

# Lebanon

## GEOGRAPHY

Lebanon occupies a narrow strip of land along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Its neighbours are Syria to the north and east and Israel to the south. Lebanon consists of a narrow coastal plain and two parallel mountain ranges separated by the fertile Bekaa Valley.

The climate is Mediterranean, with hot summers (average temperature 27°C) and mild, moist winters. Rainfall is generally adequate (over 750mm except in the east) and the mountains are snow-capped in winter.

## PEOPLE

Lebanon's population is around 4 million. Most people live in the capital, Beirut. There are 17 distinct communities recognised, including Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, Druze, Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics and Armenians. There is a significant refugee population, including Palestinians who have lived in Lebanon for 60 years. Arabic is the official language, but French and English are also used.

## HISTORY

Present-day Lebanon has only been an independent state since the 1940s. Five thousand years ago, Phoenicians inhabited the region. Over time, Lebanon has come under the control of many different neighbouring peoples, including Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Turkish, French and Syrians.

By 1100 AD, the population of Lebanon was made up of Christians, Muslims and followers of the Druze faith.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries  
The University of Texas at Austin



The community where Micha lives is benefiting from educational programs and child rights and peace-building activities.

In the centuries that followed, Lebanon was under Turkish (Ottoman) rule, but local families held considerable administrative power. After 1918, the League of Nations gave France a mandate to govern the states of Lebanon and Syria. During World War II, the Lebanese gained their independence, and the country was formalised in 1946. In an effort to satisfy Christian, Muslim and Druze communities, the new electoral system assigned leadership positions and seats in parliament to each group. This actually reinforced the divisions and rivalry between them. With the influx of thousands of Palestinians from Israel after 1948, the situation became even more complicated. The presence of armed Palestinians exposed Lebanon to raids by Israel. Various Lebanese groups took sides and raised their own militias (armies).

In 1975, an attack on a bus escalated into a bloody civil war. An Arab (mainly Syrian) peacekeeping force was set up, but the uneasy peace was shattered again when Israeli troops invaded southern Lebanon in 1982. When the Israelis partially withdrew, the nation was virtually controlled by numerous militia groups and Syrian troops.

Beirut was divided into Christian and Muslim sectors. After a ceasefire in 1991, the war officially ended, and a new government gradually gained control. However, the presence of groups like Hezbollah, who seek to liberate the south from Israel's continuing occupation, has caused further tension.

## ECONOMY

The 1975-1990 civil war seriously damaged Lebanon's economic infrastructure, cut national output by half and all but ended Lebanon's position as a Middle Eastern trading and banking hub. In the years since, Lebanon has rebuilt much of its war-torn physical and financial infrastructure by borrowing heavily – mostly from domestic banks. However, the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict in July-August 2006 caused an estimated \$3.6 billion in infrastructure damage. Internal Lebanese political tension continues to hamper economic activity, particularly in the tourism and retail sectors.

Among Lebanon's main exports are tobacco, textiles and agricultural products including olives, apples and citrus fruits.

## LIVING CONDITIONS

During the 15 intermittent years of civil war, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese were killed or wounded, and 800,000 left the country. Infrastructure and services were devastated for both rich and poor.

While Lebanon is recovering economically from these years of war, some communities remain vulnerable. A lack of employment opportunities creates hardship for both Lebanese and refugees.

The return of many of Lebanon's own refugees has pushed up prices for services and housing, taking these things beyond the reach of lower income groups.



World Vision works with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, providing educational opportunities for children with disabilities by empowering local organisations to implement quality programs.

## Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	LEBANON	AUSTRALIA
Population	4.3 million	21.5 million
Urban population (as % of total)	87.2%	89.1 %
GNI per capita (PPP US\$)	\$13,475	\$38,692
Population with sustainable access to an improved water source	100%	100%
Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)	89.6%	99%
Life expectancy at birth	72.4 years	81.9 years
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	13	6

Source: United Nations Development Programme  
Human Development Report 2010

## EDUCATION

Although many Lebanese are very highly educated, there is a belief that the education system needs to be more geared toward career learning, in order to ensure that graduates can be employed.

The 2006 Australian census recorded 74,850 Lebanon-born people in Australia, an increase of five percent from the 2001 census. Nearly 80 percent of these arrived prior to 1996 as a result of the civil war in Lebanon.

For those still living in Palestinian refugee camps, life is particularly difficult. They are unwelcome in Lebanon and yet unable to return to their homes. Many of these camps have limited or no access to support facilities. Palestinians living in these camps face poverty without opportunity for employment or political involvement in their situation. The lack of access to healthcare is causing particular hardship to these people.

Lebanon's future remains closely intertwined with that of its neighbours and with the outcomes of the Middle East peace process.

## WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN LEBANON

- Over 2,500 children, their families and communities are assisted with education and other basic needs through child sponsorship.
- World Vision works in partnership with Palestinian children, youth and their families in peace building, community-based rehabilitation, psychosocial wellbeing and vocational opportunities.
- World Vision partners with local organisations, government and community groups to support activities relating to human rights, income generation, agriculture and child development. People also learn about child rights and leadership skills.