



## J. Youth and Sustainable Human Development

The real wealth of Lebanon is its people. They are also the most important factor influencing the process of development in the country. In this context, youth (15-24 years) occupy a distinct position for two main reasons. The first is related to the demographic characteristics of society, where 49 percent of the population is less than 25 years old; and youth constituting around 20 percent of the population in 1996. The second reason is futuristic in nature. Sustainable human development implies in the first place the adoption of forward-looking choices over the medium and long-term; hence, priority should be given to preparing and rehabilitation of youth, and to enabling them to participate in decision-making since the future belongs to them and to subsequent generations.

In this context, youth represent the primary human resource for realizing sustainable human development. Hence, the issue will be examined in this section from the perspective that youth are agents of development whose present potential and possible future role are crucial for the future of the country. This means that they will not be dealt with as passive recipients who merely react to prevailing policies and conditions, but also as an important agent of change and a human and social asset. Based on this, an attempt will be made to evaluate current policies in terms of their impact on enabling youth to perform the roles expected of them, and the extent of their participation in the development process.

### 1. Demographic features

In light of available data, the evolution of the population pyramid between 1970 and 1996 is shown in Table III-38 below.

Table III-38: Lebanese residents classified by age group : 1970,1987 and 1996 (percent)

Age group	1970		1987		1996	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
0-4	7.2	7.0	5.6	5.3	4.4	4.2
5-9	7.9	7.5	5.9	5.5	5.2	4.9
10-14	6.8	6.3	5.8	5.5	5.5	5.1
15-19	5.2	5.0	6.2	6.1	5.2	4.9
20-24	3.9	3.7	5.6	5.7	4.9	4.8
25-29	3.0	3.1	4.2	4.4	4.1	4.5
30-34	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.8	4.4
35-39	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.7	3.0	3.5
40-44	2.6	2.6	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.8
45-49	2.0	1.8	2.3	2.3	2.1	2.2
50-54	1.4	1.4	2.0	1.8	1.9	2.0
55-59	1.3	1.2	1.8	1.6	1.8	1.9
60-64	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.7	1.7
65 and above	2.5	2.5	2.0	2.0	3.8	3.5

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Total	50.8	49.2	50.5	49.5	49.5	50.5
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Source: 1970: Lebanese Republic, Ministry of Planning, Central Directorate of Statistics, Labor Force Survey, 1970 (Beirut), 1972; 1987: Kasparian, R. et Beaudoin, A., La population déplacée au Liban 1975-1987, Université Saint-Joseph (Beyrouth, Liban) - Université Laval (Québec, Canada), February 1992; 1996: Ministry of Social Affairs - United Nations Population Fund, Population and Housing Database Survey, 1996.

Several factors explain the changes observed in the relative importance of different age groups in the Lebanese population over the last two decades. The main factors are summarized below:

- The general and steady declining trend of the natural rate of population growth as a result of changing family values and attitudes, and the increasing tendency to practice family planning and reduce the number of children.
- The extensive emigration abroad which has distorted the population pyramid. The majority of these emigrants were young people, in the age group 20-25 years, and male; which was also reflected in the rise of the ratio of the female population in the total.
- The high death toll resulting from the war and which, in turn, was concentrated in the same age group.

However, with the end of the war, emigration diminished and some emigrants began to return. This helped to restore some balance in the age and gender composition of the population pyramid

## 2. Social and psychological state of youth

Lebanese youth suffered acutely from the social and psychological effects of the war. These factors were instrumental in interrupting the normal course of evolution of youth attitudes, value systems and psychological characteristics.

A sample study, carried out on behalf of the Lebanese Family Planning Association, indicated that the war strengthened family ties. The worsening security situation and sectarian and geographical segregation dampened the urge of youth for independence and geographical mobility. The study showed also that only ten percent of youth aged between fifteen and twenty-five years did not live with their families; the main reason being marriage (78 percent), whereas leaving the family for reasons of work or study was done in extreme situations. The study found that 65 percent of youth were living in the homes in which they were born.

The study also noted a decline in marriage rates among young people. The celibacy rate among females aged 25-29 years rose from 25.1 percent in 1970 to 46.6 percent in 1996; and for the age group 30-34 years the rate rose from 14.2 percent to 30.4 percent. Over the same interval, celibacy among males rose from 54.8 percent to 70.2 percent for the age group 25-29 years, and from 14.2 percent to 38.4 percent for the 30-34 years old. At the same time, the average marrying age for girls rose from 23 years to 25.7 years. The main reasons underlying these shifts, according to the same field inquiry, are difficulties relating to finding a house (87 percent) and financial constraints (65 percent). A clear tendency to reduce the size of the family and have fewer children was also noted.

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The above-mentioned study found that the main factor influencing social and family behavior is the level of education; it is also the element having the greatest positive bearing on unifying youth behavior patterns and their social and family values.

With regard to expectations, a number of social inquiries carried out between 1990 and 1995 indicate that youth are not generally satisfied with their lives. The same study referred to above found out that only 7 percent of youth had absolute confidence in the authority; 20 percent expressed reserved confidence; 38 percent had no confidence at all; and, 34 percent had no opinion. Only 9 percent of youth expressed support for political parties, while 3 percent supported militias - although militias drew large numbers of young people to their ranks during the war. About 21 percent of working youth are members of labor unions, but are not impressed with their effectiveness. Youth are less aware than their elders of the role and influence of municipalities. Although democratic values and building state institutions are the most frequently expressed concerns by youth, this appears to be in the nature of moral convictions and ideals, often without being associated in their minds with a practical conception about how to apply them in public institutions and the civil society.

These findings point to a widening gap between youth and political and administrative authority, due to the distorted picture which the war projected; and lack of contact by youth with some of the administrations (e.g. municipalities) because of their perceived ineffectiveness. The attitude of youth towards political parties can be attributed to the negative experience with these parties during the war - which in their majority were transformed into militias - and the stagnation of political party life in general.

### 3. Youth and productive employment

The percentage of youth employed has remained virtually unchanged between 1987 and 1994 at 30 percent. However, there are important differences between male and female employment as shown in the following table.

Table III-39: Youth employment by gender : 1987, 1994 and 1996  
(percent)

Year	Male		Female	
	Employed	Not employed	Employed	Not employed
1987	52.7	47.3	12.4	87.6
1994	46.6	53.4	12.9	87.1
1996	43.9	56.1	13.3	86.7

Source: 1987 and 1994: Al-Atat, Asa'ad and Kabanji, Jacques, Field Study on the Status of Youth and their Attitudes in Lebanon, Lebanese Family Planning Association (unpublished, - in Arabic), 1994; 1996: Ministry of Social Affairs - United Nations Population Fund, Population and Housing Database Survey, 1996.

It appears from the table that, whereas female youth employment slightly increased during the past decade, that of males declined by about nine percentage points. In part, this decline can be attributed to the rise in university education enrollment - in

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itself a positive indicator. However, a large majority of university students are enrolled in social sciences and literary disciplines (see Table III-42 below), especially in the Lebanese University which accounts for half the number of university students in the country. This means that university education is not properly attuned to the requirements of the job market, where the prolongation of the study period may be considered a form of disguised unemployment - or delayed unemployment.

Among those covered by the sample, 36.2 percent declared that they were looking for a job. Among those seeking a job for the first time, female youth constituted 28.3 percent, compared to 22.5 percent of males. Thus, unemployment among youth appears to be a significantly higher than the national average, estimated at 12-14 percent.

Youth are among the most exposed social categories to unemployment in Lebanon, especially that resulting from discrepancies between supply and demand for jobs (structural unemployment). This mismatch is explained by the fact that supply originates in the education system, while demand comes from the economy. The discrepancy becomes immediately apparent when the fields of specialization preferred by students in 1994: informatics (52.8 percent), accounting (33.3 percent) and secretarial services (27.8 percent) are compared with those for which demand is strongest in the labor market : electricians (41.4 percent), mechanics (32.7 percent) and industrial mechanics (24.1 percent). Youth in general hesitate to enter vocational specializations, and universities contribute to structural unemployment by offering programmes that are not attuned to the needs of the economy.

Thus, young graduates, be it of universities or schools, encounter difficulties in trying to find a job; and even if they find one, it may not be in line with their field of study. Youth have the lowest income compared to other age groups (see Table III-40). This reflects the traditional nature of employment and fixing salaries, and the low valuation of the output of the educational system by market standards and economic productivity, except specializations for which demand is strong.

Table III-40: Earnings by age group, 1995  
(percent)

Monthly earnings	20-30 years	40-50 years	Above 60 years
Less than US\$ 1,000	88	52	73
US\$ 1,000 - US\$ 3,000	9	33	22
Above US\$ 3,000	3	15	5
Total	100	100	100

Source: Haddad, Antoine, *Poverty in Lebanon*, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Amman, 1995.

These negative effects are exacerbated by the large discrepancy between the income earned by new entrants to the labor market, and the big responsibilities confronting them: establishing themselves in the job, securing the financing needed to set themselves up, or in trying to become independent from their parents and start their own family. In this connection, youth are considered to be the main victims of the absence of an appropriate housing policy, as marriage and forming a family in a place of their own is almost impossible for a large segment of youth from middle class or low - income families.

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### 4. Management of youth capabilities: opportunities and obstacles

The enrollment ratio in secondary education is less than 60 percent. The university enrollment ratio for the age group 20-24 years was 27.6 percent in 1993-1994. The number of students enrolled in Lebanese universities in the academic year 1993/1994 was 74,810, of which 57,408 students were Lebanese. The number of students enrolled in the Lebanese University was 35,503, including 32,517 Lebanese students, distributed among the various disciplines, as shown in Table III-41.

Table III-41: Distribution of students in the Lebanese University by faculty, academic year 1993 / 1994

Faculty	Number
Literature and social sciences	11,880
Law, politics and administrative sciences	10,150
Sciences	5,197
Business administration	1,209
Education	599
Social sciences	1,566
Fine arts	1,159
Public Health	885
Agriculture	226
Medicine	566
Applied sciences	507
Dentistry	162
Pharmacy	198
Engineering	1,313

Source: Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, Center for Education Research and Development, Provisional Statistics for the Academic Year 1993/1994, Beirut, 1995.

The deficiency is not confined to the large discrepancies observed between theoretical and applied disciplines, and between scientific disciplines and those in literary and social sciences areas. Programmes and education methods need also to be modernized.

Vocational training is available for a very small portion of students in the intermediate - secondary levels. For the Lebanese in general, vocational training is still associated with a distorted image for some types of occupations, prompted by their lack of glamour, low appreciation and social standing.

The drawbacks in the education system are reflected on the state of education of youth in general. The school or university is often a place of rote education rather than a place of cultural formation. This aspect is generally neglected. Even when the subjects included in the curricula carry a cultural dimension such as literature, history and geography, they are transformed into material for memorization. However, it should be pointed out that there are differences between schools in this respect, with the elite schools according more importance to this aspect.

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Cultural formation and education are generally left to personal initiatives or to cultural and artistic activities that are organized by civil cultural associations and clubs, including seminars, exhibitions and festivals. The information media, which are largely controlled by the private sector (movie theaters, television and radio stations) exert considerable influence on youth in this respect. The information media, however, are characterized by their strong commercial orientation.

The positive aspects associated with openness to the outside world are offset by the fact that openness to western culture is often unilateral and does not extend to the depth and richness of this culture and civilization, as much as to the purely entertainment aspects. It also results in the confusion and duality of values, and promotes cultural divisions and differentiation in the ranks of youth between total rejection or adoption of western culture.

### 5. Youth : participation and social integration

Youth are an essential element in any kind of social integration. They are, more than any other group in society, exposed to social interaction whether through education institutions (schools, colleges and universities), voluntary work as members of non-governmental organizations, or through their involvement in political / party life - being the most targeted group.

In light of what has already been observed regarding the characteristics of the system of education, it is not far-fetched to conclude that the system does not promote social and national integration at youth level. The large disparities observed within the system between public and private education; in the type and quality of education; in the repetitive and encyclopedic nature of learning; in the tendency to expand religious institutions at the expense of public (civil) institutions; or in the weak link between the output of the system and the needs of the labor market, do not help to promote a common knowledge base and values that enable youth to participate in building the nation and society.

At another level, voluntary work provides a major tool for promoting social cohesion. There are numerous and varied types of organizations and associations in the country, ranging from the local club in the village or quarter to unions and professional associations, and cultural, scout and sports associations. These promote the spirit of initiative and togetherness, and develop the sense of belonging to the group which helps to weaken individualistic tendencies in favor of public concerns. There are factors, however, that limit these positive influences. The organizations themselves suffer from internal problems in terms of similarities in methods of operation; weakness of democratic practices and participation; in addition to the numerical dominance of organizations with primary and traditional affiliations (family, confession, region, etc.), compared with those having a modern and civic orientation.

Nevertheless, youth participation in voluntary work must be viewed as a very positive element, and as an approach to a subsequent development of their potential and participation in the development process.

### 6. Conclusion

Youth form an important part of the Lebanese society at the demographic level. They are subject to more hardships in terms of living conditions and unemployment than other groups, especially under the current system of education.

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Youth participation in public life remains less than desired and potential. The absence of a youth policy that utilizes, exploits and guides their energies, and the difficult living conditions they face, have meant that their energies have not been sufficiently utilized to promote development, social integration and cohesion. In the face of the huge challenges confronting the present generation, youth show hesitation towards direct involvement in political activity because of the war experience.

The youth generation faces the challenges of modernization and globalization on the threshold of the twenty-first century. This is a unique cultural challenge that no previous generation has confronted.

**DON'T STOP HERE .. THERE IS MORE TO READ IN CHAPTER THREE  
GO TO SECTION K:  
THE DISPLACED AND DEVELOPMENT**