



# Rebuilding Beirut

The World Responds After Blasts Rock Lebanon's Capital



**Anera Reports**  
on the ground in the Middle East

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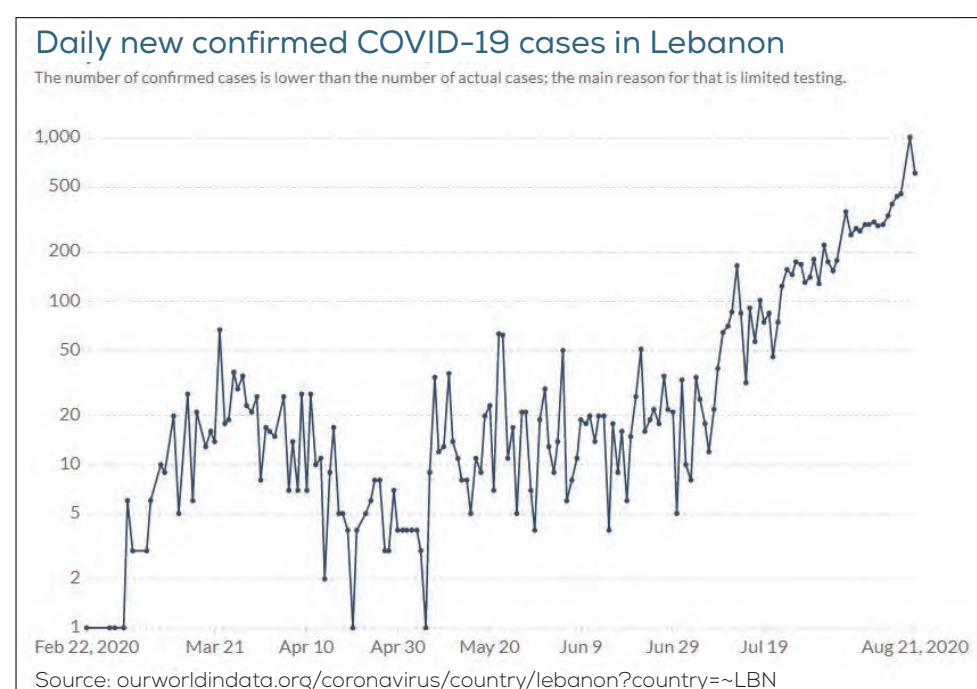
## THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN LEBANON

On August 4, 2020 at around 6 PM local time, a pair of explosions rocked Beirut, Lebanon's capital. The second and much more powerful blast is believed to have originated from a warehouse storing approximately 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate — a highly explosive chemical often used as fertilizer — which had been at the port since 2014. According to reports, a fire at a nearby warehouse ignited the large cache of ammonium nitrate. Lebanese and international officials are still investigating what caused the blast and why the explosive chemicals remained at the port for six years. In a city of 1.9 million, at least 300,000 people have been displaced from their homes. Initial reports estimate the cost of repairing damage to infrastructure in Beirut will likely be between \$10 and \$15 billion USD.<sup>1</sup>

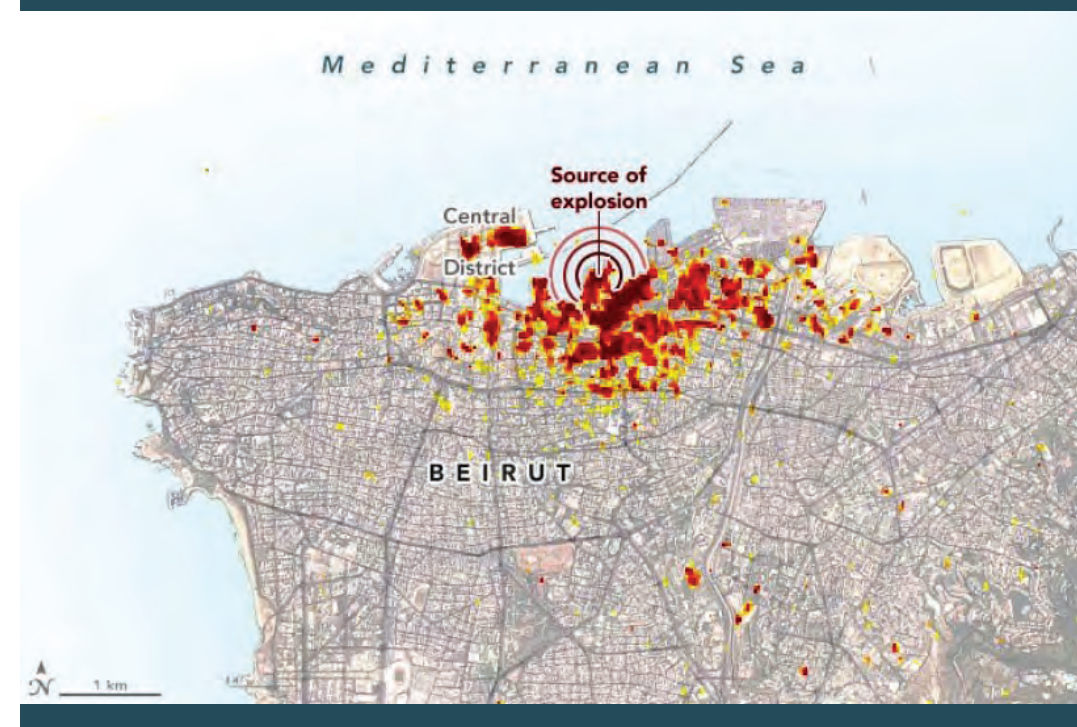
**Lebanon is facing the worst humanitarian crisis of its history, with the convergence of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, an economic collapse, and now this terrible, preventable explosion.**

Pre-pandemic, the country had a debt of more than 90 billion dollars, around 170 percent of the country's gross domestic product.<sup>2</sup> Banks no longer allow cash withdrawals in dollars, only in Lebanese pounds. Due to the drastic devaluation of Lebanese currency that has been ongoing since October 2019, restrictions on dollar withdrawals have caused customers to lose more than half the value of their money stored in banks. Lebanese banks are also blocking overseas money transfers and prohibiting online transactions.

The destruction of the port of Beirut — which processes 80% of the country's imported goods — could quickly plunge Lebanon into an even worse economic disaster.



The Lebanese pound has **lost 85% of its value** since October 2019.<sup>3</sup>



A damage proxy map created by scientists affiliated with NASA's Advanced Rapid Imaging and Analysis (ARIA) team and the Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS). Dark red pixels represent the most severe damage.

COVID-19 cases were steadily growing before the explosions took place. Now doctors are expecting the caseload to increase further over the next few weeks, as the emergency has led to lax preventive measures. People have been interacting more closely at hospitals and in the streets to respond with urgency to the suffering they see around them.

## IMPACT OF THE EXPLOSIONS IN BEIRUT

The August 4th explosion ripped through the city of Beirut and caused widespread damage and carnage more than 20 kilometers from the port area. People living in Cyprus, 276 kilometers away, even reported hearing the blast. Emergency rescue operations and non-profits mobilized and deployed quickly, providing immediate and ongoing humanitarian assistance and relief. According to Lebanon's health ministry, the latest death toll has reached 178 with over 6,000 people injured, with many still missing and hundreds of thousands displaced<sup>4</sup> Many children have been separated from their families or are still missing.

### Healthcare

Following the blasts, initial assessments indicate that at least six hospitals and 20 clinics suffered either heavy or partial structural damage, including maternal wards, immunization areas, and newborn centers, impacting services for thousands of people.<sup>5</sup> Rosair, Karantina and Saint George hospitals are fully inoperable and have been forced to redirect patients to other healthcare facilities. Geitawi and Rizk hospitals remain open but are partially inoperable.

**26**  
primary  
healthcare  
facilities are  
damaged

Source: OCHA Flash Appeal



Healthcare workers report that hundreds of thousands of medicines, used to supply health centers across Lebanon, were stored at the port and were badly damaged by the explosion. **One of the country's main vaccine and medication stock piles was destroyed in a warehouse near the port, leading to acute shortages in critically needed medications and supplies.**<sup>6</sup>

The explosions also destroyed essential personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline COVID-19 responders. Hospitals were already at maximum capacity with COVID-19 patients before the explosion. Now, inundated by those injured by the blast, these facilities are overwhelmed. Everyone in Lebanon, regardless of citizenship or socioeconomic status, already faced great difficulties accessing healthcare services before the blast and now opportunities for quality treatment are even scarcer. Many organizations have dispatched relief supplies, medical teams and field and/or mobile clinics to support the emergency response.

### Food Insecurity

Most families in Lebanon have struggled to afford basic food items in the last several months. Lebanon has faced an ever-worsening economic crisis since October 2019, which has caused rising unemployment rates, substantially reduced purchasing power, and increased poverty levels. All of these factors have steadily exacerbated food insecurity in the county. The main concerns related to food are a lack of financial resources, availability of fuel for cooking, and the closure of food suppliers and restaurants due to the economic crisis and the explosion.

According to the World Food Program the price of a basket of rice, bulgur, pasta, white beans, sugar, sunflower oil, salt, and canned meat increased by 166% from September 2019 to June 2020. This is marked by a 34% increase from May to June 2020 alone.<sup>7</sup> The explosion destroyed the country's main grain silo at the port, leaving the country with less than a month's reserve of grain.<sup>8</sup> Many organizations, including Anera, are providing food assistance to support vulnerable families in affected areas.

### Shelter

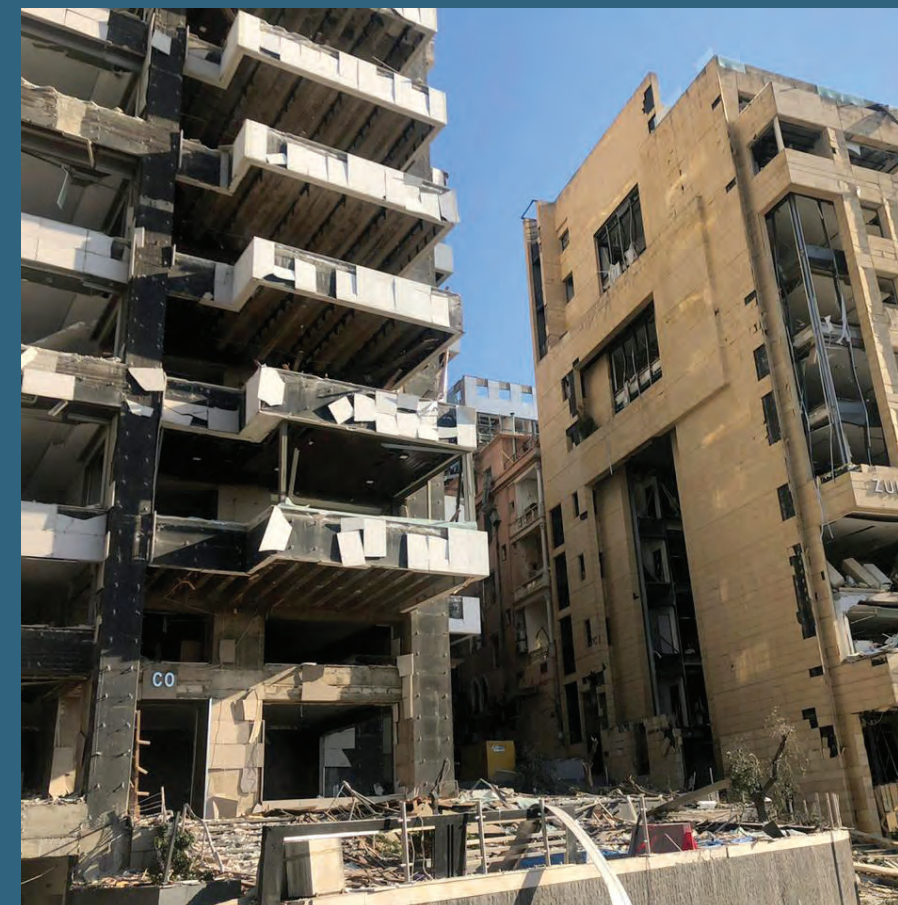
The explosion caused widespread structural damage at the harbor and in the surrounding neighborhoods. Many nearby buildings are at risk of collapsing completely. Over 7,000 buildings were badly damaged including a number of schools and university campuses.<sup>9</sup> According to the Ministry of Education, 120 public and private schools have sustained damage. In addition, 20 public technical and vocational training centers once used by Lebanese and refugee youth are also damaged.<sup>10</sup> The most affected groups include not only Lebanese but refugees and migrant workers living in some of the most vulnerable neighborhoods of Lebanon's capital — just a few kilometers away from the blast.



*A doctor at St. George Hospital comforts a newborn just after the blast. The hospital sustained heavy damage.*

*An apartment in Mar Mikhael, Beirut after the explosion ripped off its outside wall (left photo below).*

*Apartment buildings in the port area of Beirut (right photo below).*





# BEIRUT MAP

Anera's Lebanon team conducted an impact assessment to identify and target the most urgent needs facing the victims of the explosion. Based on the data gathered, Anera has prioritized shelter, food, and health as the key areas of focus in our response. We will work in areas of Beirut that are underserved and were already economically vulnerable, and then suffered the most from the blast, such as Karantina, Borj Hammoud, the Zoqaq El Blat and Basta Tahta areas of the Bachoura neighborhood, the Beydoun area of Achrafiye, and Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael.

## Achrafiye, Beydoun area

Mohammad Beydoun Street is in the Achrafiye neighborhood. It is low income area with a mix of homes and shops. Many families there have few financial resources to make repairs.

## Bachoura, Basta Tahta area

This is a working-class neighborhood close to the center of Beirut, not far from the explosion site. Basta is one of Beirut's most bustling and historic areas. It is filled with old buildings and small shops of every variety.

## Bachoura, Zoqaq El Blat area

The name of this neighborhood literally means "cobbled alley," because in the 19<sup>th</sup> century its roads were cobbled. This residential area adjoins Beirut's downtown and blends new highrises with old buildings, noisy thoroughfares and alleyways. The area is not far from the explosion site – just a couple kilometers away – so its structures sustained heavy damage in the explosion.

## Karantina

Karantina is one of Beirut's poorest neighborhoods. It is located just east of the port, which also encircles it from the north. The blasts flattened homes and killed and wounded many in this area that mixes residences, businesses, and industrial enterprises.

## Gemmayze & Mar Mikhael

Considered a center of art, youth culture, and nightlife, this is one Beirut's most popular and trendy neighborhoods. It is full of restaurants, galleries, bars, performance venues, and traditional architecture. This area is only 800 meters from the blast site and it suffered terrible damage. Some say the neighborhood may never recover.

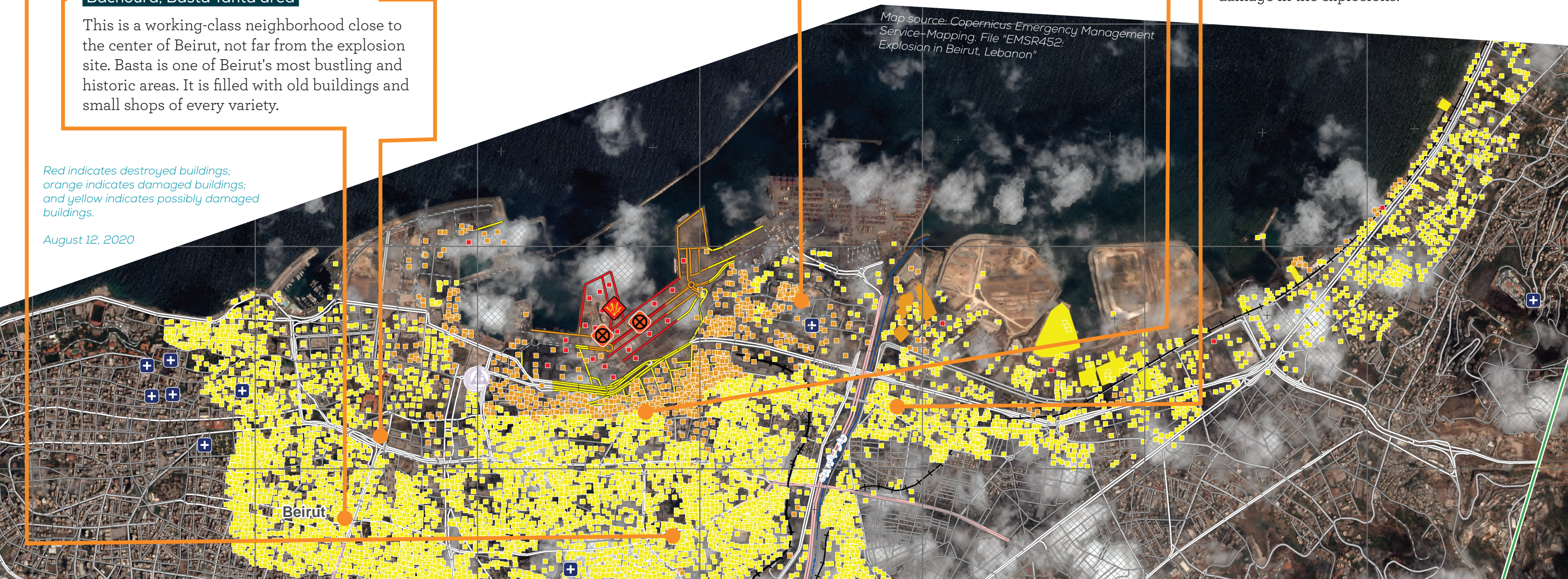
## Borj Hammoud

Located in northeast Beirut, Borj Hammoud is very densely populated. It began as a tent camp for Armenian refugees in the 1920s. Now, the neighborhood is a mixed residential, industrial and commercial area that is home to Armenians, Lebanese of Christian and Shi'a backgrounds, and Palestinians. It is also home to guest workers from Asia and Africa. Most residences in Borj Hammoud sustained damage in the explosions.

Red indicates destroyed buildings;  
orange indicates damaged buildings;  
and yellow indicates possibly damaged buildings.

August 12, 2020

Map source: Copernicus Emergency Management Service-Mapping. File "EMSR452: Explosion in Beirut, Lebanon"





# BEIRUT'S ON-THE-GROUND RESPONSE

## Volunteers and Grassroots Groups Come Out in Force

In the wake of the Beirut explosion, many grassroots initiatives have sprung up to face the crisis. The most affected areas of the city are filled with groups of volunteers of diverse nationalities, ethnicities, religions, gender orientations, age groups and backgrounds. They have come from all over Lebanon and even other countries, such as France and the United States. All are working to support one another and respond to the devastation of the explosion.

**The vast number of initiatives that have been born out of the blast gives people in the country some reason for hope. There is a multiplier effect — each initiative builds upon others, contributing to a rapidly proliferating ecosystem of mutual support.**

Community kitchens, for instance, have sprung up everywhere. Many families lost their kitchens or kitchen equipment in the blast and many more do not have electricity, so food distributions have become crucial for people of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Groups are using abandoned buildings as food parcel assembly points and hot meal distribution locations. Some farmers in the Bekaa Valley are sending fresh produce to volunteers in Beirut who are preparing meals.

Other groups have formed to help families clean and make basic repairs to their damaged homes. One group, made up of Lebanese and Syrians who live in the Beirut area, pooled their collective carpentry experience to help families. They fan out to look through piles of debris and collect salvageable materials, like hinges, doors, handles, etc., which they transport using the only vehicles available to them: two motorbikes. Then they reuse the salvaged materials to fix homes, with each person taking responsibility for a different facet of the work.



### Protesters are on Beirut's Streets

In October of 2019, people across Lebanon began mass protests against the Lebanese government over corruption and economic distress. The movement started as a youth revolution. Young people do not feel represented in the halls of power and they wanted to hold the government accountable.

The spirit of the uprising was characterized by its diversity and inclusiveness, reaching across different groups. In contrast to the past, **the protesters saw themselves as Lebanese first**, and deemphasized religious affiliations.

The explosions that rocked Beirut brought the protesters back out onto the streets in the first week after the event. They demanded the removal of the entire political class and a restructuring of the country's political system. Many in the government resigned in response and the situation is calmer for the time being.

But the anger is still simmering and protesters always stand ready to return to the streets.

Yet other groups have set up tents to gather donations of clothes, which they distribute to displaced families. There are also first aid tents.

One inspiring example of a community-based grassroots organization taking action is Muwatin Lebnene (Lebanese Citizen). They launched the “BASECAMP” initiative to provide an organized response among grassroots relief groups. Their social media channels post daily news updates and other useful information for responders. The collective action of their volunteers and donor support has helped hundreds of people.

People are taking matters into their own hands and directly responding where they see others are not. Many volunteers and grassroots groups have said they are stepping up because they have no faith that their officials would respond. In the weeks since the explosion, widely blamed on government negligence, there has been scant evidence of emergency efforts by housing agencies, public works employees or public health officials to help the displaced. Residents have despaired of what they say is a glaring lack of government empathy.<sup>11</sup>

## The World Pledges Help for Lebanese People, not the Government

A number of international governments have been working to mobilize resources quickly and respond to the overwhelming challenges confronting Beirut.

Shortly after the blast, French President Emmanuel Macron and the United Nations co-organized a virtual donor summit. More than 30 international leaders and government officials took part in the video conference, including Jordan's King Abdullah II and Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi. Key Arab states in the Gulf were represented, as were Britain, China and the United States. As a result of the summit, **the international community pledged nearly \$300 million in aid**, to be routed to the UN, international organizations and non-governmental organizations and delivered directly to the Lebanese people.<sup>12</sup>

After the summit, President Macron said "The Lebanese authorities must now implement political and economic reforms demanded by the Lebanese people and which alone will enable the international community to act effectively alongside Lebanon for reconstruction."<sup>13</sup>

## The United Nations and Non-governmental Organizations Respond

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is coordinating the response among major humanitarian and development organizations. OCHA estimates that \$565 million is needed to deliver immediate relief, rehabilitate infrastructure, and public services and economic recovery.<sup>14</sup>

In response to the overwhelming needs in Beirut, donations to Lebanon have poured in from all over the world. OCHA released a flash appeal on August 14 to



### Anera's response

Anera’s Lebanon team conducted an impact assessment to identify and target the most urgent needs facing the victims of the explosion. Based on the data gathered, Anera has prioritized shelter, food, and health as the key areas of focus in our response. We will work in areas of Beirut that are underserved and were already economically vulnerable, and then suffered the most from the blast, such as Karantina, Borj Hammoud, the Zoqaq El Blat and Basta Tahta areas of the Bachoura neighborhood, the Beydoun area of Achrafiye, and Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael.

Our medical donations program team is working day and night with our established network of donors on several shipments of medicines, medical supplies, PPE, and relief items to respond to this emergency. Anera is strategically planning our intervention with these partners to include both immediate relief and long-term commitments of these items to ensure that long-term needs from this disaster are met after the immediate global response disengages.

In addition to shipments, Anera is locally procuring medicines, medical supplies, and PPE for Beirut-area healthcare facilities. We are also planning food and hygiene kit distributions to the most affected. Local procurement projects have increased impact because they help to stimulate Lebanon’s economy.

Volunteers and staff members are organizing clean-up efforts as well as distributing water, food parcels, and PPE to families and others who are picking up the pieces after the tragic explosion. The masks that Anera is distributing are manufactured by our vocational sewing students as a part of our ongoing COVID-19 response in Lebanon.

Anera is also mobilizing teams of volunteers of all ages and nationalities – including 2,000 volunteers recruited by UNICEF – to clean up streets, remove debris, distribute relief supplies and undertake light construction work.

We are rehabilitating homes alongside grassroots groups, focusing our efforts on light-to-moderately damaged homes, healthcare facilities, schools and businesses. Anera’s aim is to help the most vulnerable and displaced people return to their homes as quickly as possible and before the winter months arrive.

*ABOVE PHOTO: Graduates of Anera's UNICEF-funded construction job skills training courses repair an apartment in the Borj Hammoud neighborhood. COVER PHOTO: A drone picture shows the scene of the explosion at the Beirut port. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)*

Learn more about Anera's response in Beirut at [anera.org/beirut-solidarity](https://anera.org/beirut-solidarity)

coordinate the response and allocate funds. OCHA is asking organizations to identify geographic and programmatic areas where they can deliver. Anera and scores of other humanitarian and development actors are responding to the call.<sup>15</sup>

OCHA identifies three areas: immediate humanitarian relief, reconstruction, and finally, in the long term, economic recovery. The appeal focuses largely on the first step and the early stages of the second, with emphasis on life-saving interventions and humanitarian response, as well as restoration of public infrastructure, homes and the wider community.<sup>16</sup>

## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Lebanon’s political system is almost universally regarded as deeply dysfunctional. In contrast, the thriving network of individual volunteers and civil society groups offer reasons for hope. There is an enormous amount of goodwill and civic sentiment among the residents of Lebanon. Any prospect the country has for a positive future – where residents have access to quality education and solid livelihoods, healthcare, public services and a sustainable environment – will in large part be grounded in social and humanitarian initiatives like those now springing up in response to the explosions.

The outpouring of support from the global community, including donations from countless individuals and organizations, has also been heartening. It is crucial now to ensure that this goodwill is implemented in ways that have a lasting impact. Lebanon must rebuild far more than just physical infrastructure.

Lebanon as a nation has enormous promise. And we have seen how beloved Beirut is by so many around the world. The solidarity of people from across the globe, both of Lebanese descent and those with no personal connections to the region, will continue to be crucial to forging a brighter future.

### Endnotes

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The Anera on-the-ground series is designed to add a humanitarian voice to the story of life in the Middle East. With data from Anera's professional staff, people who live and work in the communities they serve, and with over 50 years of experience in the region, Anera has a unique opportunity to build a fuller understanding of what life is like for families struggling to survive within an atmosphere of severe political strife and daily turmoil.