional crisis. For many communities particularly in the South and among refugee populations, this has

41 ILO and UNICEF. *Lebanon Social Protection Diagnostic Review*, 2022.

meant repeated displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and disruption of already strained public services⁴².

Recent assessments⁴³ indicate that the 2023–24 conflict, which escalated into a war between September and November 2024, displaced over 1 million people and disrupted schooling, health care, and water supply systems across southern and eastern regions. A UNICEF survey conducted in February 2025 found that, even post-conflict, over one-quarter of households had children out of school, rising to more than half among Syrian refugees, with costs of school materials and transportation cited as major barriers⁴⁴. Anxiety and psychosocial distress were also widely reported, particularly among children in affected areas, compounding the already limited availability of mental health support. Girls in conflict-affected areas are particularly exposed to risks of early marriage, gender-based violence, and long-term exclusion.

Beyond direct harm, conflict accelerates the erosion of essential systems. Damage to health clinics, electricity supply, and water infrastructure in frontline areas has made basic services increasingly unreliable. Humanitarian needs outpaced response capacity, as aid pipelines strained under both security constraints and funding shortfalls. In eastern Lebanon, surveys found that over half of children under two were considered at risk of severe food poverty, while 31 per cent of households report insufficient access to safe drinking water⁴⁵.

While no formal child-level conflict projections exist for Lebanon, foresight analysis can help frame plausible trajectories. Drawing from the broader SSP-style logic used throughout this report:

- **In a stalled development scenario (SSP3)**, persistent insecurity, limited state legitimacy, and underfunded recovery would result in continuous cycles of displacement and service collapse. Children in high-risk areas would face repeated educational disruption, poor mental health outcomes, and widening protection risks.
- **In a middle-of-the-road scenario (SSP2)**, de-escalation without systemic reform would enable partial stabilization, but chronic vulnerabilities would persist. Humanitarian aid would remain essential, with children's outcomes varying widely by region and status.
- **In a rapid development scenario (SSP1)**, sustained de-escalation coupled with governance reform and investment in service restoration could lay the foundations for community resilience. In this scenario, children affected by conflict would have access to recovery services, continuity of learning, and psychosocial support, preventing long-term developmental losses.

These scenarios illustrate that the effects of conflict on children are not only determined by security dynamics, but by how systems respond, including investments in shock-resilient social protection education, health, child protection, and mental health services. Strengthening local governance, restoring public trust, and securing sustained international support are essential to prevent conflict-affected children from being left behind.

Reducing children's exposure to conflict and strengthening their resilience must be central to any national recovery agenda. This includes safeguarding continuity of essential services in high-risk areas, investing in school-based protection and mental health support, and enabling local systems to respond to displacement and disruption. The long-term wellbeing of conflict-affected children – and the stability of the country – will depend on early, sustained investment in inclusive, shock-resilient systems.

42 UNICEF, Caught in the crossfire, April 2024.

43 IDMC, Internal Displaced Monitoring Centers, estimates, May 2025.

44 UNICEF, Shuttered Childhood. The catastrophic toll of war on children in Lebanon. February 2025.

45 Ibid.

Section 4

The future is for Lebanon to shape: a call for action



The trajectory that Lebanon takes between now and 2050 will determine the life chances of an entire generation. While the megatrends shaping the future, climate change, demographic shifts, technological transformation, are largely beyond national control, the outcomes for children are not. Whether Lebanon's children survive, learn, and thrive, or whether they grow up trapped in cycles of deprivation and exclusion, will depend on choices made today by policymakers, institutions, and society at large.

This report has illustrated how different futures are possible. Under a path of inaction, deepening inequality, and institutional stagnation, the basic foundations of child wellbeing will continue to erode. The consequences of inaction will not unfold overnight, they will compound year after year, shaping the life course of millions. Each missed opportunity to act deepens the risk of irreversible harm: to the country's social fabric, and to its capacity for recovery.

Avoiding that this trajectory materializes requires deliberate choices to be made by decision makers. With a shared commitment to children and deliberate policy choices, Lebanon can reverse course, strengthening systems, rebuilding trust, and placing the next generation at the center of national renewal.

The path forward must be strategic, selective, and grounded in the country's realities. Below are five priority areas that, if acted upon decisively, can shift the direction of travel towards a future where the rights and potential of children, and of the country at large - are realized.

01

Invest in universal, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient basic services

It is urgent to prioritize rebuilding and strengthening of the essential services that children rely on to survive and develop, starting from health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, child protection, and early childhood development. The systems providing these services must be inclusive of all children, including girls, children with disabilities, and refugees, and increasingly resilient to future shocks.

Priority actions:

- Prioritize restoration of **public basic service delivery** in health, education (including TVET), WASH, and child protection to reach minimum functionality and equity standards.
- Strengthen the **primary healthcare (PHC) system** as the first point of contact for maternal and child health, nutrition, and early developmental care.
- Scale up access to integrated **nutrition and early childhood development services**, delivered through inclusive platforms such as PHC centers, Social Development Centers, daycares, and community hubs.
- Ensure safe **drinking water, adequate sanitation**, and climate-resilient hygiene services for all children, especially in underserved areas.
- Embed **climate adaptation and emergency preparedness** into the design and delivery of all essential services.

02

Strengthen learning, skills, and opportunity for a changing world

Lebanon's recovery depends on a generation equipped with the knowledge and the skills to navigate a fast-changing labour market and society. The education system should deliver quality foundational, digital, and green skills to all learners, from early grades through adolescence and youth.

Priority actions:

- Ensure **inclusive access to quality primary and secondary education**, with particular support for girls, children with disabilities, and out-of-school youth.
- Reform **curricula** to integrate transferable skills, digital literacy, and climate awareness.
- **Expand TVET and non-formal pathways** linked to labor market needs, especially in underserved regions.
- **Support teachers** through adequate pay, training, and psychosocial support to sustain quality learning.

03

Build a fair and future-ready social protection system

Poverty and exclusion can negatively shape the course of a child's life. Lebanon's social protection system should move beyond fragmentation and emergency response to provide long-term, equitable protection.

Priority actions:

- **Operationalize the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS)** and build core delivery systems, including registry, payment, and grievance mechanisms.
- **Roll out a national child grant and disability allowances** as entry points toward universal child benefits.
- **Integrate shock-responsive** components to ensure rapid scale-up during crises.
- **Improve public finance for children** through progressive, transparent tax reform and reallocation away from regressive subsidies.

04

Protect childhood in times of conflict and disruption

Children in Lebanon are growing up under conditions of persistent fragility and periodic crisis. Their rights and wellbeing must be protected even in the face of instability. This means safeguarding access to services, strengthening mental health support, and ensuring rapid humanitarian response mechanisms are in place.

Priority actions:

- **Safeguard continuity of education, livelihood, health, and protection** services during crises.
- Scale up school-based **mental health and psychosocial support** services.
- Strengthen national and local capacity for **child protection in emergencies**.
- Improve **coordination between humanitarian and development actors** to bridge short-term response and long-term system recovery.

05

Enable young people as agents of change

Young people must be seen not only as recipients of support, but as contributors to Lebanon's renewal. Education systems, civic platforms, and labor policies should be aligned to amplify youth voice and foster meaningful participation.

Priority actions:

- **Sustain the National Youth Policy**, support and reform the TVET sector and strengthen employability skills and livelihood of vulnerable young people.
- **Integrate life skills, citizenship education, and digital competencies** into secondary and vocational curricula.
- **Create safe spaces for youth participation**, volunteering, and peer-led initiatives, including in refugee and marginalized communities.
- **Address barriers to girls' leadership and participation** in decision-making.
- **Strengthen youth mental health services** and platforms for expression and engagement.

A closing reflection

The future is not a fixed horizon; it is a space of decision. With deliberate, equity-focused policies and a sustained commitment to investing in children, the country can chart a different course. Doing so is not only a moral imperative, but a strategic necessity for national renewal. The time to act is now, and the cost of delay will be measured in children's lives and in the fragility of Lebanon's future.



Annex – Methodological Note

This report adopts a forward-looking approach to examine how global megatrends and national decisions could shape the lives of children in Lebanon by 2050. Its structure and analytical framework draw from UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2024*, which emphasizes the need to connect macro-level forces with child-level outcomes. The report applies this global structure to the Lebanese context, focusing on selected megatrends and their intersection with key social sectors.

I. Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs) approach

A core element of the methodology is the use of the **Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs)** as a conceptual framework. Originally developed for climate modelling, the SSPs are globally recognized scenarios that outline different socioeconomic trajectories based on varying levels of investment, governance quality, and international cooperation. This report adapts three of these pathways to structure scenario-based projections and explore how different development choices could affect child outcomes in Lebanon:

- **SSP1 – Sustainability and Inclusion:** A scenario marked by effective governance, inclusive social policies, and strong investments in education, health, and social protection. Economic growth is coupled with equity, environmental sustainability, and institutional resilience.
- **SSP2 – Middle of the Road:** A scenario in which historical trends continue with incremental progress. Governance and public investment remain uneven, producing mixed outcomes in social development and persistent inequalities.
- **SSP3 – Stagnation and Exclusion:** A trajectory shaped by fragmentation, weak governance, and low investment in public services. Economic and social systems struggle to respond to shocks, and child outcomes deteriorate, especially for vulnerable populations.

The SSP framework is used throughout the report to guide both narrative development and illustrative projections. Where available, scenario-specific estimates are based on internationally validated sources, including population, education, and health data from the Wittgenstein Centre. In areas where nationally representative data are unavailable, estimates rely on the best available evidence and are accompanied by appropriate caveats.

This approach is not intended to produce deterministic forecasts. Rather, it supports structured anticipation of plausible futures under different policy conditions. The report does not include climate simulations based on emissions pathways (RCPs), and no econometric modelling was conducted. The emphasis is on analytical coherence, transparency, and alignment with internationally recognized foresight frameworks.

II. Projections methodology

The projections used in the survival and education sections of this report are drawn directly from the Wittgenstein Centre's Human Capital Data Explorer. The monetary poverty projection is not part of the SOWC and was developed specifically for this report based on a Growth-Inequality-Poverty (GIP) model detailed below.

III. Methodology Note: Projecting Poverty in Lebanon to 2050

This simulation estimates poverty trends in Lebanon from 2022 to 2050 under three development trajectories. It uses a **Growth-Inequality-Poverty (GIP) model**, linking poverty outcomes to changes in GDP per capita and inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient. The model uses 4-year intervals to match the target year of 2050.

The model follows a log-linear formulation:

$$P_{t+1} = P_t \cdot \left(\frac{GDP_{t+1}}{GDP_t} \right)^{\xi_y} \cdot \left(\frac{Gini_{t+1}}{Gini_t} \right)^{\xi_\sigma}$$

Where:

- P_t : Poverty headcount ratio at time t
- $GDPt$: GDP per capita in nominal USD
- $Gini_t$: Gini coefficient (inequality)
- ξ_y : Elasticity of poverty with respect to income growth
- ξ_σ : Elasticity of poverty with respect to inequality

Parameters and sources

Variable	Value	Source / Rationale
Baseline poverty (2022)	44%	World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor (Spring 2023)
GDP per capita (2022)	4,473 USD	World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook (2024)
Gini coefficient (2022)	0.322	World Bank, Poverty and Equity assessment, 2024 (page 28), consumption-based*
Growth elasticity (ξ_y)	-3.78	Based on empirical estimate from World Bank, Poverty and Equity assessment, 2024 (page 27), based on 2012-2022 poverty and growth data.
Inequality elasticity (ξ_σ)	+2.5	Literature-based estimate (Bourguignon 2003; Lopez & Servén 2006), consistent with MENA experience.

* We use **consumption-based Gini (0.322)** rather than income-based Gini (0.61), as consumption more accurately reflects household welfare.

The model applies the three scenario narratives:

Scenario	Narrative	Average GDP Growth	Gini Trajectory
SSP1 – Sustainability and Inclusion	Recovery, inclusive growth, strong governance	GDP grows from +2.5% (2022–2026) to +1.9% (2046–2050)	Gini falls from 0.322 to 0.29
SSP2 – Middle of the Road	Weak reforms, low growth	+1.5% annually throughout	Gini rises moderately to 0.335
SSP3 – Stagnation and Exclusion	Protracted crisis and fragility	-0.5% early decline, modest recovery to +1%	Gini rises sharply to 0.36

Each scenario includes seven projection steps (every 4 years) from 2022 to 2050.

Computational method: Log-change calculations of GDP and Gini per interval; resulting log-change in poverty applied multiplicatively to update values. The Gini trajectory is illustrative, it is not based on econometric forecasting, but on normative assumptions consistent with scenario logic and global benchmarks.

References

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