

NCA RESPONSE TO BEIRUT BLAST



NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID
actalliance

CONTENTS

Background and Context.	3
Impact of NCA And Partners Response to Beirut Blast.	4
NCA Beirut Response Summary.	10
Human Interest Story.	11
What's Beyond August 2021.	14

Background and Context

The Beirut port explosion on August 4, 2020 hit the country at a time of deep social, political, and economic crisis. The homes in the affected regions have suffered substantial structural damage, and have been left without windows, doors, water, or electricity as a result of the blast, making them no longer habitable.

More than 300,000 people had their homes partially or fully destroyed by the blast and had no other shelter. As a result of the economic crisis and the inflation, most of affected families could not afford the cost of rehabilitating their homes. According to a recent study by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and UNICEF, the dire financial crisis in Lebanon meant that 55% of Lebanese people live below the poverty line and have to cut down on the number of meals and limit the type of food they consume.

As if not enough, the Beirut Blast and the economic crisis came in a time when the whole world was threatened by COVID-19 pandemic. Treating victims of the blast overwhelmed the city's hospitals, while the blast itself severely damaged two main hospitals in the capital of Lebanon. The race to save lives outweighed COVID-19 precautions and social distancing measures. Shortly after the explosion, emergency rooms became overcrowded with people searching for loved ones. From the time of the blast until the beginning of May 2021, the COVID-19 positive cases continued to increase in Lebanon. Hospitals no longer had the capacity to treat severe cases, which left the Lebanese health system cracking under the pressure.

The health system in the county was deeply shaken by the explosion, by COVID-19, but as well by the financial collapse that slashed about 90% of the Lebanese currency's value. The proportion of households living under the extreme poverty line has reached a staggering 89%, leaving the local communities incapable of coping with the situation. According to the United Nations World Food Programme, food prices have soared above 400 percent, and at least 22 percent of Lebanese, 50 percent of Syrian refugees, and 33 percent of refugees of other nationalities are currently food insecure.

NCA has been operating in Lebanon since 2012, responding mainly to the Syria crisis with a main focus on Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). As a response to the Beirut Blast, NCA and partners scaled up their operation immediately and within 48 hours were able to conduct a rapid assessment, and start an immediate response focusing on the priority needs of the affected people. NCA in partnership with the three ongoing partners in Lebanon: ABAAD, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) has been able to stand next to the affected people and continue to do so one year after the blast, providing: WASH, GBV, food assistance, NFI, rehabilitation of shelter and institutions, support to livelihood being the top priorities that require immediate response in the affected areas of Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

Impact of NCA And Partners Response to Beirut Blast

NCA and partners response in Beirut main goals is “People affected by the Beirut explosion access lifesaving services and early recovery activities appropriate and relevant to their needs”.

One year after the blast, NCA and partners have been able to reach around 103,309 persons affected by the crisis with a multi-sector intervention with humanitarian and early recovery projects appropriate and relevant to the needs of the people.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Women, girls, men and boys are enabled to improve hygiene practices through access to hygiene items in order to prevent communicable diseases with an emphasis on COVID-19

With the increasing number of positive COVID-19 cases following the chaos caused by the blast and the destruction of health facilities NCA response to Beirut Blast provided 7,213 Hygiene Kits with COVID-19 protective kit, along with COVID-19 precaution awareness messages to families.

Distribution of hygiene and dignity kits to families affected by the Blast with a high prevalence of Covid-19 positive cases in the country



Moreover, reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadly Beirut port explosion, and a dire economy, Lebanese women have now been forced to deal with a 500 percent increase in the prices of menstrual products, according to recent studies¹. NCA has taken menstrual hygiene into consideration as part of the response and has provided till date 9,496 dignity kits to women and girls affected by the crisis. NCA also provided 600 affected households with household kits that helped me replace their damaged essential non-food items such as mattresses, bedding kits, kitchen utensils among others.

¹ <https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2021/07/07/Lebanese-women-struggle-to-afford-menstrual-products-as-economic-crisis-worsens>

Gender Based Violence: SGBV Survivors access life-saving, specialized SGBV services appropriate and relevant to their immediate needs

As part of its emergency response efforts to alleviate the impact of the blast on individuals residing in Beirut and surrounding areas, NCA was able through Beirut blast response to conduct various GBV and protection activities in response to arising needs.



As part of GBV and protection response NCA and partners implemented psychological first aid (PFA), supported social development centers, provided referrals for GBV services for the purpose of creating awareness around GBV among community members. In one year, the response provided PFA to 1,779 individuals, 902 protection cases were referred or addressed, and 5,683 beneficiaries took part in awareness effort to reduce GBV especially with the increasing risk following the crisis and the lockdown imposed due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Food Security: Affected population access timely food assistance tailored to their needs

Access to healthy and hygienic food was set as a high priority by the affected people who did not have the means to cook in their destroyed houses and could not afford the cost, having lost their source of income. Other families had injured family members or positive COVID-19 cases that required additional attention and care. NCA and its partner International Orthodox Christian Charity (IOCC) partnered with a local charity organization within Beirut that had experience and a vacant space to run a community kitchen.

NCA provided healthy cooked meals that were delivered three times a week along with two bread parcels to the doorstep of 644 vulnerable affected families within the areas of Ashrafieh, Nabaa, and Burj Hammoud between August 2020 and February 2021. Priority was given to female-headed households, families with elderly members, families with no or minimal income, families with children under five and/or with a pregnant woman, and families which include members suffering from chronic physical or mental illnesses.

The kitchen offered income-generating activities to 11 individuals: 5 cooks, 3 drivers, and 3 social workers, who helped deliver food to the families. Moreover, purchasing the ingredients locally contributed to the local economy.

NCA and partner staff delivering cooked healthy meals and bread to affected families following



In parallel, NCA distributed 1,908 food kits for the families who were still able to cook in their household but who did not have the financial means to purchase the needed raw material. This support was positively received by the families impoverished by the economic crisis and the inflation. To note that between April 2019 and April 2021, the consumer Price Index has increased by more than 208 per cent and the price of food and beverages increased by 670 per cent².

In addition to access to food, the Beirut Blast response included awareness sessions on food safety and COVID-19 once per week during the food distribution to individual households.

Rehabilitation of Shelter, Health and Educational Institutions: Affected population has increased access to improved and safe shelter and basic services through repair/rehabilitation of shelters and institutions.

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/around-15-million-lebanese-need-top-un-humanitarian-official-there-warn>

The damages incurred by the Beirut explosion were severe and affected houses were no longer safe as a living space. In order to provide the necessary relief, NCA partner engineers conducted an assessment of the affected zones and drafted detailed bills of quantity (BoQs) for the homes that require restoration.

Despite the challenges that followed the explosion, the lockdown imposed by the authority to limit the spread of COVID-19, and the economic crisis, NCA response to Beirut Blast successfully rehabilitated 311 houses providing again a safe shelter to the families ravaged by the explosion. Families could not believe that someone will eventually come to support them and to help them protect their families and regain hope. As a result of the rehabilitation of the partially destroyed households 1,276 individuals enjoyed again the warmth of a home.

Before



After



Before and after repairs in a household kitchen including new plumbing, tiling, a new countertop, and cabinets for an apartment in Ashrafieh.

*The blast destroyed main institutions that used to provide health and education services to residents in the area as well as people coming from around the country to receive quality essential services in the country capital. Accordingly, NCA prioritized the rehabilitation of five schools that was damaged by the explosion to avoid any interruption in the students access to formal education once the new school year starts. The rehabilitated schools provide formal education services to 2,118 deprived students and teachers from various ethnic and religious backgrounds including refugee children and children of migrant workers.

In addition, NCA rehabilitated five primary health centers (PHCs) and a charitable hospital that provide primary and secondary health care for the affected population. The five PHCs provide health services to 15,120 individuals on annual basis. While the hospital serves annually 21,000 inpatients and outpatients, who receive quality health care in the middle of the capital at a reduced subsidized prices.

BEFORE



AFTER



Rehabilitation
of St Vicent
School in
Bourj
Hammoud in
Beirut
Northern
suburbs

Livelihood Support: Small to medium sized local businesses affected by the Beirut explosion restore their livelihood activities through repair/reconstruction and rehabilitation.

All shops and small businesses within the radius of the Beirut blast have been affected fully or partially affecting their capacity to operate and to continue to provide income for families when they needed it most. With a limited budget, NCA provided support to small businesses owned and operated by vulnerable families or women lead small businesses, taking into consideration that these businesses represent the main or sole source of income for the affected families and that the families were committed to resume operation once the rehabilitation is completed. The small businesses that were selected consisted of small mini markets, family-run bakeries, small restaurants, salons, electrical supply shops, and women-crafted accessory shops.

Accordingly, NCA completed the rehabilitation of 17 small businesses, directly benefiting 133 individuals and provided cash assistance to another 40 small businesses that were affected by the Blast. These small businesses are a main source of income to the families and their revival gave energy for the people in the affected area to resume normal life to a certain extent while regaining hope and energy to restart.



Before and after repairs to a hair salon in Ashrafieh, which included the installation of new gypsum board walls, painting, and providing new salon chairs and mirrors.

Protection Cash Assistance: Affected population receive cash and voucher assistance to reduce GBV risk and promote safety and dignity.

NCA and partners are witnessing the deteriorating situation and we are alarmed by the negative coping mechanisms and the feeling of hopelessness by the affected community. Accordingly, NCA Lebanon Office has coordinated with its standing national partners to respond immediately to the needs of the most vulnerable families who are not able anymore to meet their basic needs. Protection cash assistance has been identified as the most relevant response approach based on coordination and lessons learned from the Beirut Response, the national cash assistance task force, as well as the basic assistance working group. Till date, 2,475 families have received cash assistance from NCA. The post distribution monitoring exercise is proving how much this cash has reduced the negative coping mechanisms of affected families who were going into debt not able to pay the medical bills, rent or even to cover the cost of hygiene and food supplies.

NCA Beirut Response Summary:

- Thanks to the generous donor funding and the cooperation with national partners, NCA was able to respond immediately to the needs of people affected by the Beirut Blast that took place on 4 August 2020.
- NCA conducted a rapid assessment, developed a response plan, and immediately prioritized the need to affected people to ensure that they have a safe home, they have access to food and hygiene items, and they get support to restore their private businesses and public institutions to contribute to reviving the social protection network in the center of the capital of Lebanon.
- Now one year after the blast, NCA and partners have been able to:
 - Distribute 7,213 COVID-19 hygiene kits and increase awareness about precaution measures.
 - Distribute 9,496 dignity kits to women and girls
 - Distribute NFIs/household kits/mattresses and linen to 600 families
 - Provide PFA to 1,779 persons affected by the blast
 - 902 protection cases were identified, referred, or addressed
 - 5,683 individuals benefited from awareness on GBV
 - Rehabilitate 311 damaged houses.
 - Rehabilitate 5 schools covering 2,118 students and teachers.
 - Rehabilitate 5 primary health centers providing health services to 15,120 individuals annually.
 - Rehabilitate 1 charitable hospital that covers 21,000 inpatients and outpatients
 - Rehabilitate 17 small businesses hence restoring income for 133 individuals.
 - Provide cash assistance to 40 small businesses
 - Provide healthy cooked meals to 644 families.
 - Provide 1,908 food kits to affected families
 - Provide protection cash assistance to 2,475 families

All this would have not been possible without the support of the donor, commitment of the partners and trust of the communities.

A special thanks goes to:

NCA Lebanon partners: ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality, Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC),

NCA donors and supporters: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Action for Churches Together Alliance (ACT), DanChurch Aid (DCA), Fin Church Aid (FCA) and ICCO Cooperation.

As well as to the hard work and the perseverance of NCA team in Lebanon, Syria and Amman office, and the support of NCA Head Office.

Human Interest Stories:

Cash Assistance-Woman with Special Need Using Cash Assistance to Sell Special Easter Homemade Food Products

Samira Ghanem is a 49-year-old Lebanese woman who lives in Sin El Fil. At the age of 2 Samira got very ill and became paralyzed. Her parents tried to get her treated but couldn't find a cure which unfortunately made her illness permanent.

Samira spent her childhood in Naher Ibrahim, northern Lebanon, with her family, and used to go to a special school where she was educated on how to take care of her physical and mental wellbeing. With the love and support of her family Samira loved life and had many dreams, hopes and was always independent and never felt that her illness is an obstacle.

At the age of 19 Samira lost both her parents and decided to come to Beirut and start a new life. She went to CRC center (disability Hub) where she learned sewing and special crafts. For almost 15 years Samira was working at CRC center and had an apartment of her own. Samira loved her job and was very happy and proud with the life she was having because since she was young she loved being independent.

Then After few years CRC center had to close due to lack of funds, and her roommate left because she couldn't find a job and afford to pay the rent. But this didn't stop Samira, who looked hard till she found a job in a sewing factory. She also found a small apartment with cheaper rent that she could afford to pay. Samira worked for 3 years but since the revolution happened in Lebanon the factory had to close due to the economy.



Samira's Kitchen Pamphlet prepared to market "Samira's kitchen" a new food business where people can order Lebanese dishes and pastries knowing that they will be supporting a person with special needs to generate income to sustain herself.

Samira tried a lot to find a job but with COVID-19 and the economic crisis, it became harder with her situation. Samira wanted to count on herself so she started learning how to cook from youtube and with the support of the Church she had her small catering kitchen from home.

Samira now works from home and shares that the economic situation and lockdown and the high cost of living make things harder. Thanks to the cash support provided by MECC through funds received from NCA through the ACT LEB201 appeal, Samira covered two months' payment and was able to buy raw material that she used to prepare Easter food and dessert. The income from selling these items provided a financial income to help her in her rent, food, and medication.

Samira was extremely grateful with the MECC support having received food, hygiene and dignity kits previously and now the cash assistance. Samira's strength is an inspiration. She just asks for blessings from above so that she can keep going despite the challenging context in Lebanon.

Helping Restore a Young Family's Home after the Beirut Blast

Elie, 27, is a nurse and young father of two daughters, three-year-old Nisreen and one-year-old Naya. Elie works in the emergency unit of a hospital and worked hard to make ends meet for his family of four, even before the Beirut port explosion, by working double shifts.

With a salary of less than \$66 per month, Elie could not afford to repair the damage the Beirut port explosion caused to his home in Burj Hammoud, which is old, damp, and structurally weak.

The blast left huge cracks in the building's walls, ceilings, and a concrete column. With funds from Norwegian Church Aid – ACT Alliance, International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) conducted the necessary repairs to Elie's home to make it habitable and safe.

According to Sanaa, an IOCC engineer, the cracks in the ceilings and walls of Elie's second-floor apartment were apparent when IOCC first visited the apartment. "Cracks and visible steel in the walls, broken glass, doors, and windows, and huge cracks in the one of the building's concrete columns was what we observed during our first visit to the house. "If it weren't for NCA, the building might have collapsed on us. That is because one of the main columns of the building was severely affected by the blast," Elie said.

In addition to the risks associated with the damage, Elie was also concerned about affording food for his two daughters. With two small children and an income of almost no value because of the economic crisis, Elie is left penniless midmonth and is unable to buy food or milk. "With the rise in prices and the devaluation of the Lebanese lira, I'm unable to bring food home," he said. "I am forced to borrow money, and I can no longer bear the cost of all the family expenses. It was impossible for me to afford the repairs of the walls or windows. We had a hard time in the kitchen, as the drainage pipes were leaking, and the floor was soaked with water all the time. I couldn't afford even the smallest repairs."

Before



After



IOCC repaired the kitchen in Elie's home, including installing new plumbing for the sink, cupboards, tiles, and new paint.

Before



After



Pictures above: before and after treatment of cracks in the ceiling, and the installation of a new window, lighting, and maintenance for the door, as well as new paint in the living room and entrance.

Elie's family is one of many affected families that have received assistance with household repairs after the Beirut port explosion, thanks to funds received through Norwegian Church Aid – ACT Alliance. Through these efforts, NCA is helping survivors of Beirut's port explosion enjoy safer and more secure spaces called home.

What's Beyond August 2021

Lebanon is currently facing a wave of multiple crises unprecedented in magnitude with unravelling devastating effects on its macro-economy. The unfolding economic and financial collapse starting in October 2019 is further exacerbated by the dual economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and the massive Port of Beirut explosion in August 2020. The multi-pronged crisis has rapidly transpired into acute human tragedy, with poverty rates in Lebanon expected to engulf half the population as of 2021, due to the steep contraction of the economy and spiraling triple-digit inflation rates resulting in a steep decline of purchasing power, aggravated income generating opportunities and soaring unemployment, and competition over limited resources. In this context, humanitarian and development agencies in Lebanon are consumed with rolling out emergency relief and cash assistance programs to vulnerable households in an active effort to restrict the erosion of living standards, mounting poverty rates, and the rather generalized condition of precarity engulfing vulnerable populations.

On the 1st of July 2021, UNICEF warned that “a series of mutually reinforcing crises, including a devastating recession, have left families and children in Lebanon in a dire situation, affecting just about every aspect of their lives, with few resources and virtually no access to social support”. According to the recently published report:

- Over 30 per cent of children went to bed hungry and skipped meals in the past month.
- 77% of households do not have enough food or enough money to buy food. In Syrian refugee households, the figure reaches 99 per cent.
- 60% of households have to buy food on credit or borrow money.

In parallel, the World Bank has called Lebanon's crisis one of the worst depressions of modern history. The currency has lost more than 90% of its value and more than half the population has been propelled into poverty.

On July 6, following all these alarming statements, the Lebanon caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab warned the international community about a social explosion unless aid is forthcoming to Lebanon. The same day, NCA Lebanon and Syria country director was interviewed in the Norwegian news (studio2, P2) about the situation: https://radio.nrk.no/podkast/studio_2/1_1d623ecc-a594-46ae-a23e-cca59456aed4. In parallel, the State Secretary Jens Frolich Holte was talking about the severity of the situation on Dagsnytt 18.

With increasing needs and poverty, along with weakened public systems, NCA and partners are accountable to continue standing by the people in need. NCA will continue focusing on WASH and GBV as a priority intervention, while considering an early recovery approach to build local capacity and increase local resilience.



NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID

actalliance