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Report

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## The Fragmented Future: Lebanon's Lost Generation Amid Crisis and Migration

Christelle Barakat



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# The Fragmented Future: Lebanon's Lost Generation Amid Crisis and Migration

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## Christelle Barakat

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**Note:** This report is based on research conducted before the October 2024 escalation of the Israeli-Lebanese conflict and prior to the appointment of the current Nawaf Salam government. As such, the information contained in this report pertains to the former government led by Prime Minister Najib Mikati; however, the recommendations remain valid for the current government. Intended for publication in 2024, the report was delayed due to the war.



## Executive Summary

For nearly five years, Lebanon has endured a confluence of crises that have pushed the country to the brink. Ranging from economic collapse to political paralysis, these crises have catalyzed a perpetual exodus of Lebanese seeking refuge abroad, with youth constituting a significant demographic in this continuous wave of emigration. The economic landscape, marked by a staggering depreciation of the Lebanese pound exceeding 98% since 2019, has unleashed hyperinflation and decimated purchasing power, eroding the quality of life for the vast majority.

The government's mismanagement of these crises has deepened vulnerabilities and amplified the reliance on remittances as a lifeline for survival (UNDP Lebanon, 2023). The prolonged political paralysis and failure to implement necessary reforms have exacerbated socio-economic distress and depleted confidence in the government's ability to stabilize the crisis, pushing many to seek opportunities abroad.

Lebanon's shift towards a cash economy has further entrenched corruption and widened inequality. In this context, the emigration crisis represents a symptom of economic hardship and a profound indictment of governance failures that have undermined trust in public institutions and eroded the social contract.

This report seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of Lebanon's emigration crisis by exploring its multidimensional facets through two pillars. Firstly, it examines Lebanon's multifaceted crises, which have generated new vulnerabilities and worsened pre-existing ones, propelling Lebanese to seek emigration. Secondly, it investigates how the government's mismanagement of the crises has deepened vulnerabilities and fostered dependency on remittances as a coping mechanism, exacerbating socio-economic distress and alienation.

Fifteen key informant interviews with experts, civil society representatives, and international organizations have been instrumental in deepening our understanding of the interplay between Lebanon's deteriorating socio-political environment and the increasing rates of mass migration. They have also provided valuable insights into the impact of irregular migration out of Lebanon on children and vulnerable households. The identity of the interviewed key informants has been kept confidential to encourage open communication and cater to personal and professional considerations, and as such, interviewees will be referenced by attribution with generic titles.

Complementing this qualitative analysis, a nationwide survey conducted by the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) in 2022, encompassing 1,201 respondents across all regions and sects, provides empirical evidence on migration intentions, perceptions of Lebanon's economic decline, and the impact of financial instability on emigration trends. The survey itself revolved around the impact of the financial crisis and the Beirut Port explosion.

In total, 52% of the 1,201 surveyed respondents were female and 48% were male. Of these, 19% were between the ages of 18-24, 19% between the ages of 25-34, 19% between the ages of 35-44, 19% between the ages of 45-54, and

23% aged 55 and above. Their distribution across governorates was as follows: 27% in Mount Lebanon excluding the Southern Suburb of Beirut, 20% in the North, 13% in the Bekaa, 12% in the Southern Suburb of Beirut, 11% in the *most* affected part of the South, 9% in Beirut, and 7% in the *less* affected part of the South.

The findings of this report reveal that systemic governance failures are pivotal in driving widespread disillusionment and accelerating emigration. Lebanon's growing dependency on remittances and external aid has not only intensified socio-economic disparities but also fragmented the social contract between the state and its citizens. In the absence of substantial and meaningful reforms, addressing the root causes of migration remains unattainable.

While there are no quick fixes to Lebanon's entrenched crisis, effective solutions necessitate comprehensive reforms, the establishment of credible state institutions, and a robust commitment to the rule of law and governance. Immediate interventions are also essential to mitigate the immediate impact and provide relief to the most vulnerable populations. This report outlines select recommendations aimed at addressing these urgent challenges.

## Introduction

Over the past five years, Lebanon has grappled with a compounding array of crises, plunging more than half its population into poverty and eroding their quality of life ([World Bank, 2024](#)). Faced with dwindling prospects and constrained choices, many have turned to emigration—both regular and irregular—as a last response, marking the emergence of a potentially lost generation.

Lebanon's compounded crises—economic collapse, political stagnation, and social disintegration—have fueled an unprecedented surge in irregular migration. From 2019 to 2022, the number of Lebanese attempting crossings to Europe rose exponentially (Diab and Jouhari, 2023), reflecting not just desperation but the normalization of migration as a survival strategy. Consistent in the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) was the observation that: 'the economic crisis had a direct effect on irregular migration where numbers exploded and increased exponentially between 2019, 2020, 2021 and up to 2022, as more and more Lebanese individuals are trying to emigrate.'

According to the Arab Barometer's Public Opinion Factsheet for 2024, based on a survey administered to 2,400 Lebanese citizens, 38% of respondents are wanting to emigrate. This percentage is identical to those in 2022 and 2012. Nevertheless, it signals an increase in the desire to emigrate after a decreasing emigration trend that lasted from 2007 until 2018. Surveyed Lebanese under the age of 30 are the largest demographic desiring to emigrate at 58%, with those who are more educated being more inclined to emigrate (Arab Barometer, 2024).

A whopping 72% of respondents wanting to emigrate give economic reasons for their choice, with security concerns and political reasons further driving potential migration numbers up (Arab Barometer, 2024). To elaborate, in 2022,

13% of those surveyed stated that they wanted to emigrate due to security reasons, whereas this percentage reached 27% in 2024. Moreover, there is a 7% increase between those surveyed who wanted to emigrate in 2022 due to political reasons (16%) and in 2024 for the same reasons (23%). Corruption concerns have also increased respondents' desire to emigrate by 8 percentage points between 2022 (16%) and 2024 (24%). Emigrating for educational purposes has likewise marked a 7% increase among respondents, when comparing 2022 (14%) and 2024 (21%) percentages (Arab Barometer, 2024).

Main migration destinations for the Lebanese include Canada (32%), Germany (28%), France (25%), Australia (24%), and the United States of America (21%). 17% of those surveyed stated they would potentially emigrate without adequate documentation; however, it must be noted that this remains the lowest rate of undocumented migration among surveyed countries in the MENA region, which include Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Morocco, within the 2023-2024 period (Arab Barometer, 2024).

Today, Lebanon stands at a dangerous crossroads, marked by crises that have severely disrupted its socio-economic fabric. It additionally continues to grapple with political paralysis, the aftermath of the Port of Beirut blast, the ongoing cross-border conflict with Israel, and a stark erosion of fundamental rights. These shocks are exacerbated by the persistent absence of impactful reforms to stabilize Lebanon's crises. This has profoundly unraveled the social contract and precipitated a significant upsurge in emigration.

## **Pillar 1: Drivers of Emigration**

The first pillar delves into the complex dynamics driving emigration, including 1) financial pressures and the role of remittances, 2) political paralysis and bureaucratic dysfunction that foster insecurity, and 3) the erosion of fundamental rights in Lebanon. This analysis highlights how these intertwined challenges, exacerbated by persistent governance failures and a backsliding of basic rights, critically influence the decision to emigrate.

### **Monetary Considerations Leading to Emigration**

Since 2019, the Lebanese pound has experienced a staggering depreciation exceeding 98% (Lebanon Economic Monitor, World Bank, 2023), severely undermining the economic security of Lebanese households. This currency crisis is set against a backdrop of global and local shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, the devastating Beirut port blast, persistent social and political upheavals, and the ongoing cross-border conflict in southern Lebanon.

The ensuing hyperinflation, further exacerbated by the collapse of the banking sector, has categorically destabilized Lebanon's political economy (Zanotti, 2023). The consequent devaluation of wages, sharp decline in purchasing power, and soaring prices of essential commodities and basic

necessities, particularly consumer goods (Abdelbaki, 2021), have produced a dire economic situation. Many households were pushed into poverty and vulnerability, facing a decline in the overall quality of life.

Concurrently, the inflated prices and larger economic crises precipitated acute shortages of critical resources, including fuel, electricity, and water (Chehayeb, 2022). Lebanese were pressed to navigate fluctuating exchange rates, further eroding their purchasing power and access to essential services (Reuters, 2023; Barazy, 2024). Notably, transportation costs surged, along with escalating expenses for healthcare and education (ACAPS, 2022).

Citizens' inability to access their hard-earned funds prompted the erosion of savings and the decimation of the middle class. Altogether, Lebanon's crises have thrust the vast majority of residents across the country into multidimensional poverty (World Bank, 2024). The lack of adequate social protection mechanisms has left them acutely vulnerable and reliant on alternative coping strategies like migration.

'Irregular migration further accelerates poverty,' explained an interviewed migration scholar, emphasizing how families sell assets, deplete savings, and incur communal debt to fund these risky journeys. Indeed, smugglers are charging up to several thousands of dollars (Diab and Jouhari, 2023)—a significant cost in a collapsing economy—driving already-struggling communities deeper into poverty. Success stories of migrants securing fresh dollars abroad further reinforce this cycle, creating a perception that leaving is the only viable path to stability.

During KIIs, a recurrent theme was the relationship between the decision to migrate and the ability of individuals and families to survive amidst Lebanon's economic turmoil. One interviewed migration scholar and practitioner observed: 'Unfortunately, in Lebanon, there is a lack of jobs; therefore, whenever there is any problem, this directly increases the number of migrants, and the brain drain.' Underscoring the critical loss of human capital and its implications for Lebanon's future, this interviewee further stated, 'We have lost a whole generation from 2019 until now.'

The interviews uniformly highlighted the nuanced relationship between migration, remittances, and resilience, by stressing the importance of remittances as a vital lifeline for Lebanese families. One social policy analyst stated: 'If a family had relatives abroad sending remittances, they would survive.' Another migration expert explained: 'The lack of trust in government has led the diaspora to send remittances directly to their families. Therefore, remittances are impacting the nuclear family, but not the national level.'

Corroborating these observations, a Mercy Corps Report documented that 'over 90% of remittance senders are direct relatives (sibling, parent, or child), with only 7.8% of senders identified as more distant relatives (such as a cousin, uncle, grandparent) or a friend.' The flow of familial remittances plays a critical role in alleviating the immediate impact of Lebanon's economic crisis on individual households.

These remittances have become a vital lifeline, cushioning families against the worst effects of the downturn. However, the broader context reveals deeper structural challenges. Lebanon is experiencing a severe brain drain, with a growing exodus of skilled professionals, further weakening the country's economic prospects. At the same time, widespread distrust in governmental institutions has eroded social cohesion, compounded the nation's vulnerability, and undermined long-term recovery efforts.

It is critical to emphasize that remittances in Lebanon have largely been funneled toward consumption rather than serving as a driver for economic revitalization. As one interviewed social policy expert noted, 'People have been using remittances to consume.' This trend is confirmed by the 2022 LCPS post-crisis survey data, which shows that households primarily use remittances to cover essential needs such as food, healthcare, and electricity bills.

However, this focus on immediate consumption comes at the expense of long-term investments, such as in education, which has seen a significant decline ([UNICEF Lebanon, 2023](#)). The prioritization of basic survival—driven by the sharp rise in the cost of essential goods like food and medicine—illustrates how remittances, while crucial for sustaining households, have limited capacity to promote broader economic recovery. Instead, they reinforce a pattern of short-term relief rather than fostering structural improvements in the country's economic landscape.

The dollarization of Lebanon's economy presents a further complication, exacerbating the precarious situation of citizens whose incomes are earned in the increasingly devalued local currency. At the same time, this shift has enhanced the purchasing power of remittances, as they are often received in U.S. dollars. According to the [World Bank \(2024\)](#), households receiving remittances or income in dollars are significantly less vulnerable to falling into poverty. This dynamic highlights the dual role of dollarization: while it intensifies economic inequality, it also underscores the vital role of remittances in providing a financial buffer for those reliant on foreign currency inflows.

While remittances provide vital short-term support to Lebanese households, they do not address the more profound structural challenges embedded within Lebanon's economy. This discrepancy becomes particularly clear when considering the extensive impact of the crisis on both the public and private sectors. The private sector has faced severe repercussions, marked by a sharp decline in purchasing power and reduced capacity for international trade. The escalating costs of manufacturing, electricity, and transportation, coupled with restricted access to investment capital, have critically weakened the sector's operational stability and economic resilience ([Derhally, 2023](#)). These issues underscore the limitations of remittances as a standalone solution, revealing how systemic economic distress permeates through various layers of the economy, exacerbating vulnerabilities that remittances alone cannot address.

This systemic economic deterioration has consequently precipitated a significant brain drain, leaving Lebanon struggling to retain both its skilled



and unskilled labor force. As one social justice expert elaborated: 'Migration from Lebanon used to be reserved for highly skilled individuals, but now it is attempted by people from all skill levels. Some people migrate to work in low-paying jobs and cannot send back a lot of money; they do this for survival. This was not part of the Lebanese migration model, and it does not increase economic resilience in the country. It also creates a generational gap because we will not have youth or professional workers.'

Moreover, labor migration is not an individual issue; it is rather a collective problem that is indicative of broader societal poverty. The crisis has wrought substantial challenges across various demographic groups, including youth, women, large families, retirees, and the military. A development and policy expert captured this sentiment succinctly: 'We are witnessing a society-wide crisis, not confined to isolated pockets of poverty.' The interplay of these economic and social pressures underscores the comprehensive nature of Lebanon's crisis, illustrating how systemic issues disrupt not only economic stability but also the social and structural fabric of the nation.

Collectively, Lebanon's persistent economic downturn has emerged as a critical impetus for households to contemplate migration—whether through formal channels or informal means—as an essential strategy for economic survival.'

### Public Sector in Crisis: Political Paralysis and Bureaucratic Dysfunction

Against the backdrop of a collapsing economy, political paralysis and bureaucratic dysfunction exacerbated local frustrations and the disruption of basic services. This broader political and economic instability has tangible repercussions for the public sector. Employees have engaged in protests to express their discontent with rising costs and diminished salaries. These protests, in turn, have further crippled an already dysfunctional bureaucracy, making government services increasingly erratic. Vital processes such as issuing identity cards, birth certificates, work permits, and driver's licenses have become nearly impossible (Malhotra, 2022). As one academic observed, 'state institutions are currently operating at half capacity.' The intersection of these national crises with everyday administrative failures underscores a state in decline, significantly eroding public trust in its ability to protect fundamental rights and ensure effective governance.

This deterioration in governance and public services undermines confidence in public institutions' ability to manage both day-to-day aspects of governance and broader structural crises, feeding into wider frustration with the bleak prospects for immediate or long-term improvement and prompting many Lebanese to seek stability abroad.

### Backsliding of Fundamental Rights

The broader public disillusionment and eroded confidence in governance are starkly mirrored in the significant and expanding rollback of essential civic and human rights. The profound economic and political failures characterizing

the post-2019 landscape have significantly eroded fundamental rights, notably the right to live in dignity. Alarming indicators of this backsliding include a pronounced increase in violations of basic rights, particularly affecting children and women.

Economic hardship has rendered many families unable to afford education, precipitating a troubling rise in school dropout rates (UNICEF Lebanon, 2023). Concurrently, soaring unemployment rates have exacerbated the erosion of children's and women's rights, additionally undermining their access to opportunities and security (UNICEF Lebanon, 2022).

Simultaneously, child labor percentages have increased (ARA Research and Consultancy, 2024), with children being forced to work to provide for their families (UNICEF Lebanon, 2022). The informality of this work has thrust children into unsafe work conditions and marks a significant backsliding of core human rights (UNICEF Lebanon, 2022).

In Lebanon, women in traditional households face the dual challenge of adhering to entrenched gender roles while shouldering additional responsibilities to sustain their families. This burden is significantly exacerbated by inadequate wages and precarious working conditions, which have led many women to exit the formal labor market altogether. To navigate these constraints, others seek employment or work within the informal sector to supplement household incomes, negotiating complex socioeconomic pressures amid a backdrop of economic instability (Mohnblatt, 2023).

This broader economic and social insecurity is reflected in multiple dimensions, including social security, healthcare, and education. The lack of adequate financial and non-financial support mechanisms has driven many Lebanese women to informal employment, as the prohibitive costs of formal sector participation render it inaccessible. Thus, the prevailing economic instability and insufficient support systems underscore the systemic challenges faced by women in balancing traditional roles with the demands of an increasingly unstable labor market (Mohnblatt, 2023).

This crisis has further disproportionately revealed systemic vulnerabilities related to women and children resorting to irregular migration. One interviewed migration scholar described the risks faced by women during these crossings: 'Women are the most vulnerable... there have been many reports of abuse, theft, aggression, and even murder.' Such incidents underline the intersection of migration with lawlessness and insecurity, which continues to undermine vulnerable groups. As one Chief Executive Officer of a social enterprise remarked, 'The government is absent. Boats are sinking, and we do not know what happened or what has been done to protect against this illegal migration.' This governance vacuum has not only exacerbated migration's risks but has also normalized a culture where ingenuity is equated with successfully evading these systemic failures.

The intersection of escalating costs and competing societal demands has further strained the already inadequate support mechanisms. This situation

underscores a significant regression in Lebanon's capacity to uphold social justice and protect fundamental human rights, particularly for women and children, within an increasingly unstable socio-economic landscape.

In light of these factors, emigration must be understood as a complex strategy driven by the pursuit of enhanced rights and opportunities abroad, alongside the reliance on remittances to secure essential rights domestically. Remittances function not only as critical economic supports but also as instruments for negotiating rights within the context of Lebanon's persistent socio-political and economic instability.

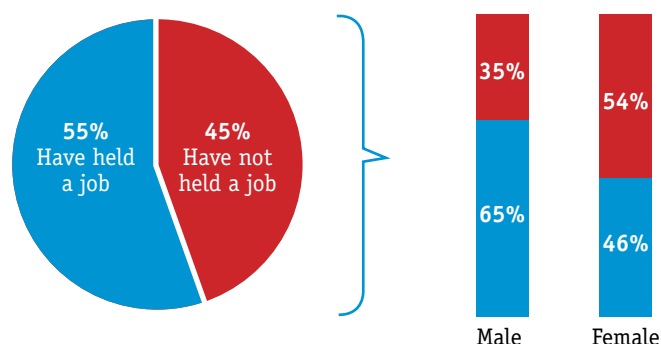
The convergence of these factors has markedly accelerated migration, as people seek better livelihoods, economic stability, and potentially foreign residence. This trend encompasses a broad spectrum of skilled and unskilled workers, with a strong focus on youth pursuing educational and professional opportunities abroad. The traditional preference for male emigrants has shifted, with priority now given to the family member with the highest potential for success, irrespective of gender. This shift has notably expanded women's roles in supporting their families' economic survival.

These developments reflect the harsh realities of Lebanon's ongoing crises, highlighting both the severe structural challenges and the pragmatic responses of its people. Confronted with deepening instability and systemic failures, Lebanese families adapt to these dire conditions out of necessity, navigating their circumstances to secure a better future. This stark reality underscores the pressing need for comprehensive reforms to address systemic issues and rebuild the social contract to more effectively support all Lebanese citizens.

With the government failing to enact reforms or safeguard livelihoods, migration has become the last resort for survival. Indeed, irregular migration is not just an individual or familial response but a broader reflection of Lebanon's institutional collapse. Yet, as one executive board member of a non-governmental organization noted, 'Our approach [as civil society organizations] cannot be complete if the government does not implement reforms at the national level.' These systemic failures have intensified brain drain, poverty, and social fragmentation, particularly in underserved regions like Tripoli, where irregular migration has taken root as a stark symbol of economic despair.

### Synthesis

Given the profound economic and political challenges driving increased migration from Lebanon, it is essential to examine how these factors influence migration choices and perceptions. To provide a grounded understanding of this phenomenon, we turn to a nationwide survey conducted by the LCPS in 2022. Administered across 1,201 respondents, the survey revealed that 45% of respondents stated they had not held a job in the last 12 months.

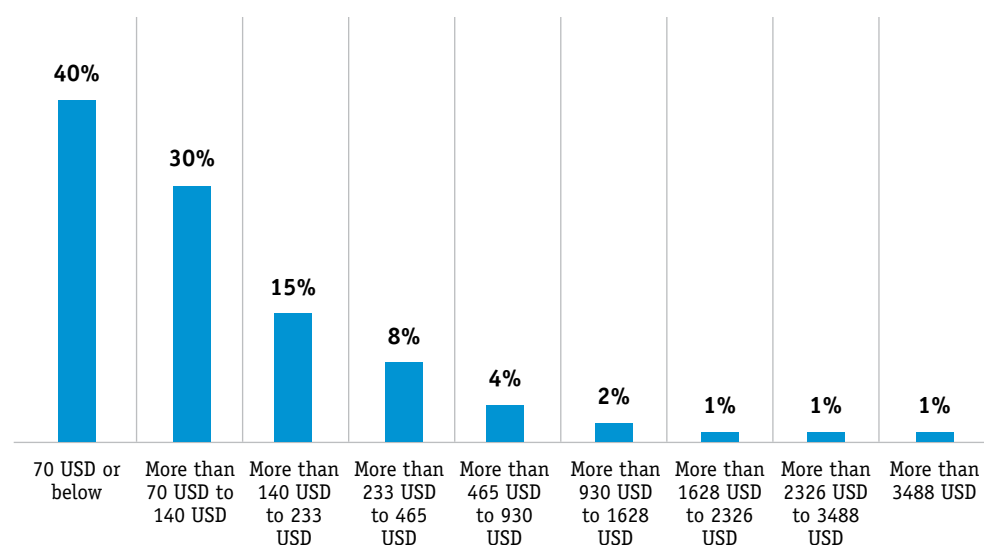
**Employment and unemployment: Have you held a job in the last 12 months?**

Base: Total sample 1,201.

The survey further went on to demonstrate the extensive impact of Lebanon's financial and economic crises, revealing stark economic realities: nearly 70% of surveyed households earn less than 6 million Lebanese pounds monthly, equivalent to just \$140 USD at the parallel market rate of USD/LBP = 43,000, highlighting severe financial strain exacerbated by the depreciating currency.

**Household income**

Black market FX Rate: USD/LBP = 43,000

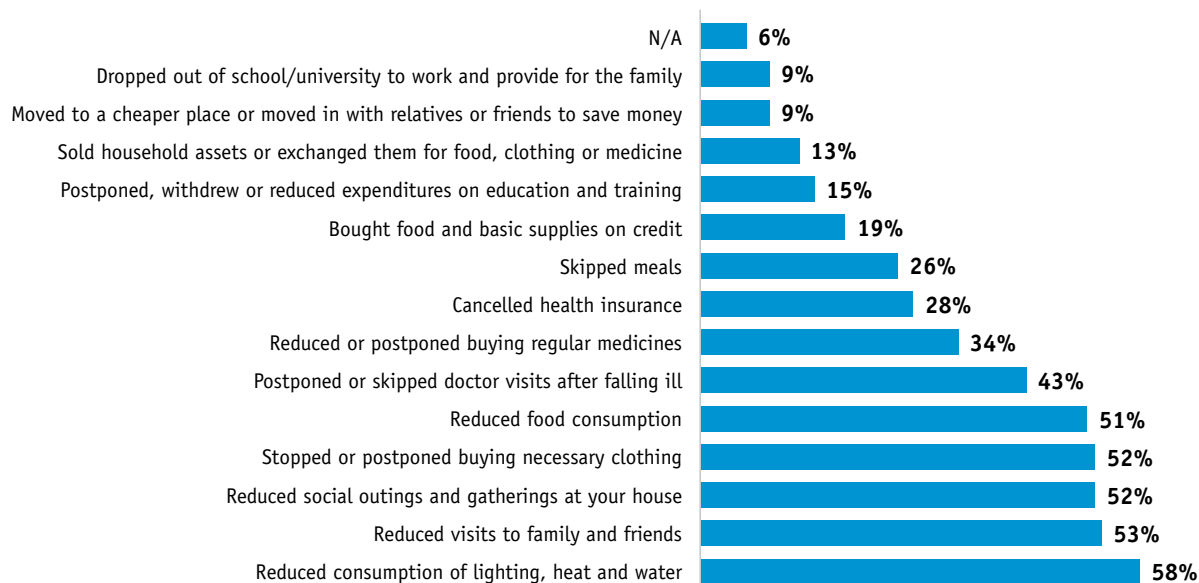


Base: Total sample 1,201.

This economic pressure has compelled Lebanese families to enact drastic adjustments in their daily lives. Essential utilities such as lighting, heating, and water have been curtailed by 58% of respondents. Moreover, the same LCPS survey revealed that 51% and 53% of respondents have reduced food consumption and limited social interactions, while 43% have postponed or foregone essential medical care due to financial constraints. These statistics underscore the acute socio-economic pressures faced by Lebanese households, reflecting broader trends of economic downturn and hardship.



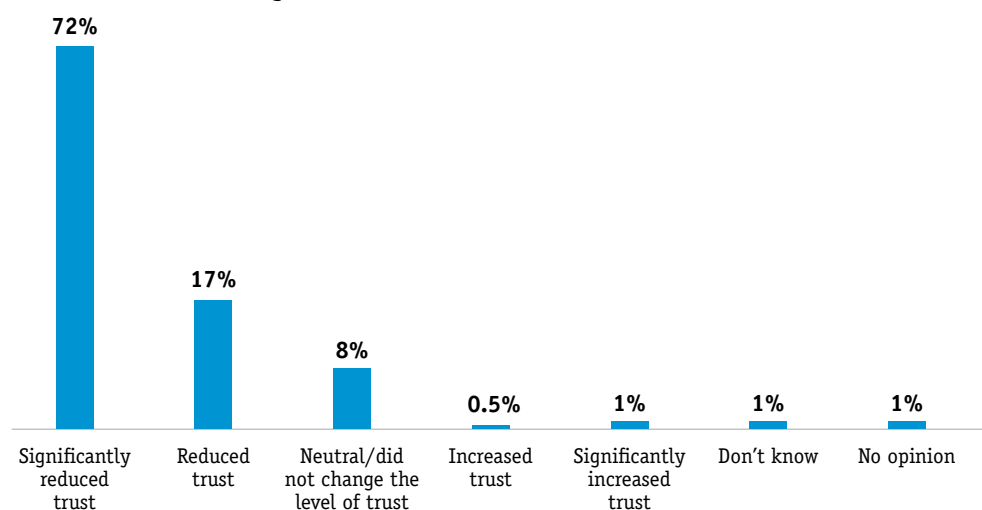
### Changes in living conditions



Base: Total sample 1,201.

There is also a palpable erosion of trust in governmental institutions. An overwhelming 89% of respondents expressed diminished confidence in the government's ability to address the crisis effectively. This disillusionment with governmental efficacy closely correlates with migration intentions.

### Trust and confidence in government

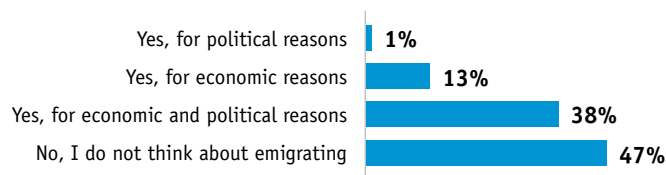


Base: Total sample 1,201.

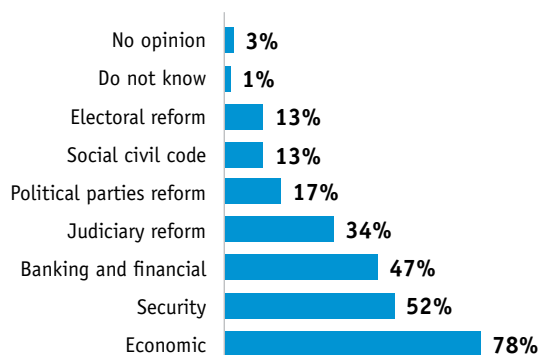
Notably, 53% of respondents desired to permanently leave Lebanon, driven primarily by dual economic and political factors. Economic reforms were identified by 78% of prospective emigrants as pivotal in potentially deterring their departure, underscoring the critical need for reforms in security (52%) and banking/finance (47%).

### Thinking of emigrating

Do you want to permanently emigrate from Lebanon? Base: Total sample 1,201.

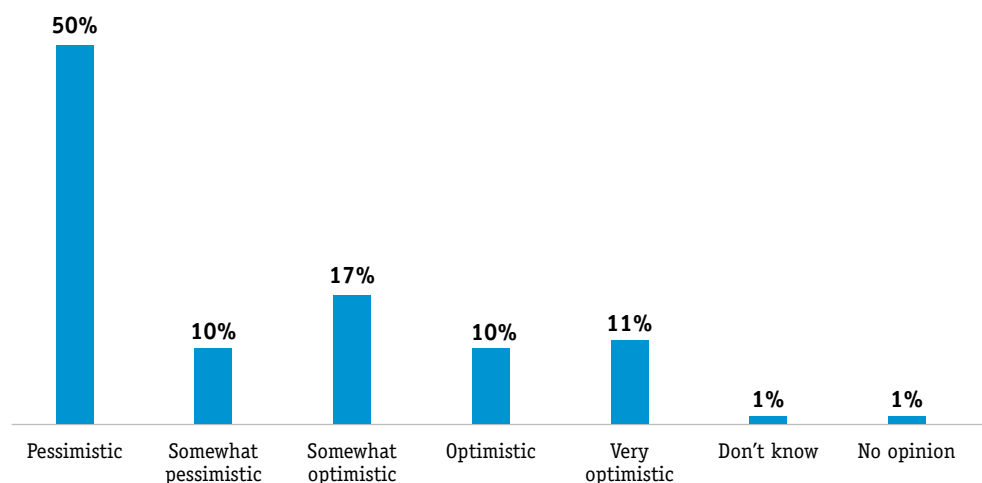


If you expressed a desire to permanently emigrate, what governmental measures or reforms would make you prefer to stay in Lebanon? Base: 632.



Sixty percent of those surveyed were pessimistic about the future and 77 percent lacked confidence in a new government's capacity to solve the crisis.

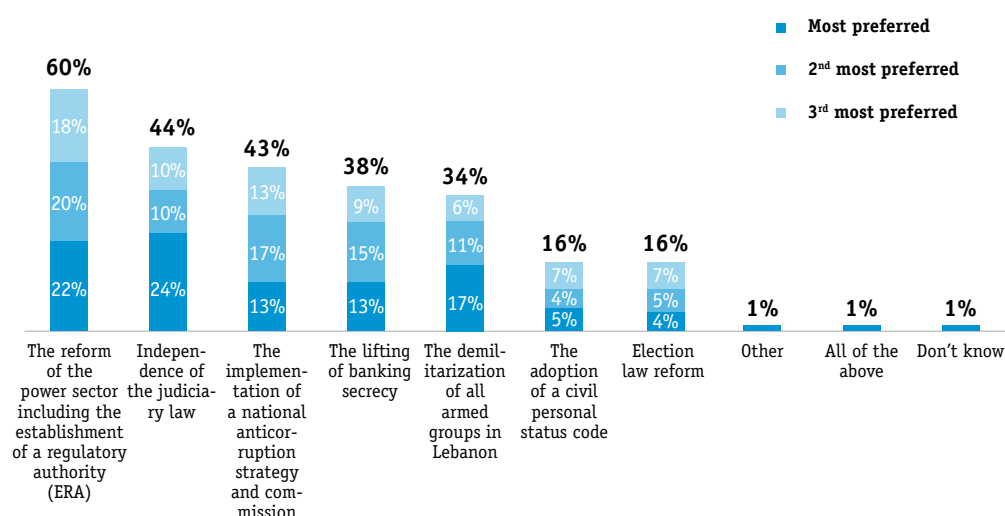
### Perception about the future



Base: Total sample 1,201.

Eighty-nine percent cited reduced or significantly reduced trust in the government following its response to the crisis. More than 60 percent of respondents wanted the government to focus on the provision of basic services and on currency stabilization. Forty-four percent of respondents emphasized the need for an independent judiciary and 43 percent wanted the implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy and the appointment of the commission to combat it.

### Reforms that would make a difference



Base: Total sample 1,201.

The survey findings reveal a critical need for comprehensive reforms to restore public confidence and address the persistent emigration from Lebanon. Ongoing governmental failures in crisis management and reform have intensified this situation, revealing the complex relationship between economic instability, political dysfunction, and migration decisions. The data highlights how perceptions of ineffective governance in addressing economic and administrative challenges significantly drive migration intentions. To stabilize Lebanon's socio-economic landscape, it is essential to address these interconnected issues, rebuild trust in public institutions, and mitigate the factors contributing to the substantial outflow of citizens.

## Pillar 2: The Government's Mismanagement of the Crises

The Lebanese government's apparent reliance on remittances and short-term economic measures, including encouraging tourism as well as emigration to stimulate remittances, reveals a troubling abdication of its responsibility to address the nation's systemic crises (Diab, Mercy Corps' Lebanon Crisis Analytics Team - LCAT, and Zoughaib, 2022). This approach has emerged amidst severe criticism of the government's crisis management, with policies described by interviewees as 'abysmal,' 'lacking,' 'absent,' and 'inadequate.'

As individuals and families turn to emigration as a survival strategy, the government has failed to implement essential reforms to stabilize Lebanon's socio-economic landscape and alleviate the suffering of its most vulnerable populations (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Instead, it has facilitated a reliance on emigrants to send hard currency back to Lebanon while promoting tourism and diaspora visits as economic lifelines (Chehayeb, 2022). This reliance on external financial support and temporary measures highlights a significant gap in effective governance and long-term strategic planning.

This pillar is structured into two main subsections. The first delves into the shift of governmental responsibilities to international organizations and civil society, revealing how these groups have increasingly taken on roles traditionally managed by the state. The second subsection explores the growing uncertainty within the Lebanese diaspora regarding their continued support through remittances, shedding light on the complexities and concerns influencing their decisions.

### Shifting Responsibility to International Organizations and Civil Society

With the government unable and unwilling to stand on its feet, international organizations and civil society organizations have had to step in to fill the void and meet increasing needs. Still, the needs are greater than the budgets and the abilities.

### To Send or Not to Send Remittances?

For its part, the diaspora has been caught in a dilemma. Indeed, it is largely reluctant to send funds to be used in local government initiatives due to a lack of trust in the government and in its institutions. This is compounded by the diaspora's awareness of rampant corruption, lack of transparency, and lack of accountability in government, particularly as it has more access to information and news, namely through social media. As one interviewed head of a research center on emigration put it: 'Today, we have social media. People know in real time what is happening in their cities and hometowns. The diaspora now can easily know what is happening in their cities and villages and where their money is going.'

At the same time, the diaspora largely continues to strive to help individuals and families. According to the director of a Lebanese policy center: 'Today, a young Lebanese employee living abroad won't hesitate to send \$100 to his parents because this sum now makes a difference.' As such, the diaspora has resorted to sending funds directly to relatives or civil society organizations through financial providers and non-bank financial institutions or directly bringing cash to give when traveling to visit Lebanon.

This has further exacerbated the cash economy and informality of monetary transfers, leading to rising concerns about additional corruption, tax evasion, money laundering, and other illegal practices. According to the World Bank's Lebanon Economic Monitor of Spring 2023, 'In the wake of Lebanon's unprecedented financial crisis, a cash economy has come to gradually replace the banking sector. [...] The root cause of a pervasive cash economy is the loss of confidence in the insolvent banking sector.' In light of governmental constraints to invest in education, these remittances can play a crucial role and help keep youth in education.

While the short-term impact of the government's failures can already be felt across different sectors, the long-term impact is more alarming, pointing to a 'lost generation.' According to Ettie Higgins, the United Nations Children's Fund



deputy representative in Lebanon, the situation of youth in Lebanon is alarming and points to grave consequences for Lebanon's social cohesion: 'Investments are needed to ensure financial concerns do not prevent them [youth] from getting the education and skills they need to eventually find decent work and contribute to the stability and prosperity of Lebanon' (UN News, 2022).

### The Changing Landscape and the Future of the Social Contract

Demographic changes are also a long-term outcome, mainly due to emigration and demographic slowdown. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) projects that by 2050, the proportion of Lebanese individuals aged 60 and above will 'more than double' (UNFPA and HelpAge International, 2024).

On a national level, the government's inability or unwillingness to enforce the rule of law and the vulnerabilities experienced by the judiciary further erode the social contract between citizens and the government. The dependency on remittances, foreign aid, international organizations, and civil society organizations is unsustainable and is leading to a growing diaspora and donor fatigue (Williams, 2021).

Lebanon's government has aggravated a crisis of its own making by favoring short-term solutions, thereby heightening the nation's dependence on remittances and external aid. This approach has effectively offloaded crucial responsibilities onto international organizations and civil society, exposing a deep-seated governance deficit. The result has been a widening of socio-economic disparities and a severe erosion of the social contract, undermining the essential trust between the state and its citizens.

At the same time, the diaspora's reluctance to engage with remittance channels reflects a profound disillusionment with Lebanon's crumbling institutional framework. This growing estrangement underscores the pressing need for comprehensive governance reforms. Absent substantial and transformative changes, Lebanon risks exacerbating its socio-economic instability and fracturing its social cohesion. Addressing these governance failures is essential for restoring institutional legitimacy and ensuring long-term stability.

## Conclusion

Lebanon's emigration crisis is deeply intertwined with its economic, political, and social dynamics. Economically, the country faces significant challenges, including the aftermath of 13 months of conflict, a crisis-hit economy, high unemployment rates, and soaring inflation exacerbated by widespread corruption and mismanagement. These economic woes severely limit job opportunities and income prospects, driving many Lebanese to seek better livelihoods abroad.

Politically, Lebanon's governance is marred by sectarianism, political gridlock, and a lack of effective policymaking. This governance crisis contributes to

inadequate public service delivery, erosion of basic rights, and disillusionment among the population, further pushing individuals toward emigration.

Socially, access to quality education, healthcare, and basic services has deteriorated, especially for marginalized communities and vulnerable populations. This erosion of social foundations diminishes prospects for personal and professional development within Lebanon, compelling skilled professionals and youth to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Economic instability, political governance issues, and eroding social foundations underscore the multifaceted nature of Lebanon's emigration crisis. Economic challenges limit job creation and income growth, political gridlock hampers effective governance and public service provision, and social disparities weaken the fabric of society. These factors create a cycle of emigration driven by economic hardship, political alienation, and social inequality.

Addressing these interconnected challenges through comprehensive reforms is essential to stemming the tide of emigration, regular and irregular, and fostering sustainable development in Lebanon. By promoting economic stability, enhancing political governance, and strengthening social foundations, Lebanon can reduce the drivers of emigration, retain its human capital, and build a more resilient society for the future.

There is no alternative or quick fix to Lebanon's crisis; only substantial reforms, the establishment of credible state institutions, and a steadfast commitment to the rule of law and effective governance can address the underlying causes driving mass emigration. While comprehensive changes are necessary for long-term stability, immediate measures can also significantly mitigate the immediate impact and prevent the worsening of the migration crisis.

## **1. Strengthen Data-Driven and Collaborative Responses to Irregular Migration**

**Recommendation:** Establish comprehensive mechanisms to monitor migration trends, identify vulnerable groups, and assess the socioeconomic impact of irregular migration.

**Context:** Current existing mechanisms to monitor migration trends fail to incorporate gender-sensitive dimensions, as well as capture vulnerable groups and the socioeconomic impact of irregular migration.

**Actions:** When developing the suggested comprehensive monitoring mechanisms, ensure the prioritization of gender-sensitive approaches by developing targeted programs to support women and children, including access to legal aid, trauma counseling, and protective measures.

## **2. Implement the National Social Protection Strategy**

**Recommendation:** Implement the National Social Protection Strategy that was adopted in November 2023 and launched in February 2024 to ensure sustainable and comprehensive social policies that act as a social safety net for individuals, therefore encouraging them to stay in Lebanon instead of emigrating legally or illegally.

**Context:** Previous social policies have been fragmented and focused on unsustainable interventions. The new strategy promises inclusive, essential healthcare services and aims to establish a social protection floor.

**Actions:** Prioritize inclusive healthcare delivery and set a robust social protection floor. Engage civil society organizations (CSOs) to monitor and ensure transparent implementation.

### 3. Regularize Public Administration Accessibility

**Recommendation:** Standardize and clarify the opening hours of government offices to improve access and streamline administrative processes.

**Context:** Unclear opening days and convoluted processes have hindered access to public services. This is a personal, lived, and day-to-day intimate relation between citizens and the state, amplifying the erosion of the social contract. This includes the issuance of documents that are vital to start the process of legal migration, therefore causing delays in fulfilling migratory aspirations or leading to mounting frustration and desperation.

**Actions:** Implement a consistent schedule for public administrations with shorter, regular intervals. Simplify and clearly communicate administrative procedures to the public. Engage CSOs to oversee and ensure transparency and efficiency.

### 4. Develop a Diaspora Investment Strategy

**Recommendation:** Formulate a comprehensive strategy to leverage diaspora funding for sustainable economic development.

**Context:** Lebanon currently lacks a unified diaspora strategy. Some municipalities have begun leveraging diaspora support.

**Actions:** Promote investment opportunities to the diaspora. Develop engagement programs to involve the diaspora in national development. Ensure investments contribute to long-term economic growth. Partner with CSOs to facilitate and monitor diaspora engagement.

### 5. Re-evaluate the Proxy Means Test and Other Data Collection Methods

**Recommendation:** Introduce universal social protection schemes.

**Context:** Social assistance and protection strategies, data collection methods related to multidimensional poverty, and child welfare are important in quantifying the needs of the most vulnerable to adequately assist them.

**Actions:** Review social protection schemes and data collection methods and tools used in ministries and at multiple other levels to ensure they are inclusive and capture the needs of the most vulnerable.

### 6. Investigate Child Labor Infringements

**Recommendation:** Enforce the implementation of labor laws, including the minimum age of employment, the prohibition of work for minors, and restrictions on working hours and conditions for children above the age of 13

and under the age of 16, who are allowed to work under specific conditions according to Lebanese labor law.

**Context:** Due to the deteriorating economic situation and increased school dropout rates, children are turning to informal jobs to help support their families. These tend not to respect work conditions and hours set by Lebanese laws.

**Actions:** Designate local officers to receive complaints about child labor infringements and investigate them. Legally pursue employers who are in charge of these infringements. Provide psycho-social, medical, and economic assistance to child laborers.

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