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The Generation We Are Losing: A Study on Post-Graduation Opportunity, Emigration, Wages, Regional Inequality, And Survival in Today's Lebanon

الجيل الذي نخسره : دراسة حول فرص ما بعد التخرج، والهجرة، والأجور، والتفاوت الإقليمي، وسبل العيش في لبنان اليوم

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Abstract:

Lebanon is not short of talent. It is short of reasons for its talented young people to stay. Every year the country educates a generation in some of the most respected universities in the Arab world, and every year a growing share of that generation packs its degrees into a suitcase and leaves. This is no longer the old, romantic story of Lebanese ambition reaching across the seas. It is a quieter and more dangerous story: a managed, accelerating, state-enabled drain of the people Lebanon most needs to rebuild itself.

In 2025 alone, the country recorded a net loss of more than 220,000 residents, with departures outnumbering arrivals across the year. Between 2018 and 2023, Lebanon lost an average of roughly 78,000 people every year, more than three times the pace of the two decades before the crisis. Those leaving are disproportionately young, educated, and employable, the very profile a recovering economy is built on.

Source: IOM border data via The Beiruter, January 2026; Lebanese Citizen Foundation study (Charbel Nahas) via L'Orient Today, January 2024.

The headline findings of this study are blunt. By credible estimates, around half of Lebanon's fresh graduates emigrate rather than build their careers at home. Youth unemployment reached 47.8% in 2022, the highest in the Arab world, while the minimum wage today is worth roughly USD 313 per month, below its pre-crisis value, after real wages collapsed by more than 90%. End-of-service savings and pensions have lost almost their entire value, and outside a small public sector, the overwhelming majority of Lebanese reach old age with no pension at all. Opportunity, investment, and multinational employers remain concentrated in Beirut, pricing young workers out of the one city that still offers jobs while hollowing out the towns they come from.

Source: ILO Arab States Employment and Social Outlook 2024 via Credit Libanais; wage.is, February 2026; The Policy Initiative; Carnegie Endowment, 2024.

The result is a profound change in what a degree now means in Lebanon. For most graduates it is no longer a tool for building a future. It is a survival instrument for an entire family. A young person who finds work is rarely supporting only themselves; they are carrying parents whose pensions evaporated and who can no longer be financially productive. Emigration, in that light, is not betrayal or weakness. It is arithmetic. The shame does not belong to the young people who leave. It belongs to a political class that watched the arithmetic harden, year after year, and chose to do nothing that would change it.

Lebanon has found its adjustment variable in mass emigration. When a state cannot fix its economy, it exports its children instead.

Keywords: Youth Migration, University Graduates, Lebanese Labor Market, Brain Drain.

الملخص:

لا يعاني لبنان من نقص في الكفاءات، بل من نقص في الأسباب التي تدفع شبابه الموهوب إلى البقاء. ففي كل عام تُخرّج الجامعات اللبنانية، التي تُعد من بين الأكثر احترامًا في العالم العربي، آلاف الخريجين، إلا أن نسبة متزايدة منهم تغادر البلاد بحثًا عن مستقبل

أفضل. ولم تعد هذه الظاهرة مجرد امتداد للطموح اللبناني التقليدي في العمل خارج الوطن، بل أصبحت تمثل نزيفًا متسارعًا ومنهجيًا للكفاءات البشرية التي يحتاجها لبنان لإعادة بناء اقتصاده ومؤسساته.

تشير البيانات إلى أن لبنان سجل خلال عام 2025 صافي خسارة تجاوز 220 ألف نسمة نتيجة تفوق أعداد المغادرين على الوافدين، بينما بلغ متوسط صافي الهجرة السنوي نحو 78 ألف شخص خلال الفترة (2018–2023)، أي أكثر من ثلاثة أضعاف المعدل المسجل قبل الأزمة. ويتركز معظم المهاجرين ضمن فئة الشباب المتعلم والمؤهل، وهي الفئة الأكثر أهمية لتحقيق التعافي الاقتصادي.

وتبين نتائج الدراسة أن نحو نصف خريجي الجامعات الجدد يهاجرون بدلًا من بدء حياتهم المهنية داخل البلاد. كما بلغ معدل بطالة الشباب 47.8% عام 2022، وهو الأعلى في العالم العربي، في حين تراجعت القيمة الحقيقية للأجور بصورة حادة، وانخفضت قيمة الحد الأدنى للأجور، وفقدت تعويضات نهاية الخدمة والمعاشات التقاعدية معظم قيمتها، بينما يفتقر غالبية اللبنانيين إلى أي نظام تقاعد فعّال. وفي الوقت نفسه، تتركز فرص العمل والاستثمار والشركات الكبرى في العاصمة بيروت، مما يزيد من التفاوت الإقليمي ويجعل الحصول على فرص عمل لائقة أكثر صعوبة للشباب في مختلف المناطق.

وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الشهادة الجامعية في لبنان لم تعد تمثل وسيلة لبناء مستقبل مهني داخل الوطن، بل أصبحت أداة تُمكّن الخريجين من الهجرة وتأمين مصدر دخل لإعالة أسرهم، خاصة في ظل تآكل دخول الأجيال الأكبر سنًا. ومن هذا المنطلق، لم تعد الهجرة خيارًا شخصيًا بقدر ما أصبحت ضرورة اقتصادية فرضتها الظروف المعيشية. وترى الدراسة أن الهجرة الجماعية أصبحت الآلية التي يتكيف بها الاقتصاد اللبناني مع أزماته، إذ يعجز عن توفير فرص العمل والدخل لمواطنيه، فيدفعهم عمليًا إلى البحث عن هذه الفرص خارج البلاد.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الهجرة الشبابية، خريجو الجامعات، سوق العمل اللبناني، هجرة الكفاءات.

1. The Scale of the Exodus: How Many Stay, How Many Leave

Lebanon does not maintain a modern, reliable labour-market information system, and it has held no official population census since 1932. Precise year-by-year figures on graduate destinations therefore have to be assembled from border data, professional orders, university records, and survey research. Taken together, the picture they form is unambiguous.

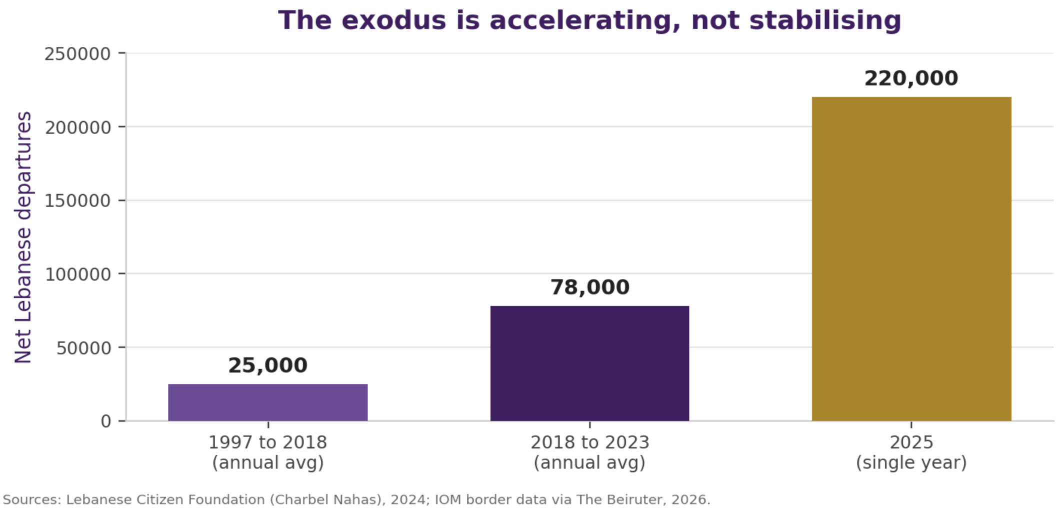
Source: ReliefWeb, Matching Skills and Jobs in Lebanon (ILO policy note); L'Orient Today, January 2024.

The clearest single indicator of intent is survey data on the desire to emigrate. The Arab Barometer found in 2024 that 58% of Lebanese aged 18 to 29 want to leave the country, roughly double the share among older citizens, and that the wish to leave rises with education. Earlier waves recorded even higher figures among the young, and a separate regional youth survey reported that more than three quarters of young Lebanese had considered or were actively trying to emigrate. Wanting to leave has become the default emotional state of an entire age group.

Source: Arab Barometer, Lebanon Migration Insights, 2024; ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey via Hamad Bin Khalifa University, 2021.

Desire becomes departure at a striking rate among graduates specifically. Lebanese labour research has put the share of youth graduates who emigrate at roughly one in two. That estimate is consistent with what the professional orders report from the other side: in engineering, of the more than 72,000 engineers and architects registered in Lebanon, around half work outside the country. A degree, in other words, does not anchor a young Lebanese to Lebanon. Statistically, it loosens the anchor.

Source: WEE Portal / Information International, youth migration data; Order of Engineers and Architects (Beirut) via UPI, December 2020.



The deeper alarm is not the level but the trajectory. For two decades after the civil war, net migration was roughly flat. Since 2019 it has turned into a structural outflow that accelerates rather than settles. The country lost an average of about 25,000 people per year between 1997 and 2018; that figure jumped to about 78,000 per year between 2018 and 2023; and the single-year net loss for 2025 exceeded 220,000. Economists studying the collapse describe emigration as the mechanism through which Lebanon now absorbs economic shocks. When the state cannot create income, it exports the people who would have earned it.

Source: Lebanese Citizen Foundation (Charbel Nahas) via L'Orient Today, January 2024; IOM via The Beiruter, January 2026.

To grasp the scale, set it against the population that remains. The Lebanese diaspora is now estimated at around 15 million people worldwide, against roughly 5.7 million residents inside the country. The nation abroad is already close to three times the nation at home. The 220,000 net departures of a single recent year are not a statistical blip in that context; they are the steady widening of a gap that the country has stopped trying to close.

Source: Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 2025; IOM via The Beiruter, 2026.

- **2. Why They Leave: Wages, Conditions, and Impossible Demands**

Lebanese youth are not leaving because they lack patriotism or stamina. They are leaving because the economics of staying no longer support a dignified adult life. Three forces sit at the center of that calculation: wages that have lost their meaning, working conditions that have deteriorated, and a hiring culture that asks the impossible of people at the start of their careers.

- **2.1 Wages that no longer buy a life**

The financial collapse that began in 2019 destroyed the value of Lebanese incomes. The currency lost more than 98 percent of its value, and real wages fell by over 90 percent. A salary that supported a household before the crisis now covers a fraction of the same basket of goods. The official minimum wage was raised in stages and stood at 28 million Lebanese pounds per month from August 2025, which converts to roughly USD 313 at the market rate, still below the pre-crisis equivalent of around USD 450. The average gross monthly salary sits near USD 300.

Source: Executive Magazine, September 2025; wage.is, February 2026; World Bank country overview, 2025.

For graduates the comparison that matters is not Lebanon-then versus Lebanon-now, but Lebanon versus abroad. Professionals who once earned the equivalent of USD 2,000 to 3,000 per month in Lebanon often now earn between USD 200 and 500 for the same work. The same skill set, carried across a border to the Gulf, Europe, or North America, can multiply a young person's income several times over while also restoring the basic services, electricity, healthcare, and security, that Lebanon can no longer guarantee. No motivational speech about national duty competes with that gap.

Source: wage.is, February 2026; sectoral wage reporting, ILO and L'Orient Today, 2024.

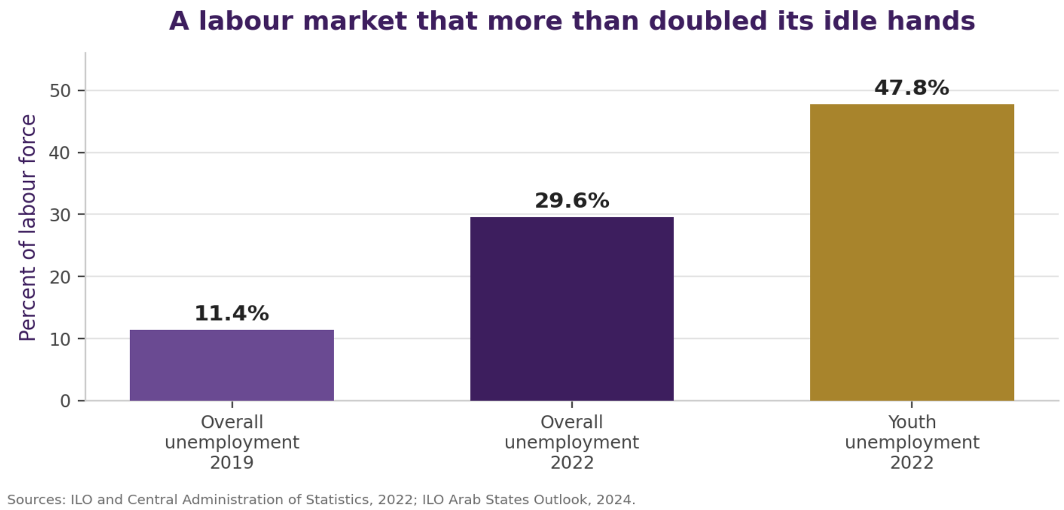
Indicator	Before crisis (2019)	Today (2024 to 2026)
Currency value (LBP vs USD)	1,507.5 pegged	est. 89,500 (lost over 98%)
Real wages	Baseline	Fell by more than 90%
Minimum wage	est. USD 450 / month	est. USD 313 / month
Average gross salary	Several multiples higher	est. USD 300 / month
Overall unemployment	11.4%	29.6% (2022)
Youth unemployment	Lower	47.8% (2022), highest in Arab world

Sources: Executive Magazine, 2025; Legal Agenda, 2026; wage.is, 2026; ILO and Central Administration of Statistics, 2022; ILO Arab States Outlook, 2024.

- **2.2 A labour market that lost a quarter of its jobs**

Even at these wages, the jobs are scarce. Overall unemployment rose from 11.4% in 2019 to 29.6% in 2022, and the employment-to-population ratio fell from 43.3% to 30.6% over the same period, meaning that more than a quarter of the jobs that existed in 2019 had simply disappeared. Youth bore the worst of it: youth unemployment hit 47.8% in 2022, the highest rate in the Arab world, and some crisis-period estimates put the youth unemployment gap closer to 60%. Informality rose in parallel, from 55% of workers in 2019 to 63% in 2022, so that even those who find work increasingly do so without contracts, social security, or protection.

Source: ILO Arab States Employment and Social Outlook 2024 via Credit Libanais; ReliefWeb / ILO-UNICEF labour synthesis; TIMEP, 2023.



- **2.3 The impossible demands placed on jobseekers**

Beyond pay and scarcity lies a third, quieter cruelty: the conditions employers attach to the few openings that exist. Lebanese graduates routinely describe entry-level postings that demand several years of experience, multiple languages, advanced software certifications, and a willingness to accept salaries that do not cover transport and rent, often for roles labelled as internships or junior positions. Employers, for their part, complain that they cannot find candidates with the right mix of technical and interpersonal skills. Both are describing the same broken machine: an education system that was never connected to the labour market, and a market too small and too distressed to absorb and train the people it produces.

Source: L'Orient Today, June 2024, on Lebanon's paradoxical job market; World Bank and Forward MENA skills survey, 2024.

The mismatch is severe enough that recruiters report receiving more than a hundred applicants for a single junior role yet interviewing only a handful who meet the stated requirements, and hiring perhaps one. A young person can be both unemployed and, on paper, unqualified for the only jobs being advertised, while the qualification on offer abroad is simply a plane ticket. When a market asks graduates to arrive already experienced, already certified, and already willing to work below subsistence, it is, in practice, telling them to leave.

Source: Berytech and Forward MENA, via L'Orient Today, June 2024.

- **3. The Fields Lebanon Does Not Offer, and the Ones It Cannot Employ**

Part of the migration of talent is structural in a way rarely discussed honestly: for certain fields, the question of whether to leave is decided before graduation, because the discipline itself is either not taught in Lebanon to an advanced level or has no domestic industry to absorb it. A student who wants a serious career in these areas has no realistic option but to train and work abroad.

Lebanon hosts more than forty universities and produces graduates across a wide range of disciplines, so the gap is rarely total absence. It is depth, specialization, equipment, and, above all, the existence of an employer who needs the skill. The fields below illustrate where Lebanese students most often have to look outside the country, either because advanced programs are thin or missing, or because no local sector exists to hire them once qualified.

- **Aerospace and aeronautical engineering,** with no domestic aviation manufacturing or space sector to provide training or employment.
- **Semiconductor and microelectronics design, nanotechnology, and advanced materials,** which depend on fabrication facilities and research budgets Lebanon does not have.
- **Petroleum, offshore, and subsea engineering,** a cruel gap given Lebanon's own undeveloped offshore gas potential, which has produced an industry only on paper.
- **Nuclear engineering, advanced robotics and automation, and quantum and high-performance computing,** research-intensive fields with no critical mass of laboratories or funded employers locally.
- **Advanced and subspecialty medicine,** where techniques such as surgical robotics are learned abroad because the equipment, fellowships, and case volume are concentrated elsewhere.
- **Actuarial science, advanced quantitative finance, and large-scale data and artificial-intelligence research,** where a handful of programs exist but the deep professional market does not.
- **Industrial-scale creative fields,** including film production, animation, and game design at a commercial scale that Lebanon's small market cannot sustain.

Source: Synthesis based on ILO manufacturing skills survey, 2024; sector reporting on Lebanon's offshore gas and medical training (L'Orient Today, 2024); university programme landscape.

The honest conclusion is uncomfortable for policymakers. In most of these cases the deeper problem is not the missing classroom; it is the missing industry. A country can open a petroleum-engineering track or an aerospace lab, but if it never develops the gas field, the manufacturing base, or the research economy that would employ those graduates, it has only trained people more precisely for export. Closing this gap is not primarily an education reform. It is an economic-development decision that Lebanon's leaders have repeatedly declined to make.

● 4. Where the Demand Is: The Industries Still Hiring

It would be wrong to conclude that Lebanon has no demand for talent. It has significant, documented demand in several sectors. The tragedy is that the demand and the people who could meet it are kept apart by low pay, a skills mismatch, and the pull of better offers abroad. Understanding where the demand sits is essential, because these are precisely the sectors a serious recovery would build on.

● 4.1 Technology and digital services

The clearest area of unmet demand is technology. Surveys of Lebanese digital and tech companies found that around 88% were actively trying to hire but could not find suitable candidates, with software developers the single most sought-after role, named by 64% of firms, followed by sales and project-management profiles. Demand also runs strong for data analysts, cybersecurity specialists, DevOps engineers, and UI and UX and digital-marketing skills. Tech is one of the few sectors hiring precisely because it serves foreign markets and has low barriers to entry, which is also why its salaries can approach international levels and why its workers are the easiest to lure abroad.

Source: Forward MENA survey via L'Orient Today, June 2024; World Bank Skilling Up Lebanon, 2024.

- **4.2 Industry, manufacturing, and skilled technical trades**

Lebanese manufacturers report an acute shortage of technical labour. In a 2024 skills survey of industrialists, around half reported worker shortages and 62% reported open vacancies, with persistent demand for technicians skilled in programmable logic controllers, human-machine interfaces, and computer-numerical-control machining, alongside growing needs in industrial IT and automation. Engineering and skilled construction trades, civil, electrical, and technical roles, face similar gaps. These are exactly the mid-level, hands-on skills that vocational and technical education could supply if it were funded and respected.

Source: ILO Skills Anticipation Survey, Lebanese manufacturing sector, December 2024; Qureos Lebanon hiring guide, 2025.

- **4.3 Healthcare**

Healthcare carries a paradox sharper than any other sector: demand is high and rising, yet the workforce is being stripped out faster than it can be replaced. Hospitals and clinics report shortages of doctors, nurses, and allied professionals, even as need grows, because emigration has pulled so many practitioners abroad. Lebanon trains excellent medical staff; it cannot retain them, which turns a sector of genuine opportunity into a sector of chronic crisis.

Source: Qureos Lebanon hiring guide, 2025; WHO data via L'Orient Today, 2024.

- **4.4 Agriculture and energy: potential, not yet opportunity**

Two sectors hold latent promise that successive governments have failed to convert into jobs. Agriculture already engages a fifth to a quarter of the active population, much of it informal and poorly paid, and remains the least attractive sector to investors and educated youth despite clear room to grow with state support. Offshore gas and renewable energy are repeatedly described as promising, yet remain largely undeveloped, so the careers they could create exist only as projections. Potential is not opportunity until someone builds the industry that turns one into the other.

Source: European Training Foundation, Labour Market and Employment Policy in Lebanon; sector reporting, 2024.

Sector	Demand signal	Why graduates still leave
Technology and digital	88% of firms cannot fill roles; developers most wanted	Talent poached by higher-paying foreign and remote employers
Manufacturing and trades	est. 50% report shortages; 62% have vacancies	Low pay, undervalued vocational tracks, weak training pipeline

Sector	Demand signal	Why graduates still leave
Healthcare	Rising demand for doctors, nurses, allied staff	Mass emigration of practitioners since 2019
Agriculture	20% to 25% of active workforce; room to grow	Informal, low-paid, neglected by investment and policy
Energy (gas, renewables)	Described as promising	Industry undeveloped; jobs remain hypothetical

Sources: Forward MENA via L'Orient Today, 2024; ILO manufacturing skills survey, 2024; Qureos, 2025; European Training Foundation.

- **5. Fleeing Instability, and the Value of a Second Passport**

Wages and jobs explain much of the exodus, but not all of it. A large part of the decision to leave is a judgement about stability and about the future Lebanon can credibly promise. Young Lebanese have lived through a financial collapse that erased their families' savings, a port explosion that destroyed part of their capital, repeated rounds of conflict, and a political class that has failed to form functioning government or deliver basic services. For many, the rational response is not to wait for the next shock but to place themselves and their future children somewhere the ground does not move.

Source: World Bank country overview, 2025; Arab Barometer, 2024.

This is where the question of citizenship becomes decisive, and where Lebanese youth are unusually clear-eyed. A second passport is not vanity; it is mobility, security, and optionality. The Lebanese passport ranks among the weakest in the world, placed around 88th to 95th in recent Henley Passport Index rankings, with visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to roughly 43 to 45 destinations. A Gulf passport such as the Emirati one, by contrast, ranks in the global top ten with access to around 185 destinations. Acquiring a stronger citizenship transforms a young person's life chances: where they can work, study, invest, seek medical care, and flee to if their home country fails again.

Source: Henley Passport Index 2025 via Credit Libanais; Visa requirements for Lebanese citizens, 2026.

Passport	Approx. global rank	Visa-free or visa-on-arrival destinations
Lebanon	88th to 95th	est. 43 to 45
United Arab Emirates	10th	est. 185
Qatar	47th	est. 112

Sources: Henley Passport Index, 2025 and 2026, via Credit Libanais and Wikipedia.

So when a young Lebanese says that leaving is simply better, that another nationality opens doors everywhere, they are not being disloyal or naive. They are reading the same data this study reads, and reaching the only conclusion the data supports. The instinct to secure a stronger passport is a direct measure of how little security their own state provides. A country earns the loyalty of its young by being worth staying for. Lebanon has spent fifteen years proving the opposite, and the passport rankings quietly keep the score.

A second passport is the price a generation pays for a state that could not guarantee them a first future.

- **6. The Beirut Trap: Centralization, Rent, and the Hollowed-Out Hometown**

For those who choose to stay, geography sets a second trap. Almost everything that still functions in the Lebanese economy, the banks, the international and multinational companies, the head offices, the better-paying jobs, is concentrated in Beirut and its immediate surroundings. The capital has historically housed roughly half the country's population, and the post-war model deliberately rebuilt it as the financial and commercial center while the regions were left to depend on agriculture, remittances, and a thin public sector.

Source: Embassy of Lebanon economic profile; Kellogg Institute, 2021.

The consequence is stark regional inequality. Poverty rates reach as high as 70% in Akkar and around 56% in North Lebanon, while Beirut shows markedly lower poverty. Wage disparities widen the further one moves from the capital, and the country's income inequality has worsened dramatically, with the Gini coefficient rising from 0.32 in 2011 to 0.61 in 2023. For a graduate from the Shouf, the Bekaa, the South, or the North, the message is that the only place with real work is the one place they cannot afford to live.

Source: Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, 2025; ILO Arab States Outlook, 2024.

This is the centralization trap in full. A young person from the regions who lands a Beirut job must then surrender much of that salary to the capital's housing market, because demand from every other young worker in the same position keeps rents high. After rent, transport, and the private cost of electricity and water that the state fails to provide, little remains. The salary that looked like a path to independence becomes barely enough to share a flat. There is nothing left to send home to ageing parents, nothing to save, and nothing with which to build the future the move was supposed to buy.

Meanwhile the hometowns empty. With no investment, no projects, and no employers, the towns and villages that produced these graduates offer them nothing to return to. Talent flows to Beirut, money flows to landlords, and the regions are drained of the very young people who might have revived them. The same centralizing logic that pushes graduates into the capital eventually pushes them out of the country, because if a young Lebanese must uproot their life and pay punishing rent to work, the calculation of doing so in Dubai or Paris rather than Beirut becomes very easy to make.

We built one functioning city and abandoned the rest of the country, then act surprised that the country's youth keep leaving the country.

- **7. Survival, Not Ambition: The Pension Collapse and the Graduate as Breadwinner**

This is the most important section of this study, because it explains why the Lebanese situation is not merely difficult but structurally different from ordinary economic hardship. In most countries, a young graduate who begins working is building their own future. In Lebanon today, a young graduate who begins working is, very often, the last remaining financial support for an entire family, including parents whose retirement was supposed to be secure and is now worthless.

- **7.1 A country that, for most people, has no pension at all**

Lebanon is one of the very few states in the region that, until recently, offered no pension scheme to private-sector workers at all. Roughly 80% of the population has no formal pension coverage. Outside the public sector, which accounts for only about 16% of the workforce, retiring workers received not a monthly pension but a one-off end-of-service indemnity, a lump sum that, even before the crisis, was widely understood to be inadequate. By one estimate, a lump sum earned over 30 years of work covered only about 7 years of retirement, against a life expectancy more than twice as long.

Source: Carnegie Endowment, 2024; The Public Source, 2023; The Policy Initiative.

- **7.2 The savings that vanished**

Then the crisis destroyed even that. With the currency losing over 98% of its value, accumulated end-of-service savings and the lump sums already paid out lost around 90% of their worth, and by some measures effectively their entire value. The fund meant to underwrite these benefits collapsed in parallel: The National Social Security Fund's end-of-service branch saw its assets fall from about USD 8 billion in 2018 to under USD 1 billion in 2025. A reform to introduce a proper monthly pension was finally passed into law at the end of 2023, but its launch has stalled amid missed deadlines and unissued decrees, leaving today's retirees with nothing restored.

Source: Executive Magazine, 2025; This is Beirut, November 2025; L'Orient Today, April 2025.

The human meaning of these numbers is simple and brutal. A teacher who spent a career earning a public pension now finds that the indemnity, once a foundation for old age, would be spent almost as fast as it is received, enough perhaps for a single repair bill before it is gone. People who saved their whole lives watched those savings trapped in banks and dissolved by inflation. The generation that should now be retired and supported is instead financially stranded.

Source: The Public Source, 2023; Legal Agenda, January 2026.

- **7.3 The graduate who carries everyone**

These two facts collide in the life of every new graduate. Because their parents' pensions and savings are gone, and because the state provides almost no old-age support, the retired generation must fall back on its children. The labour-force participation rate for Lebanese men aged 65 to 69 was already the highest in the Middle East and North Africa even before the crisis, a sign that the elderly were never able to truly retire. Now their working-age children inherit that burden in full. A graduate's first salary is not seed capital for a life; it is the household's income floor.

Source: The Public Source, 2023; Carnegie Endowment, 2024.

This is what people mean, often without the data to prove it, when they say that work in Lebanon has become survival rather than ambition. The young worker is not saving for a home, a business, or a family of their own. They are covering their parents' medicine, their siblings' tuition, and the generator bill, because the public systems that should carry those costs have failed. Remittances now perform the functions of the state: of the diaspora's transfers, a large share goes directly to healthcare and school fees for the families left behind. The country runs on its children's wages, sent from abroad, precisely because it offered them no way to earn a future at home.

Source: The Beiruter, An Economy Outside Its Borders; World Bank and LCPS / UNICEF data via The Beiruter, 2024 to 2026.

In Lebanon today, a degree is no longer a ladder. It is a lifeline thrown to a whole family that the state left to drown.

- **8. A Reckoning for Those Who Govern**

Every figure in this study points back to the same address. The collapse of wages, the disappearance of jobs, the destruction of pensions, the strangling centralization, the worthless passport, the empty hometowns: none of these is a natural disaster. Each is the product of decisions made, and reforms refused, by people entrusted with the Lebanese state. The young people leaving are not the authors of this failure. They are its survivors.

Consider what is being lost. Lebanon spends some of its scarce resources educating a generation to a high standard, and then watches other countries reap the entire return. The doctors trained in Beirut staff hospitals in the Gulf and Europe. The engineers educated here build other nations' cities. By credible accounts, around 40% of doctors and 30% of nurses left during the worst of the crisis, more than 2,500 physicians departed in a short span, and a single university lost over 1,500 faculty and staff in two years. This is not brain drain in the abstract. It is the export of the country's most expensive and most valuable product, its educated people, for free.

Source: WHO via L'Orient Today, 2024; Lebanese Order of Physicians via Frontiers, 2023; Foreign Policy, 2021.

The history makes the waste sharper still. Lebanese excellence abroad is a documented, almost clichéd fact: in medicine, finance, engineering, academia, the arts, and enterprise, Lebanese names sit at the top of institutions on every continent. The diaspora's success is not evidence that emigration is harmless. It is proof of exactly what Lebanon is throwing away. The same people who would have built hospitals, firms, and universities here are building them elsewhere, because elsewhere asked them to stay and Lebanon did not.

To those who govern Lebanon, the charge of this study is precise. You did not lose your youth to fate. You lost them to your own inaction: to budgets that never reached the regions, to a pension reform left unsigned in its drawers, to an economy you allowed to concentrate in a single square mile, to banks you shielded while savings burned, and to a politics that treated mass emigration as a release valve rather than a wound. A generation read your record and bought one-way tickets. The shame of that departure is not theirs. It is yours.

A state is judged by whether its most capable young people choose to stay. By that measure, the verdict on Lebanon's leadership is already being written, in departure lounges, every single day.

And yet the same data that indicts also points to the remedy, because every cause listed here is reversible by deliberate choice. Decent wages and formal contracts would make staying viable. Investment spread beyond Beirut would let young people work where they can afford to live. A real, funded pension would free a graduate's salary to build a future instead of patching a family's survival. An industrial and energy policy would turn promising sectors into actual careers and keep the engineers, technicians, and doctors Lebanon trains. None of this is utopian. It is ordinary governance, of the kind Lebanon's youth have every right to demand and, so far, have been forced to seek under other flags.

Lebanon does not have a talent problem. It has a leadership problem. The young people are extraordinary; the country that raised them keeps proving unworthy of them. Until that changes, the suitcases will keep filling, the planes will keep leaving, and the most damning statistic in this report will remain the simplest one: that staying has become the harder act of love than leaving.

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