



## Diaspora Humanitarians

*How Australia-based migrants help in crises abroad*

### Lebanon Briefing

- Since 2019, Lebanon has experienced a worsening economic crisis. The Lebanese lira has lost more than 95% of its pre-crisis value, and the country's population has become highly vulnerable. The Lebanese diaspora in Australia has mobilised to provide economic, social and political assistance.
- In 2021, Lebanon received US\$6.35 billion in migrant remittances, equivalent to 27.5% of the country's GDP that year. The effectiveness of the country's diaspora institutions have reduced as a result of the crisis.
- The Lebanese-born population is the second largest migrant group from the Middle East living in Australia. In 2023, approximately 96,180 Lebanon-born individuals resided in Australia, an increase of approximately 17,000 since 2000.

### Responding to Crisis

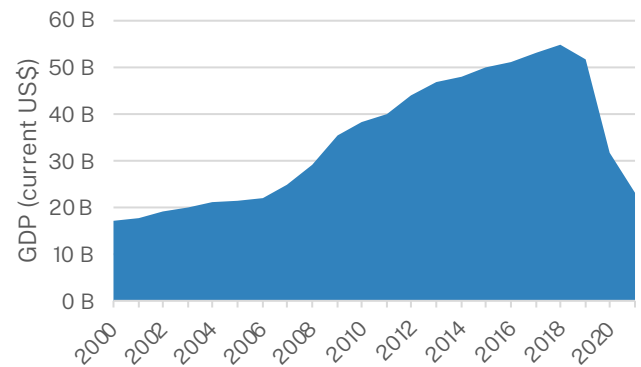
After decades of economic mismanagement, Lebanon experienced a financial crisis in October 2019 that was described by the World Bank as one of the worst in a century. Between 2018 and 2021, the country's GDP decreased by 57%. Previously classified by the World Bank as an upper-middle income country, Lebanon was reclassified as a lower-middle income country in July 2022.

The human impact of the crisis has been immense, with high inflation and currency depreciation impacting the country's living standards. Prior to the crisis, approximately 42% of the Lebanese population experienced multidimensional poverty (the multidimensional poverty index uses health, education and standard of living indicators to determine incidence of poverty experienced by a population). As of 2021, 82% of the population did so. The Government's ability to provide basic services has collapsed. As a result of severe fuel shortages, people in the country receive around 1-2 hours of electricity per day. The country's healthcare and water supply systems have also been significantly impacted.

The crisis's impact has been amplified by the 2020 Beirut Explosion, by the Covid-19 Pandemic and as a result of increasing tensions with Israel. Today, more than half of the country's population relies on humanitarian aid for food and basic services and about a third of the population does not have access to clean water. These challenges have been magnified by regional instability, as Lebanon

currently hosts more than 1.5 million refugees.

Figure 1: Lebanese GDP, 2000-2021



### Diaspora Humanitarians

Relative to its size, Lebanon has one of the world's largest diasporas. Estimates of the diaspora's size range from 14-18 million people. The country's experience of a range of crises over the past 50 years, including the Lebanese Civil War and the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War, has driven waves of emigration from the country. While many of the overseas Lebanon-born population are now ageing, the global diaspora retains strong cultural connections to its homeland as descendants of these migrants have retained their Lebanese identities. During periods of crisis in Lebanon, the diaspora has systematically mobilised to provide support to the country.

The Lebanese diaspora's humanitarian actions are diverse. Remittances sent from the diaspora are a significant safety net for the country. Generally provided to family or civil society organisations, remittances help with living expenses, educational support, developmental projects and enterprise development. As a result of migration dynamics, minority groups in the country also receive this assistance. The diaspora also engages in advocacy – directed both at the Lebanese Government and international actors – regarding political, humanitarian and human rights crises. Aid to Lebanon from Australia occurs through family, village and religious connections. When people affiliated with the same village in Lebanon live together in Australia, they often form associations designed to help that village (Canetti 2022). Religious communities also provide significant amounts of aid to Lebanon, and engage in advocacy regarding Lebanon's political leadership.

In Australia, a wide variety of Lebanese community groups exist. Often, these groups have a humanitarian focus – and seek to address human suffering both in Lebanon and in Australia. Some groups emphasise fundraising and donation collection among the diaspora, while others focus on political advocacy. In particular, the Lebanese diaspora in Australia has focussed on healthcare. Donating to the Lebanese Red Cross, a primary healthcare provider in Lebanon, and sending medicine to the country are common humanitarian acts taken by the diaspora. A global 2020 appeal, called Jobs for Lebanon, encouraged diaspora members to hire people remaining in Lebanon for remote work. This appeal was shared across Lebanese communities in Australia.

## Homeland Connections

Pre-existing homeland connections has shaped the Lebanese diaspora's humanitarian response to the ongoing economic crisis. These connections include remittance flows and formal diasporic institutions.

### *Remittances*

Over the past 20 years, the value of personal remittances to Lebanon's economy has varied. In 2002, when remittance data for the country was first reported, personal remittances constituted 13.3% of Lebanon's GDP. Between 2006, when remittances constituted 26.4% of national GDP, and 2018, when they constituted 12.7% of national GDP, the value of remittances to the Lebanese economy declined. The collapse of Lebanon's financial system in 2019 has caused the value of remittances to the Lebanese economy to rise sharply. As of 2021, remittances constituted 27.5% of national GDP.

However, while the importance of remittances to Lebanon's economy rose sharply between 2018 and 2021, the absolute value of personal remittances sent to the country has slightly decreased. While the value of remittances sent to Lebanon increased by US\$390

million between 2018 and 2019, the annual value of remittances sent to the country has since declined. In 2022, US\$6.44 billion was sent to Lebanon via personal remittances, which was US\$930 million lower than in 2019.

In 2021, US\$719 million was sent from Australia to Lebanon through personal remittances. This made Australia the third-largest remittance sending country, behind Saudi Arabia (which sent US\$1.114 billion in personal remittances) and the United States (US\$1.002 billion). The value of remittances sent from Canada (US\$702 million) and Germany (US\$669 million) was

### *Diaspora Institutions*

The Lebanese Government has maintained diaspora institutions since 1941, when it formally established its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 2000, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants has managed the country's relationship to its diaspora. Aside from offering help to Lebanese nationals living abroad, the Ministry has emphasised connecting members of the diaspora to benefit small and medium-sized enterprises in the country. The Ministry has produced a series of digital apps to deepen these connections. Lebanon Connect (similar to LinkedIn) and Live Lebanon (crowdfunding or volunteering for needy communities in Lebanon) are both aimed at the diaspora. The Bank of Beirut also maintained a platform, called Lebanon Investors, to link the Lebanese diaspora to economic opportunities in the country. The financial crisis significantly disrupted the Government's ability to engage with its diaspora: several of the services listed above are no longer maintained.

Between 2013 and 2019, the diaspora held six seats in the country's parliament. However, following opposition, this was amended. In 2022, Outside the Country Voters (OCV) were able to vote for the country's pre-existing 128 MPs. In the 2022 election, more than 140,000 members of the diaspora voted in the country's election. These OCVs constituted 6% of the electorate, and were more likely to vote for anti-establishment candidates than voters living in Lebanon.

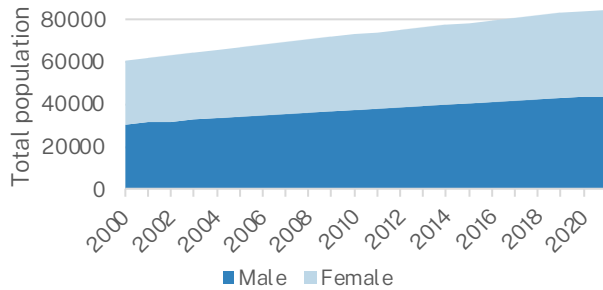
## The Australia-Based Diaspora

The diaspora's humanitarian responses to their homeland's economic crisis has been shaped by migrants' continuing connections to their homeland, by their dynamics of migration and by their experiences of settlement in Australia.

This brief primarily uses data from Australia's 2021 census to analyse the experiences of the Lebanese diaspora in Australia. This census (held on August 10, 2021) occurred during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic: border closures and disruptions to usual migration flows resulted in unusual census outcomes. For example, 87,340 people living in Australia identified that they were born in Lebanon on census night. The

In 2021, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated for that 95,110 Lebanon-born migrants resided in Australia – significantly more than the census count. Recognising the census’s limitations, it remains a valuable resource for understanding dynamics experienced by the diaspora.

Figure 2: Total Lebanon-born population in Australia, 2000-2021



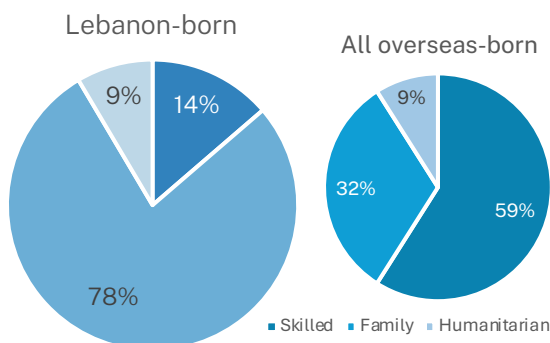
### Dynamics of Migration

As of the 2021 census, 87,340 Lebanon-born migrants lived in Australia. Of this population, 51.7% were male and 48.3% were female. The Lebanese diaspora in Australia is well established. Migration from Lebanon to Australia increased in the 1950s, and by 1980 more than 33,000 Lebanon-born individuals resided in the country.

The current Lebanon-born population in Australia is dominated by two migration peaks that occurred in the 20th century. More than 28,000 individuals who migrated to Australia during Lebanon’s economic ‘golden age’ (1962-1977) and more than 17,500 migrants who left Lebanon between 1982 and 1992 (during the Lebanese civil war) continue to reside in the country. Approximately 23,500 Lebanon-born migrants living in Australia arrived since 2000.

In 2021, 89.3% of the Lebanon-born population in Australia were citizens. Today, most Lebanon-born individuals follow permanent migration pathways to Australia: as of 2021, there were 22,410 Lebanon-born migrants in Australia’s permanent migration program. The vast majority of these individuals (78%) were in the family visa stream, while 14% held skilled visas and 9% held humanitarian visas.

Figure 3: Lebanon and all overseas-born permanent residents in Australia, 2021



Comparatively, a low number of Lebanese-born individuals reside in Australia on temporary visas. As of February 2024, just 1337 Lebanese-born individuals were temporary migrants. 34% of this population held student visas, 33% held skilled visas and 33% held other temporary visas.

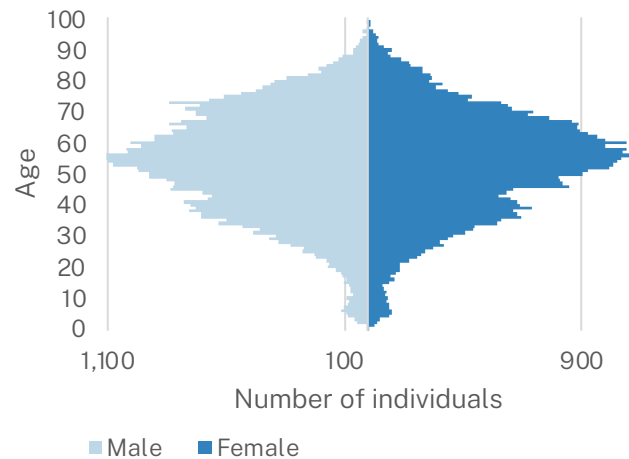
### Population Dynamics

While population dynamics experienced by the Lebanese diaspora are diverse, certain patterns are evident: the Lebanese diaspora in Australia is relatively old compared to other migrant groups and overwhelmingly resides in Greater Sydney. However, educational and employment outcomes are varied.

### Demography

In 2021, the median age of Lebanese-born individuals in Australia was 54, significantly older than the Australian-wide median of 38. Reflecting that the diaspora overwhelmingly migrated to Australia before 2000, older cohorts of the population are larger. In 2021, 40% of the Lebanon-born population were between 40 and 59 years old, and 32% of the population were between 60 and 79 years old. Comparatively, just 19% of the population was aged between 20 and 39. Children comprised 4% of the population, and those over 80 years old comprised 5%.

Figure 4: Population pyramid for the Lebanese-born population in Australia, 2021

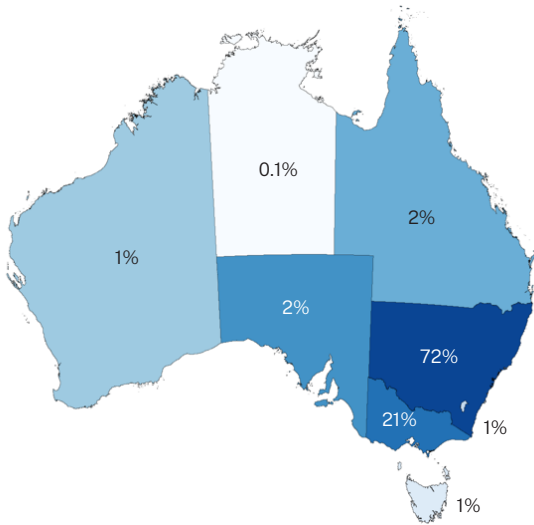


### Geography

The Lebanese diaspora overwhelmingly resides in Australia’s capital cities, and is highly concentrated in Greater Sydney. As of 2021, 97% of Lebanese-born individuals resided in Australia’s capital cities, and 71% resided in Greater Sydney. 40% of Sydney’s Lebanese-born population lived in the Inner South West, 27% lived in Parramatta, 12% lived in the South West and 4% lived in the Inner West.

The majority of other Lebanese-born individuals in Australia reside in Greater Melbourne. As of 2021, 21% of the population lived in the city. Additionally, 2% of the population resided in Greater Adelaide and 1% resided in both Greater Perth and Greater Brisbane.

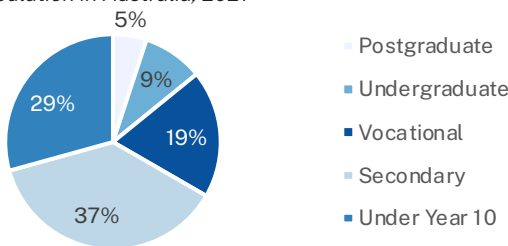
Figure 5: Geographies of residence of the Lebanon-born population in Australia, 2021



### Education

Of the adult Lebanon-born population in Australia, 70% had completed secondary school and 33% possessed post-secondary qualifications in 2021. 19% of the diaspora have vocational qualifications (certificate III or IV, advanced diplomas) and 14% are university educated (9% undergraduate, 5% postgraduate). Younger people in Australia are more likely to have post-secondary qualifications. Given that the Lebanese-born population’s median age is 16 years older than the national median, their lower level of post-secondary qualifications is in line with their earlier migration flows.

Figure 6: Highest level of educational achievement of the Lebanese-born population in Australia, 2021

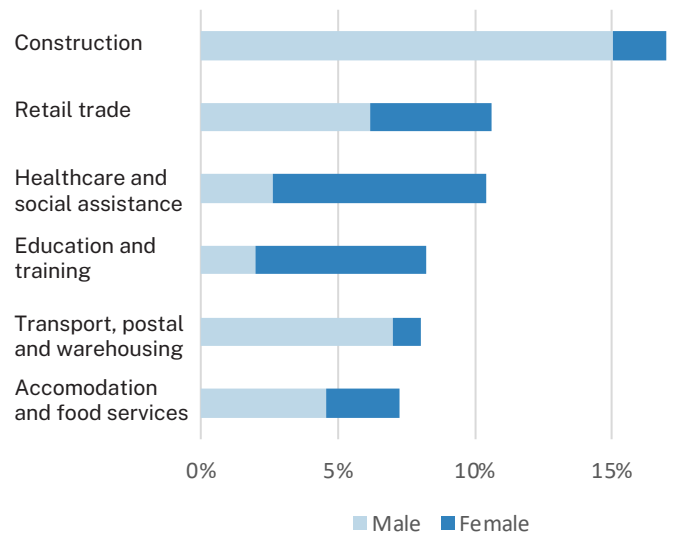


### Employment

In 2021, 26,972 Lebanon-born migrants were employed in Australia. Of these people, 17% were employed in construction, 11% were employed in retail and 10% were employed in healthcare.

The diaspora’s dynamics of employment are gendered. In 2021, the most populous sectors of employment for Lebanon-born women working in Australia were healthcare (21%), education (17%) and retail (12%). For Lebanon-born men, key sectors of employment included construction (24%), transport, postal and warehousing services (11%) and retail (10%).

Figure 8: Leading sectors of employment for the Lebanese-born population in Australia, 2021



### Sources:

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022a), Census of Population and Housing, 2021; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022b), Permanent Migrants in Australia; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024a), Tom Canetti (2022), Lebanese banks aren’t letting citizens withdraw their own money. The diaspora in Australia is stepping in; Permanent Migration Program (Skilled & Family) Outcomes Snapshot – Annual Statistics; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024b), Temporary visa holders in Australia; Human Rights Watch (n.d.), Lebanon: Events of 2022; Anna Pukas (2022), Lebanese across the globe: How the country’s international community came to be; The World Bank (2021), GDP (currentUS\$);

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This research is partially supported by the Australian Government through the ARC’s Linkage Projects funding scheme (project LP200200817). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or the ARC.



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*The Diaspora Humanitarians project aims to map the extensive humanitarian activities and contributions of Australia-based migrants to crises abroad. For more information see [www.diasporahumanitarians.com](http://www.diasporahumanitarians.com)*