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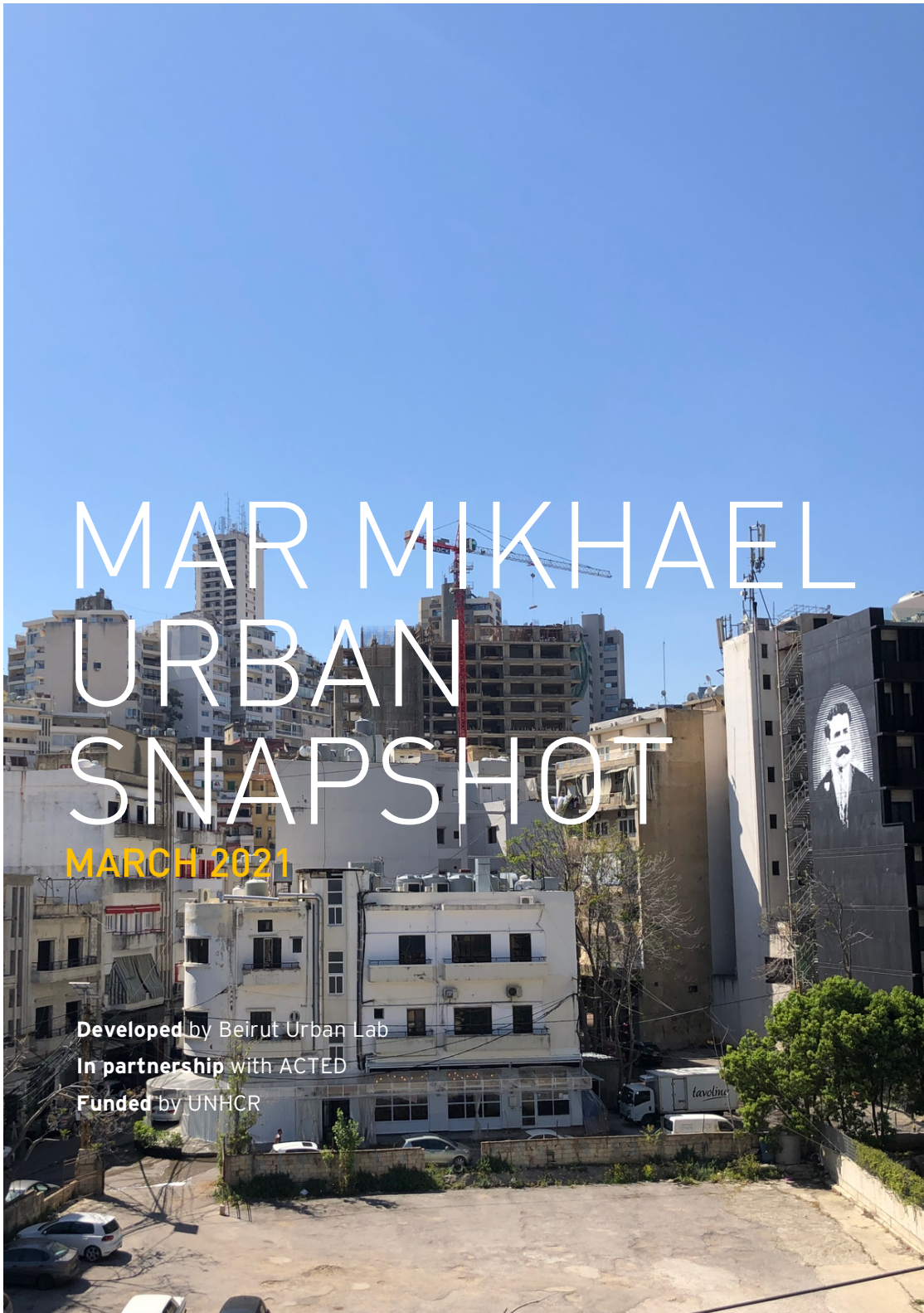
# MAR MIKHAEL URBAN SNAPSHOT

MARCH 2021

Developed by Beirut Urban Lab

In partnership with ACTED

Funded by UNHCR



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# INTRODUCTION

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On August 4th, 2020, the Port area of Beirut was rocked by two massive explosions, killing over 200 people and wounding more than 6,000<sup>1</sup>. Buildings were destroyed or damaged within a 10 km area around the port, including an estimated 70,000 apartments and nearly 40,000 residential or commercial spaces.

UNHCR partnered with four international organizations (MEDAIR, ACTED, Save the Children, and Intersos) to rehabilitate shelters, restore shared spaces, and introduce the upgrading of selected neighborhood-level communal spaces, in six neighborhoods severely affected by the blast: Karantina, Mar Mikhael, Geitawi, Badawi, Bachoura, and Karm el-Zeitoun. In this framework, ACTED and Beirut Urban Lab at the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), partnered to develop an assessment meant to support the effort of locating the recovery efforts within an urban-scale approach in each of the above-mentioned neighborhoods.

This report is one of the six Urban Snapshots conceived by the Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) in partnership with ACTED and funded by UNHCR in Fall/Winter 2020-2021. The reports are designed to a) Inform the understanding of each of the four INGOs and UNHCR about the urban processes underway in each of the neighborhood prior to the blast, focusing on those processes that are likely to slow-down or threaten the return of residents and the recovery of the neighborhood, and b) Whenever possible, point the INGOs in each of the neighborhood towards potential communal projects of important social relevance.

Further, the Urban Snapshots have the potential to support the work of the community of social workers, city planners, urban designers, researchers, activists, and others who are intervening with relief, repair, and recovery in short, medium, or long term development in Beirut in response to the August 4th, 2020 port blast.

The assessment built on the knowledge and research of the Beirut Urban Lab about each of the six neighborhood's history and urban conditions. Additional fieldwork was conducted by a team of field researchers to gather the needed information from neighborhood-level interviews and discussions with residents, NGOs, etc.

Each of the reports locates the effects of the explosion within the larger urban trends that have influenced the studied neighborhood over the past three decades. It does so by providing a preliminary urban documentation and analysis of the neighborhood conditions, including a brief historical overview, insights about contextual urban trends, profiles of influential stakeholders, and a brief review of socio-spatial conditions. To the extent possible, the reports thus cover both urban trends and recovery efforts at the household (e.g., resident, business-owner), building, and neighborhood scales (e.g., shared space, road, recycling).

Each report further unravels some of the critical threats that are likely to undermine the recovery of each neighborhood, including dwellers' return, the rehabilitation of shared spaces and amenities, the reignition of economic activities, and the restoration of tangible and intangible heritage.

The reports are not conceived as exhaustive surveys. Rather, they are snapshots, taken at a specific moment (i.e. November-December 2020), yet located within a solid understanding of the economic, social, and political forces that influence Beirut's ongoing urbanization. Indeed, they build, as outlined thoroughly in the methodological section, on pre-existing knowledge of the neighborhood developed at the BUL and complemented by data gathered during November and December 2020 directly in the neighborhoods.

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<sup>1</sup> Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework 3RF

## METHODOLOGY

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The selection of neighborhoods and the delineation of their boundaries were proposed by UNHCR, reflecting its areas of intervention. In order to improve the coherence of the study and its recommendations, the BUL research team introduced mild modifications in delineating neighborhoods to account for the internal characteristics of the neighborhood, particularly lot morphologies, building typologies, and population profiles. Neighborhood boundaries thus do not coincide with official administrative boundaries.

The reports are the result of the work of six field researchers, one reporting officer and one research team coordinator hired by ACTED who were trained by the Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) team and worked under its supervision from October to December 2020. The positions were filled through a transparent and competitive process putting the emphasis on previous experience and methodological trainings; three of the six fieldworkers had worked for the Beirut Urban Lab before, and another was a recent graduate of the Master in Urban Design program at AUB.

The production of this report relied on case-study research methods of data collection as defined by Yin.<sup>2</sup> In essence, Yin sees the goal of case studies as understanding complex social phenomena, relating data to propositions and aiming at analytical generalization as if they were an experiment. By nature, case-study research is qualitative and typically uses multiple methods to collect different kinds of evidence (e.g. documents and archival records; interviews; direct and participant observation; physical artifacts; surveys), as this insures the triangulation and cross-checking of evidence, and hence more rigorous and valid data analysis.

For this report, BUL relied on five data sources collected through: (i) desk reviews of available publications, technical reports, records and other documents; (ii) field observations (direct and participant) using the guide available as annex C; (iii) qualitative semi-structured interviews with key informants (e.g. *mukhtar(a)*, NGOs' representatives) according to protocols described below and available as annex D, as well as informal conversations with residents and business-owners; (iv) data from the shelter technical assessment collected between September and December 2020 by INGOs intervening in the area and provided by UNHCR in December 2020; (v) surveys and maps compiled by the BUL's researchers about Beirut's built environment in the context of the Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED)<sup>3</sup>.

### **(i) Documents and Records (Desk review)**

Data analysis relies on the review of several gray reports<sup>4</sup>, academic research, and references available about the neighborhood. They are listed as footnotes throughout each report whenever they were used as evidence for the documentation and analysis of some of the neighborhood's urban trends.

### **(ii) Field Observations**

The researcher conducted fieldwork for about 12 full days in the neighborhood (1.5 day per week for a duration of 8 weeks, on the average), observing directly the built environment, documenting damaged constructions and processes of physical repair in residences and businesses, as well as noting the following: shops' activity/closure; buildings' quality and condition; abandoned/dilapidated buildings; clusters of impoverishment; construction activity; heritage buildings; the use of open/public spaces by the community and presence of greenery; infrastructure conditions (access to water and electricity, traffic congestion, conditions of streets, sidewalks and stairs); options for waste disposal. The researcher also observed social interactions in the neighborhood, when they occurred and documented them, including groups of migrant workers and refugees. They were

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<sup>2</sup> See Yin R.K, *Case-Study Research: Design and Methods* (2014) London: Sage.

<sup>3</sup> The Beirut Built Environment database is an online GIS platform developed by the Beirut Urban Lab at the American University of Beirut. The initiative brings together a collection of maps, documents, and surveyed indicators about actors as well as spatial and environmental characteristics that can inform ongoing research, public policy making, and advocacy about the city. It also relies on a database of building permits dating back to 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Gray literature is produced outside of the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels and typically includes reports, working papers, government documents, white papers and evaluations. Organizations that produce grey literature include government departments and agencies, civil society or non-governmental organizations, academic centres and departments, and private companies and consultants.



tasked to also document key landmarks in the neighborhood (educational, religious, cultural, corporate), and to report visible political sites and signs (flags, icons, posters, markings on walls). These observations were recorded as field notes and mapped, when relevant, serving as evidence that substantiates several claims made in this report, as indicated in the text.

### **(iii) Qualitative semi-structured Interviews and Conversations with key informants**

Field researchers were trained to conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews with key actors in the neighborhood they were able to reach out to amidst the difficult working conditions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They interviewed neighborhood's elected local representative (*mukhtar(a)*), NGOs' representatives, as well as dwellers and business-owners who stayed and are engaged in the repair process. The interviews' questions were organized in three broad categories: (a) Awareness about the actors in charge of repair (do they know who is in charge, who visited them, who returned, what support were they provided with thus far); (b) Respondent's tenure status (do they own or do they rent, do they pay in real or Lebanese dollars or in LBP, how precarious is their tenure situation, do they get any support from family abroad, what are their future plans: are they staying or leaving, and why?); (c) Processes of repair (did they receive support, for what, from who, where is the process at, what is still to be done, are damaged common spaces fixed?). In addition, researchers also conducted interviews and informal conversations with residents and business-owners, on selected sections of the interview guide. Overall, 46 in-depth interviews were conducted in Mar Mikhael.

All interviews and conversations were conducted after securing verbal consent and according to ethical standards of social research. Cited interviews and conversations have been anonymized and personal identifiers removed to protect interlocutors.

Field observations and qualitative interviews were documented by field researchers through pictures and detailed notes, geo-referencing the location wherever possible. They then reported the interviews and developed fact sheets that were discussed with the rest of the team.

### **(iv) Quantitative Technical Assessment Data collected between September and December 2020 by INGOs operating in the area under UNHCR funding**

Qualitative findings are complemented by an analysis of technical assessment data shared by UNHCR, providing technical assessment of a prioritized number of damaged houses in the six neighborhoods (according to criteria set by UNHCR), conducted by its INGO implementing partners (one per neighborhood). BUL researchers analyzed this dataset and extracted statistical information from it, which is referred to in the report. It should be noted that the technical assessments were conducted in specific targeted areas of each neighborhood as part of the shelter response implementation, therefore not resorting to any type of probability sampling. Furthermore, the data used as part of this research originates from UNHCR partners only, thereby not taking into account any other technical assessment data that may potentially have been collected by other actors in the area. As such, corresponding findings may not be extrapolated to the entire neighborhood, but rather interpreted as a useful triangulation source for the findings deriving from qualitative data sources. The total number of assessed housing units in the 6 neighborhoods amount to 5262, including 844 in Mar Mikhael. It is worth noting that the collected data includes a substantive number of "no entries" (reaching up to more than 90% for some questions and averaging 40% for the others) which means the data needs to be interpreted cautiously. Yet, the data is representative for several sets of assessment variables, and BUL used it to substantiate qualitative findings. This is notably the case for nationality of occupants; level of damage (level 1, 2 or 3); status of repair; mode of repair; type of assistance; reason for lack of repair; mode of occupancy in each neighborhood (old/new rent, hosting, ownership); and type of rental contract (written, oral). This set of evidence is mainly used in the "Socio-Demographic Profile," "Housing Conditions, and "Recovery Status" sections of the report.

### **(v) Spatial Data and Mapping**

The report relies largely on spatial data compiled within the framework of the BUL's Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED), which has been made available thanks to the MoU agreed upon between ACTED and BUL. This includes data regarding population size; density; damage assessment; building age; building height; real-estate developers' profiles; vacancy rates; number of loans acquired from the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH); open public spaces and unbuildable lots. Data listed in the BBED is based on official records of filed building permits at the Lebanese Order of Engineers and Architects, official property records from the Land Registry, comprehensive field surveys, and registration records. This information is reported within the text itself, in related sections, as well as in maps compiled in Annex A. It is used as a main source of evidence in the

“Urbanization Trends,” “Socio-Demographic Profile,” “Housing Conditions,” and “Quality of Public Spaces” sections of the report.

Readers should acknowledge the fact that the Urban Snapshots were not designed following a Neighborhood Profile approach, which would have required more time and resources. The Urban Snapshots were developed in the aftermath of the Beirut explosions, during the Fall/winter 2020-2021. BUL relied on the most relevant and up-to-date available data from the sources listed above, while more generally coordinating with the Forward Emergency Room (FER). Figures that relate to emergency response actors’ achievements reflect information as collected during the research period. As such, they are not meant to provide an up-to-date nor comprehensive overview of all achievements as of end of December 2020. No systematic surveys of damaged housing and business units were made available, with detailed datasets regarding associated tenure, socio-economic, infrastructure and other variables, which would have allowed to derive more precise patterns and urban trends associated to the Blast.

The health situation in the country also constrained BUL from conducting a larger number of interviews with dwellers, business-owners, and stakeholders to profile in more depth and with more rigor the modalities of repair in the neighborhood, the governance of actors, and inscribe recommendations for community-based projects in a sound analysis of power groups and opportunities and challenges for intervention. Yet, BUL believes this report successfully points towards potential communal projects of important social relevance, paves the way for this work to be further developed out by actors working on the Port Blast recovery, and presents productive avenues for future research projects and community-level initiatives.

### **What is Unique about Mar Mikhael?**

This report covers the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael. Of the six neighborhoods included in this project (Map 1), Mar Mikhael stands out in its very close proximity to the site of the explosion. However, the neighborhood’s location along the axis of the blast as well as the dilapidated conditions that resulted from decades of neglect have exacerbated the damage caused by the blast. Mar Mikhael is known for its rich cultural heritage and liveliness, but has witnessed processes of gentrification and financialization over the past years causing substantial demolition of its historic housing stock and forced displacement of many residents.

Field research in Mar Mikhael was constrained by the pandemic conditions: interviews and conversations included 46 respondents. The research was conducted by Field Researcher Luna Dayekh.

# I. NEIGHBORHOOD INDICATORS

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## 1. Area of Study

### A. Geographic Context

The neighborhood of Mar Mikhael is located within the neighborhoods of Rmeil and Medawar in the Eastern part of Beirut and at the Northern entrance to the city. The neighborhood borders the Port to the North, Bourj Hammoud to the East, Achrafieh hill and Geitawi to the South, and Gemmayzeh to the West (Maps 1 and 2).

According to a study conducted by Nahnoo<sup>5</sup>, population growth in Mar Mikhael started with the French Mandate in 1923, especially with the arrival of Armenian refugees in 1922 who eventually settled down in Nor Hadjin Camp and Khalil Badawi Street. The residential areas grew progressively with the creation of the tramway station, between 1923 and 1929, the expansion of the port, the building of the Laziza brewery in the 1930s, and the Electricité du Liban (EDL) in 1936, which provided employment opportunities in the neighborhood. Thus, the urbanization of the neighborhood occurred quickly, attracting primarily lower-income and working-class dwellers.

Hence, the early urbanization of Mar Mikhael began with upwardly mobile residents of Bourj Hammoud who began building modest two-story houses. Thus, Mar Mikhael presents an interesting case of urban expansion impulse from the suburbs towards its center, rather than the other way around, like other areas in Beirut.

### B. Defining Zone Limits

The neighborhood limits of Mar Mikhael include Zones 10, 11, 24 and 39.<sup>6</sup> In this report, Mar Mikhael extends over the cadastral areas of Medawar and Rmeil. It is defined by Armenia Street as the main artery of the neighborhood with Zones 10 and 11 located in the Medawar area directly facing the port. To the south, Zone 24 includes Salah Labaki Street and Zone 39 Patriarch Arida Street, both covering the area of Rmeil. The area of Qobayat is located in the central part of Mar Mikhael stretching east-west from the middle point of the train station to the local landmark of Jisr Al Hadeed (near the demolished Laziza brewery and the army base). Taking into consideration that formal boundaries set by InterAgency / Shelter Sector or the Army's Forward Emergency Room (FER) are useful for survey and study purposes, they should not be considered as hard lines that distinguish areas. As such, even though both Qobayat and Badawi are often referred to by dwellers familiar with the neighborhoods as distinct and separate from Mar Mikhael in terms of social and economic ties,<sup>7</sup> Zone 39 is part of Qobayat. Even though residents refer to this area as Geitawi, in this study it is incorporated within Mar Mikhael for several reasons.

These decisions were informed by three sets of observations generated from BUL's intimate urban knowledge of the area. First, Zone 39 has undergone urban transformations, whereby old local businesses (e.g., mini-markets, barbers, mechanics) have been replaced by trendy cafés and restaurants, boutiques, art galleries, and so on. Second, there are strong familial relations across neighborhoods, whereby residents residing in Mar Mikhael are connected to family members residing in Geitawi. Third, there is urban coherence in terms of building ages and historic development, in addition to topography, which provide the areas with urban elements such as sidewalks, stairs and dead-end streets. Zone 39 is separated from Zone 38 (Geitawi) by the police base and by stairs which constitute physical barriers.

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<sup>5</sup> See Nahnoo. (2020). *Achrafieh and Mar Mikhael Youth-led Architectural Heritage Mapping in Beirut*. Nahnoo.org. <http://nahnoo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ashrafieh-and-Mar-Mikhael-Low1.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to OCHA definition of reconstruction zones in Beirut (Map 2).

<sup>7</sup> Goulordava, K. (2018). *Very small enterprises in a gentrified neighborhood: a case study of Qobayat, Mar Mikhael, Beirut*. Scholarworks.aub.edu.lb. <https://scholarworks.aub.edu.lb/handle/10938/21562>.

Conversely, Nor Hadjin Camp, located in Zone 39 on the north-western corner of the neighborhood, was excluded from the study of Mar Mikhael and relocated as part of the study of Badawi because its socio-spatial fabric recalls transformations and patterns in Badawi's.

## C. Landmarks

Generally, landmarks are buildings and places that are used for wayfinding and identification by the residents. They may hold religious, political, cultural or social value. Landmarks can be open spaces, urban elements, distinctive or mundane locations where residents meet and socialize. Mar Mikhael includes several landmarks (Map 3) that hold historical significance such as EDL, the site of the demolished Laziza brewery, the Train Station, or the private Tobagi Garden. Other landmarks include religious institutions such as the St. Michel Maronite Church and the Center of the Union of Armenian Churches or open spaces such as Vendome and Gholam stairs.

Some of the best-known landmarks are community spaces that have brought positive change to the neighborhood, as respondents shared during the fieldwork. These include the Laziza Community Park (which replaced the Laziza brewery), Haven for Artists,<sup>8</sup> and Riwaq, a local café known for being respectful to the surrounding environment especially in terms of noise and littering. Riwaq holds social value to the residents of the neighborhood mainly because it includes an underground space with a library that is often used to host plays, music performances and neighborhood meetings. Riwaq has opened again after the blast and it can potentially play an important role in re-generating the neighborhood meetings where residents gather to share their concerns and think collectively of ways to improve the quality of life in the area.

## D. Main Urbanization Trends Influencing the Neighborhood at the Time of the Blast

The analysis of Mar Mikhael's urbanization trends and several types of development reveals the complex morphological changes the neighborhood went through over time.<sup>9</sup> The aim of this analysis, as supported by fieldwork, is to locate the current repairs within the context of larger urban transformations that affect the neighborhood. By underscoring these trends, the analysis helps the post-disaster recovery locate its immediate relief concerns within the long-term developmental needs of the neighborhood, particularly those that affect residents and their livelihoods in the neighborhoods.

**Gentrification** in Mar Mikhael mostly took place throughout the 1990s and 2000s, when large-scale developments attracted new economic activities within existing buildings as well as intensive building redevelopment. It was followed in 2008 by a wave of financial investments<sup>10</sup> that swept through the neighborhood, attracting banks and investment companies, which aside from accelerating the pace of gentrification also intensified real estate development as a speculative practice. Consequently, demolition of existing buildings raged while others were abandoned (forced

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<sup>8</sup> Haven For Artists is a local NGO located in Mar Mikhael that aims to endorse and encourage the modern underground art scene of Lebanon and the Middle East, see: <https://havenforartists.org/>

<sup>9</sup> These trends, and observations about building activities are all derived from the Beirut Built Environment Database. Data about building permits was obtained by the Beirut Urban Lab from the Order of Engineers and Architects in Lebanon in 2019 and all data points were surveyed to double-check their validity. Please check the Methodology section in the beginning of this report or visit the BBED [website](https://thepublicsource.org/beirut-blasted-neighborhoods-between-recovery-efforts-and-real-estate-interests) for the detailed methodology used to collect and analyze the data.

<sup>10</sup> Financialization: Evictions and displacement stem from the subjugation over the land market due to financial interests. "By relying on land transactions to attract foreign capital, Lebanese decision-makers have favored the role of the land as a financial asset over its other functions as a shelter or workplace." Fawaz, M., & Mneimneh, S. (2020). "Beirut's Blasted Neighborhoods: Between Recovery Efforts and Real-Estate Interests." *The Public Source*. <https://thepublicsource.org/beirut-blasted-neighborhoods-between-recovery-efforts-and-real-estate-interests>

abandonment through eviction) with or without demolition.<sup>11</sup> These trends are outlined in detail below.

Until the 2000s, Mar Mikhael was a middle and working-class residential area mainly composed of low and mid-rise buildings and known for its proximity to commercial hubs such as the train station, the port, and EDL. At the time, Armenia Street was an industrial street comprising carpenters, craftsmen, car repair shops and hardware stores – many of which had operated continuously since the 1920s.<sup>12</sup> As of 2009, the neighborhood started to attract entrepreneurs and creatives (artists, craftsmen and designers), due to low rent, accessibility, and the unique social and spatial character.<sup>13,14</sup> Soon, a booming nightlife scene spilling over from Gemmayzeh (spilling over from Monot) came to Mar Mikhael, with the first bars opening at the corner of Armenia Street.<sup>15</sup> In a snowball effect, more pubs, restaurants, galleries, and designer shops started opening, while the area's rent prices rapidly increased.

Major demographic shifts and change in social fabric took place due to gentrification. As a result, residential rent prices have considerably increased in the area, having an impact on the demographics, as many residents have been forced to leave due to increase of cost of living, eviction, building demolition, growing pressure to relocate, and a sense of a loss of place.<sup>16</sup> People who used to live and work in the neighborhood were progressively replaced by a new income group, accompanied by the rise of a creative class in which trendy cafes, boutiques and restaurants cater to newcomers in the neighborhood (e.g. Baron Restaurant and PaperCup bookstore on Pharaon Street; Slate Restaurant on Madrid Street). Eventually, the change in the socio-economic profile of the neighborhoods' residents as well as the increased presence of tourists, expats, and consumer visitors has contributed to the general mixity of Mar Mikhael.

The neighborhood includes several old very small enterprises (VSEs) such as mini- markets (grocery stores on Armenia Street and Rue 64), local salons, barbershops or electronics on Pharaon Street, mechanics on the latter part of Armenia Street and Khatchadourian Street, blacksmiths on Ibn El Rabih Street, and hardware supply businesses. Most of these are meant to serve the daily needs of the old residents and respond to their consumer habits. However, old dwellers are largely excluded economically and socially from the aforementioned new establishments (trendy restaurants/cafes/boutiques).

Gentrification has not displaced all of the long-term residents, mainly due to the old rent law and residents' sense of attachment to the neighborhood. In particular, those who were born and raised there stated that they are not planning to leave, even in the post-blast setting. There is a high proportion of tenants in the neighborhood: 51.8% compared to 29% nationwide, while 48% are owners. Of the tenants, almost 80% (or 41% of residents in Mar Mikhael) are on old rent contracts<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Vacancy rates are extremely high across the city, particularly among higher end apartments, where rates reach above 50%. See: <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/612/beirut%E2%80%99s-residential-fabric>

<sup>12</sup> Nahnoo. (2020). Achrafieh and Mar Mikhael Youth-led Architectural Heritage Mapping in Beirut. Nahnoo.org. <http://nahnoo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ashrafieh-and-Mar-Mikhael-Low1.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Goulordava, K. (2018). Very small enterprises in a gentrified neighborhood: a case study of Qobayat, Mar Mikhael, Beirut. A case study of Qobayat, Mar Mikhael, Beirut. [Master's Thesis, American University of Beirut]. Scholarworks.aub.edu.lb. <https://scholarworks.aub.edu.lb/handle/10938/21562>

<sup>14</sup> See Gaia-Heritage (2015) Chapter D. in *Report on the Arts, Crafts and Design Sector and Urban Change in the Beirut District of Mar-Mikhael*. Backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb. (2015). <http://backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Mediterranean-cultural-network-to-promote-creativity-in-the-arts-crafts-and-design-for-communities-regeneration-in-historical-cities-MEDNETA-.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Krijnen, M., & De Beukelaer, C. (2015). Capital, state and conflict: the various drivers of diverse gentrification processes in Beirut, Lebanon. In L. Lees, H. B. Shin, & L.-M. Ernesto (Eds.), *Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development and Displacement* (pp. 285-309). Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*. This is also supported by fieldwork.

<sup>17</sup> See Buccianti-Barakat and Hariri (2015) Chapter C. in *Report on the Arts, Crafts and Design Sector and Urban Change in the Beirut District of Mar-Mikhael*. Backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb. (2015). Retrieved 14 December 2020, from <http://backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Mediterranean-cultural->



(ageing population with no second homes, many live and work in the neighborhood). These are threatened by the new rent law<sup>18</sup> that can displace many of them. Despite the protections offered by the old rent law, evictions in the neighborhood allowed the demolition of several buildings in the area.

In Mar Mikhael, **abandonment** or the proliferation of many dilapidated buildings and physical structures are a result of the unaddressed effects of civil war, where multiplicity of ownership may have precipitated these conditions. An example of abandonment is in Zone 11, in an old and unkempt building that has not been used since the Lebanese Civil War. In most other cases, forced abandonment through eviction was due to the speculative investments of developers who had purchased buildings, evicted all residents, and are waiting for a recovery of the real estate market to reinvest in the demolition of buildings and their replacement. Most of these buildings are left standing, with/without permits filed in their location. According to the 2018 survey of the Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED)<sup>19</sup> of AUB's Beirut Urban Lab (BUL), 29 building permits had been filed in Mar Mikhael between 1996-2018, with several unbuilt permits left as empty lots, old/non demolished buildings or on-hold/cancelled construction sites.

In some cases, residents (mostly old tenants) may be forced to leave their apartments if they are unable to cover the post-blast repair costs, especially if their landlords refuse to offer help. In one case, a landlord seeking to sell a building pre-blast was looking for ways to evict the old renters from a building on Alexander Fleming Street. Post-blast, the landlord refused to help any of the residents or businesses owners, and even declined help from the army.

In some cases, landlords had not been in contact with old renters for a long time before the blast for desire to evict their tenants, either to generate more income from new tenants or to sell the building. The trend may also be exacerbated with a new "downward cycle" where some tenants can no longer afford to pay high rent as a result of the economic crisis (i.e. unemployment, high cost of living). Therefore, they leave apartments to impoverished landlords who are unable to cover the costs of repair.

The **Fouad Boutros highway** was part of the 1952 Ecochard Master Plan that connects the Charles Malek, Alfred Naccache, and Charles Helou (from College de La Sagesse to the Port) roads, but its execution was stopped during the Civil War. Recent studies have found that the highway does not reduce traffic congestion but destroys a historic area and produces noise and air pollution. According to a study done by Nahnoo,<sup>20</sup> the construction of the highway in Mar Mikhael would have destroyed significant heritage buildings and the Tobaji Garden that date back to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to data in the BBED, the implementation of the highway will destroy approximately 22 houses.

Although the Fouad Boutros Highway project has been stopped/postponed, it left behind several abandoned buildings, especially in Zone 24 and across Salah Labaki Street. The residents of these buildings were forcefully evicted when the state expropriated the lands in the 1970s and 1980s for the project; the lots are now owned by the municipality of Beirut. As a result, the residents were forced into displacement, but the buildings have been mostly left unused and in need of rehabilitation (Figs. 1 and 2). There are a few residents still living on the trajectory of the highway and are constantly under the threat of eviction. Also, several municipality-owned buildings are inhabited by residents, as observed during fieldwork. For instance, a Lebanese resident in one of the buildings reported that the municipality did not pass by to check the damages or attempt to contact them after the blast. Her building is damaged and she is worried about eviction, especially in the absence of a rental contract with the municipality. One of her neighbors offered her temporary shelter in a vacant apartment that was recently fixed by Stouh Beirut on Salah Labaki Street. Another resident, a middle-aged Lebanese also lives in a municipality-owned building with his wife, mentioned that he is an old renter, and his house is in bad condition and needs maintenance.

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[Inetwork-to-promote-creativity-in-the-arts-crafts-and-design-for-communities-regeneration-in-historical-cities-MEDNETA-.pdf](#)

<sup>18</sup> For more information on new rent law, see: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Jan-24/390748-lebanon-tenants-enraged-by-new-modifications-to-rent-law.ashx>

<sup>20</sup> Nahnoo. (2020). *Achrafieh and Mar Mikhael Youth-led Architectural Heritage Mapping in Beirut*. Nahnoo.org. <http://nahnoo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ashrafieh-and-Mar-Mikhael-Low1.pdf>

Activist mobilization against the Fouad Boutros highway in 2014 put forward a proposal to replace the highway with a park that offers spaces to house public, social, and cultural services and includes green spaces, given that Beirut only has less than one square meter of green space per inhabitant.<sup>21</sup> This project thus represents today important opportunities for the recovery of Mar Mikhael and beyond.



**Figure 2.** Structurally damaged building along Fouad Boutros trajectory. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020



**Figure 1.** Abandoned building along Fouad Boutros trajectory on Salah Labaki Street. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020

**Vacancy** is a main outcome of the compiled effects of speculative investments (both in abandoned and unsold units), as demonstrated by the BBED survey in 2018. In the areas immediately surrounding the blast, the vacancy rates among buildings with permit issues since 1996 were as high as 31% in Mar Mikhael. Vacancy is exacerbated by regulations that exempt empty apartments from municipal and property taxation. An example of vacancy in the neighborhood is a building on Pharaon Street, in which all apartments are vacant except for one apartment on the top floor occupied by a family. The owners of this building and their relatives had been searching for a buyer since before the blast.

The high number of old renters in Mar Mikhael has led to a rent gap,<sup>22</sup> in which the profits being earned on an existing property are much lower than the potential profits if reinvestment were to take place.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the construction of new buildings, often replacing old buildings, have a

<sup>21</sup> For more information, see: <https://stopthehighway.wordpress.com/the-fouad-boutros-park/the-proposal/>

<sup>22</sup> The rent gap is a concept that points to the tendency of neighborhoods to attract higher investments when the difference widens between, on one hand, the current profit (or rent) accumulated from property ownership and, on the other, the potential profit that could be reaped if residents were evicted and /or the building was altogether replaced by a new, typically higher building. In Lebanon, the rent gap is generally the outcome of three overlapping regulations. These are: (i) rent control, (ii) heritage preservation laws, and (iii) building development regulations. For more information, refer to: Smith, N. (1987). Gentrification and the Rent Gap. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 77(3), 462-465. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2563279>.

<sup>23</sup> Goulordava, K. (2018). *Very small enterprises in a gentrified neighborhood): a case study of Qobayat, Mar Mikhael, Beirut*. [Master's Thesis, American University of Beirut]. Scholarworks.aub.edu.lb.

much higher rent rate than others in the area. These new high-end apartments include many empty properties because they are unaffordable for the majority of the population including middle to low-income residents who are evicted from their homes in Mar Mikhael and are usually forced to relocate to other areas.

In a recent example, the Laziza Brewery in Qobayat (Zone 39) was demolished in 2017-2018 to make space for the construction of luxury lofts. In numerous reports and interviews, architects who invested in the neighborhood, such as Bernard Khoury, describe the changes in the neighborhood as “inevitable.”<sup>24</sup> New developers who usually partner up with banks have a great influence on gentrification and significantly change the built environment, often contributing to the production of vacant apartments.<sup>25</sup> There are several abandoned buildings in Qobayat and Salah Labaki Street that could result in further high-end developments in the future (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3.** Abandoned Building on Zanoubia Street. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

*The loss of cultural heritage is severe. The neighborhoods surrounding downtown's historic core, including Mar Mikhael, Geitawi, and Gemmayzeh, have gradually seen their heritage layers (e.g., buildings, artisans, streetscapes, trees) devastated by speculative building activities (Map 4). Heritage classification in Lebanon is outdated: based on building age, it fails to protect the significant historical value of neighborhoods.*

Mar Mikhael has a diverse building typology, ranging from houses that date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with gardens (Tobagi Garden), three-floor residential buildings from the French Mandate period, and modern buildings from the 1930s onwards (Maps 5 and 6). There are several new developments with 14+ floors including skyscrapers such as Skyline and AYA Towers constructed between 1993 and 2020 (Map 6).

There are clusters of heritage buildings across the zones, with a significant presence on Armenia Street and Salah Labaki Street (Map 4). These buildings constitute spaces of shared memories and social significance to the community.<sup>26</sup> However, many of them are currently suffering from structural damage or are under the threat of collapse.

As a result, the protection of buildings with historical architectural value become the subject of lengthy negotiations, with arguments about what is valuable and how many can be kept, while the overall character and integrated understanding of heritage is eventually lost.<sup>27</sup> Several heritage buildings have already been demolished, resulting in the displacement of residents. In some cases, such as one building on Armenia Street, the buildings were demolished after a lawsuit of a 1m<sup>2</sup> infringement on the main road. One of the residents still works in the neighborhood, but after her building was demolished, she could not afford the high rent in the area and had to relocate to Bourj Hammoud. Other buildings are currently under the threat of demolition and could potentially lead to eviction such as this other building on Pharaon Street (Fig. 4). Also, some owners might take advantage of the destruction caused by the blast to evict old renters and demolish the building, such as the case of one lot reported by neighbors on Pharaon Street. Yet, the building owner was not able to evict the resident, and Beit El Baraka is currently repairing the apartment.

Many heritage buildings were already in bad condition and are now suffering from structural

<https://scholarworks.aub.edu.lb/handle/10938/21562>

<sup>24</sup> See: <http://www.beirutreport.com/2017/03/historic-laziza-brewery-demolition-begins-can-it-be-stopped.html>

<sup>25</sup> See: <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/612/beirut%E2%80%99s-residential-fabric>

<sup>26</sup> Al-Harithy, H. (2020). A Participatory Recovery of Post-Blast Beirut. *Jadaliyya* - جدلية. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/41620>

<sup>27</sup> Al-Harithy, H. (2020). For more information, see: <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/659>



damages after the blast. A few of these buildings have collapsed, while others are under the threat of collapse and have been evacuated. Following the blast, the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) supported by experts and activists invested in heritage preservations have surveyed the neighborhoods to increase the number of buildings earmarked for heritage preservation. While no official listing is available, repair and/or any other intervention on these buildings has to be cleared by the DGA by order of the city's Governor. Consequently, the number of buildings with heritage protection has increased through this ad-hoc arrangement. There are 116 heritage parcels in Mar Mikhael, the buildings highlighted on the map (Map 4) are the ones that are currently present on heritage parcels.



**Figure 4.** Heritage building on Pharaon Street. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

**Generalized impoverishment and loss of livability** has been aggravated, with numerous businesses closing since the beginning of 2019 due to economic slowdown, the wave of protests, financial meltdown, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Store closure and the formation of urban pockets of poverty has been steadily increasing, prior to the blast. In one example, a 26-year-old male has been running a small café/bar in Mar Mikhael for two and a half years. He said that he will be doing his own repairs only to operate his business for a short period of time until he can pay off the debts to his landlord and gather enough money to emigrate to Armenia with his parents and sister.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, many residents who live and work in the neighborhood lost a major source of income when their businesses were damaged by the blast. This, in addition to the inability to access dollar savings in the bank, has placed them in a very vulnerable position. As reported by ACTED's team in Zone 11 and a local informant, several residents have not been able to pay rent post-blast, and hence might be under the threat of eviction after receiving warnings by their landlords to leave the apartment by the beginning of the year if they continue to fall behind on rent payments.

**Loss of livability**, including the deterioration of building quality, is also evident. Some residential buildings were in bad condition even prior to the blast. As mentioned in the section on abandonment, the building owners have not contacted them for a long period of time to avoid discussing building maintenance. This may indicate that they are waiting on the tenants to pass or become impoverished and leave so they can use their property in more lucrative ways.

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<sup>28</sup> This interview took place before the war in Armenia.

## 2. Socio-demographic Profile

The income profile of the Mar Mikhael residents is mixed. However, low-income working-class residents are consistently being pushed out by the increase of rent prices and replaced by a new middle- and upper-class population. It is also worth noting that some residents live and work in the neighborhood, either in the same building or closer to Geitawi where the rent is cheaper and there is less nightlife noise.

Based on the interviews with residents and business owners, almost all were Lebanese, with some being Armenian by heritage or a passport holder. The only exceptions were one Syrian and one Egyptian man living and working in the neighborhood.<sup>29</sup> According to an ACTED fieldworker in Zone 11 and a local informant, there are only a few refugees in the area, mainly middle-class Syrian renters and a few working-class Egyptians/Syrians who work in the neighborhood. It is also worth noting that Mar Mikhael has also attracted expats working in Beirut, mainly Europeans, who moved to the neighborhood in the past few years.

The Technical Assessment conducted by UNHCR's implementing partners provides some elements of information concerning nationality among assessed residents, although because of their status and vulnerability, it is likely that non-Lebanese populations are under-reported.<sup>30</sup> 39 out of 510 respondents assessed in Mar Mikhael declared being non-Lebanese (of whom 26 Syrians), while another 334 preferred not responding to the question.

## 3. Housing Conditions

### A. Quality of Housing Stock

The quality of the housing stock in Mar Mikhael is very uneven. New buildings have adopted high standards and luxurious finishes that reflect the development characteristics of the post-war era. These apartments vary in size to include a niche of studios/small scale apartments built over the past decade as well as larger apartments, typically developed in earlier years.

In the absence of municipal enforcement of regulations on building owners to maintain buildings, the quality of old buildings and individual apartments within differs depending on the profile of residents. In general, it can be safely said that buildings held under rent control are in substantially worse conditions as a result of the tensions that pit landlords against tenants and discourages both stakeholders from investing in the maintenance of their assets. It is noteworthy that among those buildings are valuable heritage buildings such as 1930s modern structures as well as older walk-up buildings – some of which have been severely affected by the blast and are currently under the threat of collapse.

### B. Residential Arrangements

Surveys conducted in the neighborhood indicate that the majority of residents in Mar Mikhael are tenants, a tendency common to Beirut's older residential neighborhoods. While active building development has led to a shift in the pattern, given that newer buildings only offer apartments for sale, Mar Mikhael maintains a substantial percentage of tenants among its residents – including those benefiting from the old rent control. Thus, the Buccianti-Barakat and Hariri survey<sup>31</sup> recorded

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<sup>29</sup> According to the survey conducted by Liliane Buccianti-Barakat and Nizar Hariri (2014), 93.3% of the residents in Zones 10 and 39 are Lebanese, 93.1% in Zone 11, and 90% in Zone 24.

<sup>30</sup> Anecdotal information has circulated since the Beirut Port Blast that indicates that vulnerable tenants were being evicted or under-reported as landlords sought to collect their rents. For more on the status of vulnerable populations, please refer to the body of work about Syrian refugees produced by the Legal Agenda at <https://english.legal-agenda.com/country/lebanon/>.

<sup>31</sup> Buccianti-Barakat and Hariri (2015) Chapter C. in *Report on the Arts, Crafts and Design Sector and Urban Change in the Beirut District of Mar-Mikhael*. Backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb. (2015). Retrieved 14 December 2020, from <http://backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Mediterranean-cultural->

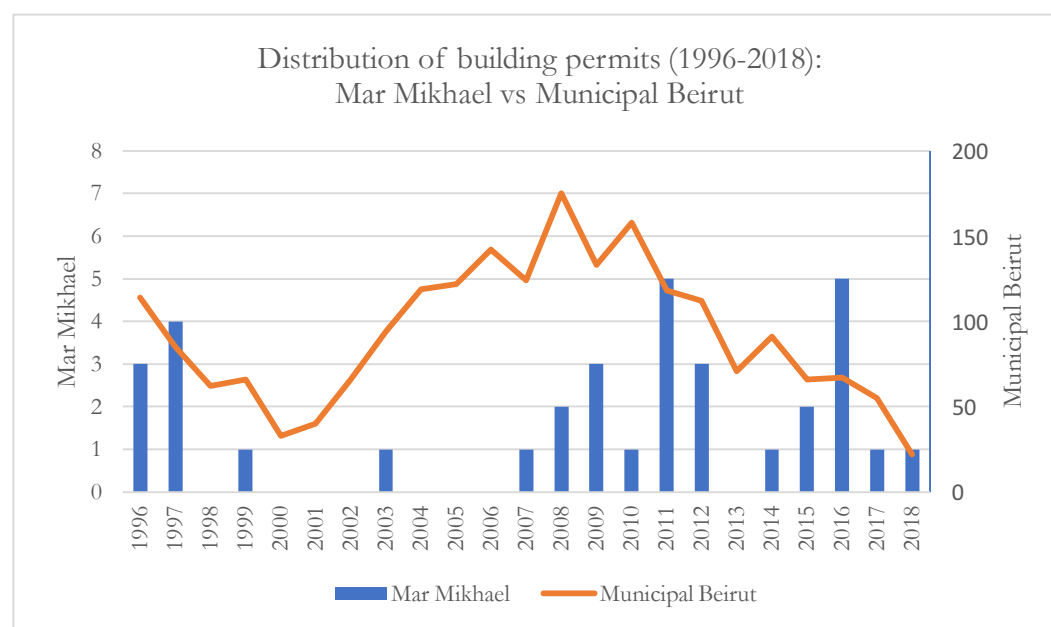


in 2014 that 76.6% of the residents are renters and 23.3% are owners in Zones 10 and 39; 58.6% are renters and 41.3% are owners in Zone 11 (88.2% of renters have old rent contracts); and 62% are renters and 37.9% are owners in Zone 24 (63.1% of renters have old rent contracts). Fieldworkers and a local informant in Zone 11 confirmed that most renters are on old rent contracts, with a few exceptions of new rent contracts done with Philippe Tyan who has a large number of apartments and buildings in the neighborhood, mainly on Armenia Street.

The Technical Assessment led by UNHCR's implementing partners between September and December 2020 in Mar Mikhael which covered recorded 512 entries concerning mode of occupancy. Among those, almost half declared they were owners (44%), while another 37% were tenants. Assessed tenants were mainly on old contracts and hence may bear a serious threat of eviction.

New homeowners purchase their homes either by making a full payment or through private bank loans. Only few homeowners have benefited from the subsidized public loan of the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH) in this neighborhood because of the high value of apartments that places them above the eligible threshold for subsidized public loans. In Mar Mikhael, the PCH loans are located at the edge of Geitawi. There is also one case on Salah Labaki Street, likely in an older building (Map 7). Thus, while elsewhere in the city, residents have been able to rely on publicly subsidized loans to purchase the apartments in which they had dwelled for decades with old rent control, the extremely high rent gap in Mar Mikhael has kept these apartments above the means of their occupants who are unable to follow the same path for homeownership. Instead, landlords are often eager to evict tenants with the smallest compensation possible in order to benefit from their assets by partnering with a developer who could redevelop their property into a newer and higher building.

### C. Market Conditions



**Figure 5.** Graph of building permits filed in Mar Mikhael and Municipal Beirut. Source: Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED), Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.

The research conducted by BUL reveals that the building development sector in Mar Mikhael underwent several fluctuations between 1997 and 2018, roughly following the trends of the larger market (Fig. 5, Map 8). Thus, the first post-war real estate crisis in 1997 caused the neighborhood to slow down in building activities. The graph further reveals the impacts of Lebanon's Central Bank

interventions as of 1997, as it sought to incentivize banks in intervening on the real estate sector either directly by facilitating transactions in the sector, or indirectly by channeling the flow of domestic and external capital to the building industry.<sup>32</sup> The graph also shows the solid trend of building activities as of 2007, with the financialization trends taking an important toll on the neighborhood. Despite vacancy rates reaching over 31% in new buildings by 2018, Mar Mikhael saw an increase in building permits and several residents evicted from their homes. Today, many old buildings have been demolished while new construction has yet to be initiated. Instead, in place of these demolished buildings are empty lots and/or parking lots. All point to the speculative investments taking place and the shift towards assigning higher value for property as an investment over the social value of land as shelter.<sup>33</sup>

This trend is expected to continue after the blast as several building owners who are now looking for buyers were identified, seeking to transform old buildings (into new developments to generate more profit from new tenants. Building owners in the area have been seeking to sell old buildings since before the blast because they do not make profit from old renters. After the blast, the building conditions have further deteriorated and many residents cannot afford repairs, making it easier for owners to evict them.

## 4. Local Economy

The majority of ground floors are used for commercial purposes, even in the residential area of Qobayat (Zone 39). Of the existing businesses, most fall into the common categories of food and grocery, cafes and restaurants, bakeries, mechanics/car supplies, boutiques, beauty salons/barbershops, furniture as well as arts, crafts and design. According to the Beirut MSMEs Joint Rapid Needs Assessment report conducted in September 2020, establishments in Mar Mikhael were severely damaged by the blast and most of them applied for assistance from the Higher Relief Council.<sup>34</sup> Some of these establishments, especially the micro-enterprises, are owned by people who live in the neighborhood.

Based on an assessment, conducted during the second week of December 2020 for this report, some businesses on Armenia Street are still shut post-blast, especially those located on the ground floor of structurally damaged buildings. However, a considerable number of shops have re-opened during the day including supermarkets, take-away restaurants, beauty shops/barbers, pharmacies and mechanics. However, some of the shops are still in need of repairs and are suffering from losses in equipment and products. Similarly, on Pharaon Street, a business-owner, mentioned that if the government does not compensate him for damaged equipment, he might be forced to shut down. At least four shops around Pharaon Street have decided to either permanently shut down or wait to see what happens in the future. Conversely, several bars and restaurants on Armenia, Madrid and Alexander Fleming have re-opened including Chaplin, Tavolina, Anise, The Bros, Das Küche, Slate, Bar 35, Internazionale, and Meet the Veganz. Several initiatives such as "Car-Free Day" have been held to support the area's local businesses.

On Salah Labaki Street in Zone 24, many businesses were shut pre-blast due to the economic crisis. For example, the Private Hotel that used to attract tourists to the street had shut down and is now left un-repaired by the owner. The remaining businesses in the area are significantly affected by the blast and are mostly still shut. Whereas on Patriarch Arida Street in Zone 39, many businesses including boutiques, mechanics and restaurants were open during October and November. This is mainly because the area was less damaged by the blast.

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<sup>32</sup> See: <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/612>

<sup>33</sup> Fawaz, M., & Mneimneh, S. (2020). Beirut's blasted neighborhoods: Between recovery efforts and real estate interests. *The Public Source*. <https://thepublicsource.org/beirut-blasted-neighborhoods-between-recovery-efforts-and-real-estate-interests>

<sup>34</sup> For more information, see the joint assessment led by ACTED, Action Against Hunger USA, CARE, Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Oxfam & Save the Children. (2020, Sept 29). Beirut MSME Joint Rapid Needs Assessment. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/beirut-msme-joint-rapid-needs-assessment-september-2020>

## 5. Quality of Public Spaces



**Figure 6.** Laziza Park in Geitawi. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

The main amenity of the neighborhood is the pedestrian infrastructure: the entire urban fabric of the area and its human scale, narrowness of the sidewalks, density of businesses, the heritage quality of most of the built environment in addition to the presence of some greenery has created a sense of walkability that is highly appreciated by residents. The 2014 survey conducted by Gaia Heritage found that one-third of Mar Mikhael residents do not own a car, which shows that they can find their everyday needs near home or they prefer to walk if they work in the surrounding area.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, interviews conducted with residents proved that many moved to the neighborhood because of its pedestrian infrastructure and the quality of its streets.

This positive assessment should not obscure the fact that the neighborhood's public spaces need dire improvements. Encroachments by cars and restaurants/pubs often conflict with pedestrian mobility on the narrow sidewalks. Furthermore, while parking areas are widely available in the lots near the highway, residents typically complain that finding on-street parking is difficult as it is typically monopolized by valet parking. Prior to the blast, valet-parking in Mar Mikhael made the parking situation worse, but now with the destruction of many bars and restaurants, things have changed again. That is, there could be potential to reduce the number of valet-parking or find a solution, now that some restaurants and bars might not re-open.

There are no formal public spaces in Mar Mikhael such as a bounded garden, but the neighborhood is rich with interstitial spaces in which numerous shared activities occur (Map 9). These include stairs, dead-ends, spaces in-between buildings, and street corners. For example, the Vendome stairs is a known destination where young residents meet and hang out whereas the senior residents often gather in a grocery store located on a dead-end street (Rue 64) in Zone 11. Some of these socio-spatial practices resurfaced after the blast, for example, where several old men regularly gathered in an appliance store owned by one of them on Pharaon Street and would move outdoors to the sidewalk if the weather got too hot. It is a common practice for old VSE owners to sit outside their stores and interact with passersby in Mar Mikhael.

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<sup>35</sup> Bucciatti-Barakat and Hariri (2015) Chapter C. in *Report on the Arts, Crafts and Design Sector and Urban Change in the Beirut District of Mar-Mikhael*. Backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb. (2015). Retrieved 14 December 2020, from <http://backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Mediterranean-cultural-network-to-promote-creativity-in-the-arts-crafts-and-design-for-communities-regeneration-in-historical-cities-MEDNETA-.pdf>

The Laziza Park (Fig. 6) is identified just outside the limits in Zone 39 and falls within the physical limits of Geitawi. GROBeirut<sup>36</sup> and Umbrella Beirut have been squatting the private space since the October 17 protests. In addition to planting trees, they placed a few sofas, tables, and chairs for residents to use. After the blast, young residents were spotted having morning coffee and hanging out at the park. However, there are piles of waste around the lot, which discourages many residents from going in.

## 6. Infrastructure and Environment

In terms of water access and quality, Mar Mikhael is relatively privileged in its access to municipal water. While residents still purchase their potable water, they can rely on the city agency for their everyday uses. The survey conducted by the BUL team in 2018 showed that there were only a few wells in the neighborhoods. These wells showed relatively high levels of contamination with bacteria.

In regard to street-level waste collection, matters are not well managed. After the blast, the presence of rubble and waste on the sidewalks created obstacles for pedestrians. Residents on Salah Labaki Street and Patriarch Arida Street said that the waste was not being collected on a weekly basis and sometimes the waste fills the sidewalks for weeks before being removed by the municipality (Fig. 7). The waste is being mainly removed from Armenia Street.



**Figure 7.** Sidewalk covered with waste and rubble on Salah Labaki Street. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

Local NGO Arc-en-ciel has facilitated the collection of all the broken glass from the blast and placed them in a vacant lot owned by the municipality of Beirut in Karantina. The glass is now being relocated to another lot owned by the Port of Beirut, in coordination with the city's governor. Arc-en-ciel is awaiting the delivery of a glass crusher which will help recycle and reuse the glass.

In Zone 24, there is an Egyptian man in charge of collecting the household waste of residents for a weekly fee. In other areas, residents said that they walk to the nearest main street to throw them at a RAMCO pick-up point.

In terms of environmental conditions, Mar Mikhael's residents are no longer relying on generators because EDL has been supplying them with 24/7 electricity post-blast. In Zone 24, mainly along Salah Labaki Street, generators are located near the Maronite Archdiocese of Beirut on La Sagesse Street. In Zones 10 and 11, there are two main generator suppliers.

<sup>36</sup> GROBeirut and Umbrella Beirut are community-led initiatives based in Geitawi. For more information, see: <https://grobeirut.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/Umbrella-Beirut-101162935172537/>



## II. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

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### 1. Municipality

Public stakeholders such as the **Municipality of Beirut** and *mokhtars* do not have a strong influence in Mar Mikhael, compared to other institutions. The general lack of trust of the municipality was exacerbated in the post-blast environment with its absence. When asked if the municipality helped post-blast, many residents replied, "What municipality? We don't have one here."

### 2. Religious Actors

The **St. Michel Maronite Church** plays a key role in the sub-neighborhood of Mar Mikhael identified as cluster 1 in Zone 11, especially in providing support to its parish, which extends to Geitawi, Rmeil and Karantina. The Maronite church is also considered an important landowner in the area; there are several Waqf owned buildings and a parking lot on Lamartine Street and Pharaon Street, all located on one large parcel intercepted by the street network and Ibn el-Rabih Street. Also, the church has a list of the parish members in the area, who were seen on multiple occasions flocking to the NGO **Berrad El Hay**<sup>37</sup> located on the ground floor of the church to report their needs or grab a daily meal. This NGO was operating four months prior to the blast as a response to the economic crisis. The church has also given the list of parish members to NGOs operating in the neighborhood after the blast.

### 3. Political Parties

The main three political parties in the neighborhood, namely **Kataeb**, **Lebanese Forces** and the **Free Patriotic Movement**, have several offices in the area, clearly indicated through official signs as observed during fieldwork.

In interviews and conversations, a strong rhetoric of threat and of needing to be *entre-soi* was often shared. For example, one resident mentioned that parks should only be accessible to the Lebanese residents of the neighborhood rather than Syrians. Another mentioned that Syrians were flocking to the neighborhood directly after the blast to benefit from the aid that should be solely directed to the affected Lebanese.

Between 2016-19, and as reported by an interviewee, there was an initiative by the secular political group, **Beirut Madinati**, in order to support the creation of a neighborhood committee in Mar Mikhael. The committee, mostly composed of residents, identified a common cause: the negative externalities of nightlife on the residents' everyday life, particularly due to noise pollution and valet parking practices. The committee managed to close a pub (that later re-opened illegally), visit the governor, and file a lawsuit. Given the lack of response from public authorities, the committee eventually lost steam and is currently inactive.

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<sup>37</sup> Berrad El Hay is a non-profit community fridge that has several locations including Mar Mikhael, Achrafieh and Haret Sakhr. They support residents with food and other social services. See: <https://www.instagram.com/berradelhay/>



## 4. Active Non-Governmental Organizations Pre-blast

Several civil society organizations were active in Mar Mikhael pre-blast, such as **Achrafieh 2020**<sup>38</sup> initiated by **MP Nadim Gemayel, Save Beirut Heritage, Nahnoo, Public Works, Berrad El Hay** and **Haven for Artists**. Some Beirut-based foundations and nonprofits, like the **Arab Center for Architecture** and the **Samir Kassir Foundation**, have previously worked in the neighborhood with other organizations such as **GAIA heritage**.<sup>39</sup> Although GAIA heritage, who works closely with **Université Saint-Joseph (USJ)**, is considered a private actor and not a civil society organization, it has played a significant role in supporting the neighborhood's Arts, Craft and Design sector as well as developing a Mar Mikhael Creative District map. Given its interesting history and architectural heritage, it is not surprising to know that many universities have mapped the neighborhood's public and residential spaces, including the **Department of Architecture and Design at the American University of Beirut** and **ALBA (Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts)**. ALBA's research has informed guided tours on the heritage of the area in an effort to revitalize the neglected public spaces.

## 5. Landowners

It is noteworthy that land ownership in Mar Mikhael is in relatively few hands within the central area, placing control over urban renewal with a few property owners who have precipitated gentrification by evicting old renters and partnering with developers. This was particularly possible after 2014, once the passage of a new rent law shifted the conflict between landlords and tenants to the courthouses, empowering well-connected landlords to sue tenants for eviction. Anecdotal evidence collected in the neighborhood indicates that tight social networks connect a handful of local landlords to both the bar scene, from which they may have benefited, and to the political parties who are grounded in the neighborhood.

## 6. Developers

According to data in the BBED, Mar Mikhael has a very diverse profile of 22 developers including banks, investment companies, entrepreneurs, amateurs, etc. The number of building permits began to increase after 2008 at the time when Mar Mikhael was attracting many new people to the neighborhood and appeared on the developers' radar. This can be seen in the quality of the new buildings permitted after 2008 (includes multiple units), which resulted in an increase of rent gap in the neighborhood. This can be addressed by putting forward a regulatory framework that places the rent gap under control. It is also worth noting that this data only covers Mar Mikhael as defined by our neighborhood limits. A larger market appears when the area is extended to Gemmayze, Saifi, and Geitawi.

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<sup>38</sup> Achrafieh 2020 is an environmentally driven initiative by Nadim Gemayel. See: <https://www.facebook.com/Achrafieh2020/>

<sup>39</sup> For more information, see: [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/research\\_reports/2015-2016/20160627\\_linking\\_MarMikhael.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/research_reports/2015-2016/20160627_linking_MarMikhael.pdf)

### III. RECOVERY STATUS

#### 1. Overview

Damage from the blast is mostly visible in Zones 11 and 24. The Technical Assessment conducted by UNHCR's implementing partner in Mar Mikhael from September to December 2020 covered 844 housing units, among which the level of damage was very high, with 28% of damaged units were categorized as Level 1, and 72% as Level 2 (this is indicative information not representative of the neighborhood). Three assessed units were categorized as Level 3<sup>40</sup>. Of all damaged units assessed, 39% had been repaired by the time the assessment was conducted, while 61% had not yet been repaired. From the 327 assessed repaired units, 32% were supported by a local NGO, while 65% were done at one own expense (the remaining 4% report resorting to debt and other modalities). As part of this assessment, absence of repair was reported as primarily due to a lack of financial means (90%). Among those who had received shelter assistance, modalities included partial repairs, cash, and weatherproofing.

There are many NGOs working in Zone 11, particularly on the streets surrounding the church (Pharaon, Rabbat, Alexander Fleming, Lamartine, etc.), where buildings are undergoing reconstruction and rehabilitation, with some completed as of early December 2020. For example, during a meeting with BUL, **ACTED** confirmed that it had finalized 100 apartments and planned to finish 200-250 apartments by the end of November 2020. In addition, **Beit El Baraka** is still in the process of fixing businesses and apartments.

**Son of Man**, a faith-based organization (Greek Catholic), rented an apartment that used to be vacant on Pharaon Street and opened a free health clinic for residents in the neighborhood (Fig. 8).



**Figure 8.** Son of Man's Health Clinic on Pharaon Street. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Please note that there could be more; as indicated in the methodology section, the technical assessments conducted by UNHCR partners were led in the framework of the shelter intervention implementation. As such, they did not resort to any form of probability sampling nor were they meant to provide comprehensive neighborhood-level data.

**Nusaned**, a local NGO, opened an office/information hub on Armenia Street one month after the blast and is still operating daily, as of December 2020. **Nusaned** has been repairing apartments covering all the areas affected by the blast and has an active hotline to which team members directly respond. As of this writing, the NGO has been offering free online consultations for mental health through a phone application. Also, the **Neighborhood Initiative of the American University of Beirut** has been working with several designers to rehabilitate the open spaces in Mar Mikhael. Future plans include working on rehabilitating the Vendome, Gholam, and Akkawi staircases to render them more accessible to the residents of the area. They are also working on a long-term project to install benches, biking routes on Armenia Street, sustainable landscape planting, and enhanced streetlights.

Although Zone 24 includes more buildings at risk of total or partial collapse than other areas (Map 10), as well as more vulnerable residents, there are far less NGOs working in the area compared to Zone 11. Several buildings have not been repaired yet, many apartments still have broken windows (Fig. 9), and many shops are still shut. This might be because the area is less lively and not as occupied as other zones in Mar Mikhael. Some buildings still have uncollected rubble inside apartments and at the entrance of the building. Residents reported that NGOs such as **Concern Worldwide** and **MEDAIR** approached them in December to help with apartment repairs. Before that, **Intersos** were spotted conducting assessments during mid-November and one resident reported that one building was fully renovated by a man who wants to nominate himself for the next parliamentary elections. Generally, it is still unclear which NGO is mainly working on the area.



**Figure 9.** Unrepaired Building on Salah Labaki. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

Zones 10 and 39 have less visible damage and buildings are undergoing minor renovations. In Zone 39, specifically on Patriarch Arida Street, more shops are seen operating, such as car garages, hardware stores, salons, clothing stores and some cafes/restaurants. Many residents seem to have returned to their apartments (with a few exceptions of vacant apartments in new buildings undergoing renovations) and a few elderly residents were spotted having coffee on their balconies. There is generally less construction work and most windows/doors are fixed.

Armenia Street has been busier than other streets, especially that many shops (including pharmacies, fast food restaurants, markets) have re-opened and buildings are still undergoing reconstruction, including some heritage buildings that were under the threat of collapse. However, not many residents are back to their apartments. Most aid tents that were set directly after the blast are no longer there, but **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)** set up water tanks on the sidewalk in front of EDL to provide drinking water for passersby, a gesture that was greatly appreciated by residents (Fig. 10).



**Figure 10.** MSF water tanks on Armenia Street.  
Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

## 2. Active Actors in the Recovery Response

There is a large number of NGOs working in Mar Mikhael since the blast, but, based on observation, only a few are still active in the recovery process. In total, fifty-eight actors who are working long-term on recovery and reconstruction were counted (see Annex). The information is based on the FER's website, OCHA's dashboard, fieldwork observations, and NGOs that attended coordination meetings in the St. Michel Maronite Church.

**The St. Michel Maronite church** has been playing an active role in the recovery process, in that they have been providing a space for NGOs to conduct coordination meetings and working closely with them on the ground, organizing them and directing them towards residents in need of aid, a role that is expected by state institutions. For example, the project manager of **Offre Joie** on Rabbat Street has been collecting information about the residents' needs and reporting them to the church, who is organizing this information and circulating it to NGOs through **OCHA**. Residents would also line up outside the priest's office to talk to him, ask for aid or express their concerns.

There is no direct presence of political parties in the recovery process. However, some political parties are operating through NGOs and initiatives to distribute aid to people. For example, the **Lebanese Forces** have been conducting internal repairs for damaged apartments and distributing equipment and food to residents through their NGO **Ground-O**. Also, several posters carrying the Lebanese Forces sign were spotted around the neighborhood with the slogan "My house is not for sale, our history is not for sale," urging residents not to sell their houses."



### 3. Challenges

The NGO coordination meetings started taking place at the **St. Michel Maronite Church** on September 8 and have been ongoing on a bi-weekly basis. One important concern that has been repeatedly reported in meetings is that NGOs did not know what other NGOs in the same zone were doing. The NGOs are attempting to remedy this concern through a WhatsApp coordination group. **OCHA** agreed to start a list/excel sheet with the contacts and needs of citizens. This list circulated among NGOs so they could fill the gaps according to their sector. This initiative faced several challenges as no one volunteered to update the sheet and it was ineffectively shared with other NGOs working in the neighborhood. More recently, the NGOs started using a new referral system created by the **Danish Refugee Council** known as RIMS (Referral Information Management System).

Another concern about aid distribution was reported during the coordination meetings which includes residents hoarding aid. In a few instances, residents hid cash assistance from NGOs that should have been used for repairs and then asked for help from NGOs. In another instance, a household received two fridges and sold one of them or relocated it to their second home while another family in need remained without a fridge.

There was also an evident overlap between some organizations regarding repairs. Even though some NGOs such as the **World Patriarchal Maronite Foundation for Integral Development (WPF)** marked streets such as Pharaon Street, other organizations such as **Basmeh & Zeitooneh, Ground-O** and **The Armenian General Benevolent Union Lebanon** were also doing repairs on the same street. In addition to the Maronite Church, The Armenian General Benevolent Union Lebanon is another religious actor that has been repairing two buildings on Pharaon Street and Alexander Fleming Street, including a heritage building.

Many residents have also reported experiencing survey fatigue after various actors passed by to conduct assessments but did not follow through with repairs. During an interview with a resident, volunteers were coming into his house to conduct physical assessments without introducing themselves.

### 4. Multiple Modalities of Reconstruction

The post-blast recovery process in Mar Mikhael includes multiple modalities of reconstruction that combines both public and private actors. However, several dwellers in the neighborhood, especially the ageing population, are having difficulties identifying which NGO to contact for aid. An owner of a small shop on Pharaon Street said he was not familiar or informed about who to contact for help and did not afford to repair his shop which remains closed.

#### **Modality 1: Army**

Residents rely on the army, which has been distributing cash after assessing household damages.

#### **Modality 2: NGOs**

In Mar Mikhael, Rabbat Street is known to be **Offre Joie's** (Zone 11) who are in charge of rehabilitating 12 buildings around the street and often distribute hot meals to residents. One of the volunteers reported that Offre Joie is refurbishing buildings (both apartments and businesses) and is mostly done with repairs now. Meanwhile, the buildings on Pharaon Street were mainly rehabilitated by **WPF** and by **ACTED** on Alexander Fleming Street.

In one case, the neighbors surrounding a building on Alexander Fleming Street contacted NGOs to come and help with repairs after the landlord refused to help the old renters, indicating strong social networks in the community. On the other hand, many residents / shop owners said that a multitude of NGOs passed by to assess damages or take measures, but they either did not come back or were very late to return.

#### **Modality 3: Private Donors**

In some cases, private donors hire Lebanese agents to identify residents in need of household repairs. One resident on Salah Labaki Street reported that the agent came by to take



measurements and promised to repair all doors and windows, but only came back to repair one door, and took a picture with the UAE flag for the donor.

**Modality 4: Self-Funded Repair**

Some residents, mostly in Zone 24, reported that they are paying for their own house repairs, especially if they were not approached by an NGO or if the NGO only repaired windows and doors. In Zone 11, an old renter of a small business shop in an already precarious condition who sells new/used equipment, said he had to pay 2,000,000 LBP from his own pocket money to fix the shop's metal gate, but did not know who to contact to fix the other damages he could not afford (i.e. glass storefront, ceiling).

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS OF POTENTIAL SITES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

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In this section, BUL discusses recommendations of sites that could potentially be used for community-based projects. A word of caution is due: these recommendations are preliminary and founded on partial fieldwork that was conducted in the neighborhood and thus have not been sufficiently validated by interviews and surveys with dwellers, business-owners and other stakeholders. Any community-based project in the neighborhood should derive from a participatory planning process which requires genuine and prolonged engagement with concerned people, that materializes in community meetings and discussions that ultimately converge towards a consensus. Still, BUL's recommendations build on the urban trends and dynamics that characterize the neighborhood, the preliminary actors' mapping that BUL undertook, the identification of vacant lots or public spaces where either some socio-spatial activity has started taking place or could potentially occur, and preliminary discussions with residents.

BUL begins by noting that Beirut's public and shared spaces are severely neglected realms. This is due to a confluence of factors that include the neglect of public agencies to these valuable assets, associations between public and danger that date back to the legacy of the civil war, and the poor conceptual policy approach with which such spaces have been approached as ornamental rather than communal.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the "Plan Vert de Beyrouth" study—commissioned by the Municipality of Beirut but never implemented—found that there was less than 1m<sup>2</sup> of open space per capita, well below the 10m<sup>2</sup> recommended by the World Health Organization.<sup>42</sup>

The absence of such spaces was often compensated by residents through ad-hoc appropriations, temporary occupations of vacant lots and sidewalks, as well as a heavy use of neighborhood scale commercial venues as sites of gathering.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Beirut is a city rich with socio-spatial practices, which are deeply rooted in its urban history, experienced through streets, markets, and multiple public and private open spaces that are more or less hidden, including alleyways, historical staircases, building entrances, vacant lots, and other appropriated sites, many of which are found in the neighborhoods affected by the Beirut Port Blast. Yet, much more needs to be done to provide more and better open, green public spaces to residents of the city. Over the past decade, an increasing number of collectives and NGOs have decried the closure and scarcity of open spaces and the direct negative effect on neighborhoods' public life and attachment to place, as well as the mental and physical health of residents.<sup>44</sup>

Activating open public spaces and vacant lots for socio-spatial practices matters for recovery. Indeed, aside from the physical damage caused by the explosion and the temporary forced displacement, the blast has caused the temporary and potential long-term displacement of residents and may sever permanently their relation to the neighborhood if they are not provided with venues to gather. As argued elsewhere, shared spaces typically operate as sites of sociability and social interaction, where children play safely, the elderly socialize, women meet and converse,

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<sup>41</sup> For case studies of public spaces and urban mobilization in Beirut, see *Practicing the Public*, Fawaz and Gharbieh (2016) at: <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/569/practicing-the-public>; Harb M. (2013), "Public Spaces and Spatial Practices: Claims from Beirut", *Jadaliyya*, and Harb M. (2018) "New Forms of Youth Activism in Contested Cities: The Case of Beirut." *International Spectator*, 53:2, 74-93. About the fear of public space in Beirut, see Nasreddine-Cheaitli, A. (2019) "Addressing Fear in Public Spaces: Design Solutions for the Ramlet El-Bayda Park", Unpublished Master's Thesis, MUPP Program, American University of Beirut, and, for everyday appropriation of spaces in Beirut, see Guadagnoli, G. (2016), "Tools for Tactical Neighborhood Planning and Design: Lessons from User-Led Small Scale Physical Interventions in Municipal Beirut Open Spaces," Unpublished Master's Thesis, MUPP Program, American University of Beirut.

<sup>42</sup> For more information about the Plan Vert de Beyrouth, see <http://idf-beyrouth.com/?q=content/espaces-verts-et-paysagers>.

<sup>43</sup> See Fawaz and Gharbieh, *op.cit.*

<sup>44</sup> See Harb (2018), *op.cit.* Also, see: Harb M. and Mazraani D., "Vacancy as Opportunity: Re-activating Public Life in Beirut." Beirut Urban Lab website, March 2020. <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/619/vacancy-as-opportunity-re-activating-public-life-in-beirut>

migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups hang out and forge communities.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, such sites can foster what authors called “city-zenship,” a sense of inclusive urban belonging where “the right to the city [...] extends to all residents, regardless of origin, identity, or legality.”<sup>46</sup> In the aftermath of large-scale disasters, communal belonging is threatened and communities are scattered. Consequently, shared spaces gain an additional critical role not simply to recover a lost space, but rather to allow communities to perform two critical tasks: healing and exchanging information.<sup>47</sup> This role extends, it is noteworthy, to commercial social spaces that have been shown to provide in post-disaster recoveries the direly needed gathering social spaces where communities can share information and experiences that contribute to a better and faster recovery.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the horrendous blast, BUL noted during fieldwork that some of the everyday socio-spatial practices were resurfacing, performing an important role in keeping residents connected to their neighborhoods. For instance, fieldworkers observed dwellers placing chairs and congregating among the ruins of destroyed homes, in the alleyways, along the sidewalks. They also observed children playing football in empty lots.

As such, a participatory urban strategy that seeks to re-activate anchors of socio-spatial practices within neighborhoods, whether publicly held land, temporarily occupied private lots, public venues, or commercial stores that serve as sites of congregation, can play an important role in fostering recovery. These anchors could be a small garden, a street corner, a small store, a building entrance, a stairs landing, etc. Such sites play a key role in allowing communities to heal and even flourish, depending on an array of socio-economic and political conditions which need to be investigated beyond this report. Interventions on these sites need to be conceived according to participatory modalities that enable the co-imagining of how to activate them with programs that respond to the needs of specific communities and neighborhoods in relation to the post-blast trauma. Such activities can bring dwellers together to heal and recover collectively and to rebuild neighborhoods, including private homes and shared spaces.

In what follows, BUL identifies potential sites where such community-projects could occur in Mar Mikhael. In some instance, these build on already existing practices. BUL also identifies the potential NGOs and collectives that could be supportive of these projects—noting that BUL has not discussed these ideas with them, but has identified them as actors actively engaged in activating public spaces and collective life in the post-blast recovery of the city. Most of these actors have also been identified by the Area-Based Approaches (ABA) Temporary Technical Committee (TTC), in a study dated in February 2021 on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) engaged in the Beirut Port explosion.

## Potential Interventions in Mar Mikhael

There are several opportunities for community-based interventions in Mar Mikhael (Map 11), especially with the NGOs serving it and the rich spatial structure of the neighborhood. For instance, **Haven for Artists**, a local NGO located on a dead-end street near Armenia Street in Zone 10, is a “self-funded, feminist, women-led, all-inclusive arts organization that has opened two cultural and safe spaces for artists, activists and advocated of freedom of expression and equality, while focusing on women’s and LGBTQI rights.” It hosts cultural, civil and social initiatives through open discussions, civic engagement campaigns and collaborations with other local NGOs. The space is temporarily closed for now since they are working on repairs. Supporting their rehabilitation will be key for the neighborhood. **Riwaq**, located on Assad Rustom Street in Zone 39, is a café that carries social value to the residents as it includes an underground space with a library and often hosts plays, music performances and neighborhood meetings. Riwaq has opened again after the blast and can potentially play an important role in hosting neighborhood meetings.

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<sup>45</sup> See Mazraani D., Dayekh L., and Harb M., “Why Socio-Spatial Practices Matter to Urban Recovery?” *Public Source*, December 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Vrasti W. & Dayal S., (2016), Cityzenship: Rightful Presence and the Urban Commons, *Citizenship Studies*, 20:8, 994-1011.

<sup>47</sup> Brand D. & Nicholson H. (2016) Public Space and Recovery: Learning from Post-Earthquake Christchurch, *Journal of Urban Design*, 21:2, 159-176.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Haeffele, S. and Craig, A.W. (2020), “Commercial social spaces in the post-disaster context”, *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 303-317.

Before listing sites where further community-based activities can occur, it is important to mention that the neighborhood's collective life can be much improved with some basic interventions that the municipality should undertake. One is clearing the sidewalks from leftover rubble and waste. Installing waste collection and recycling bins can also help reduce waste on the streets. Some stairs are broken and need rehabilitation (Fig. 11). Fixing the streetlights has also been a demand by residents who do not feel safe when they walk at night. One resident in Zone 11 reported that an NGO (unknown name), in coordination with the municipality of Beirut, installed new streetlights on Pharaon Street before the Blast. However, most of them were destroyed by the explosion.

There are two public sites that could be used for community-based interventions. One is owned by the Ministry of Public Works and other is owned by the municipality. **The Train Station site** in Mar Mikhael Zone 10 provides the greatest opportunity for a large public space (Map 9). It is partially used as a parking lot during the day; it previously hosted a summertime pub within the station and occasional events. Half of it is currently used as a base for the **Lebanese Red Cross** (Fig. 12) and the other half is empty, with a few cars parked inside. The **Municipality owns an empty lot** located behind the St. Michel Maronite church on Pharaon Street in Zone 11 (Fig. 13) that could be transformed into a small neighborhood park for the residents who need more greenery and open spaces in the area. The municipality is currently building/renovating the small buildings surrounding the lot.

Three private properties could be interesting for community-based projects.

#### **(i) Laziza Park**

One is Laziza Park which is located near Qobayat Street. It used to be a heritage building that was demolished for a real estate project that never happened. **GROBeirut** and **Umbrella Beirut** are community-led initiatives that have been squatting the private space since the October 17 protests. In addition to planting trees, they placed a few sofas, tables, and chairs for residents to use (Fig. 14). After the blast, young residents were spotted having morning coffee and hanging out at the park. They also placed a tent for NGOs working on repairs in the surrounding neighborhood to use (Fig. 15). However, the entrance to the park from the side is rocky and uneasy. The front entrance from where cars are parked is muddy and filled with rocks and waste, and there are further piles of waste around the lot, which discourages many residents from going in (Fig. 16). The founder of Umbrella Beirut told us that they try to keep it as clean as possible and they asked the municipality to remove the waste and rubble after the blast, but they have only done so once. Umbrella Beirut's upcoming plans are to expand the community garden and transform the other side of the lot, currently used by residents to park their cars, to a communal space where residents gather to garden and grow food. They also plan on hosting activities for children to encourage them to visit the green space more often. Support to this initiative would be certainly welcome, in addition to enabling connections with other NGOs that have good experience in activating communal spaces in creative ways such as **Embrace, Catalytic Action, Dar Onboz** or **Zouqaq**.

#### **(ii) A Community Center in a Heritage Building**

A second potential privately-owned site is a vacant heritage building on Salah Labaki Street (Fig. 17) which is privately owned by a landlord residing on its ground floor. The owner had plans prior to the blast to turn the building into a community space. He wanted to charge a small fee for food & beverage as well as internet. He also planned to turn the upper floor terrace into a green hang-out space. However, after the blast and in light of the ongoing economic crisis, his project seemed to have been dismissed. Yet, it may be interesting to explore this possibility again, with funders and NGOs.

#### **(iii) Garage Souk**

A third site is the parking lot located in front of Spoiler Center on Armenia Street which hosts a Garage Souk (Fig. 18) that allows people to buy, sell, swap or thrift products. This initiative has continued after the blast in the winter location (Fig. 19) (located on the ground floor of a residential building on Armenia Street), providing important support to the local community. Identifying the owner of the lot and exploring ways for supporting this initiative is important for the recovery of the neighborhood.



**Figure 11.** Broken stairs facing EDL. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.



**Figure 12.** Lebanese Red Cross in Train Station. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020





**Figure 13.** Municipality owned lot. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.



**Figure 14.** Sofas in Laziza Park. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.



**Figure 14.** Laziza Park overview. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.



**Figure 16.** Waste surrounding Laziza Park. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020





**Figure 15.** Privately-owned vacant heritage building on Salah Labaki Street. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.



**Figure 18.** Summer location of Garage Souk. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

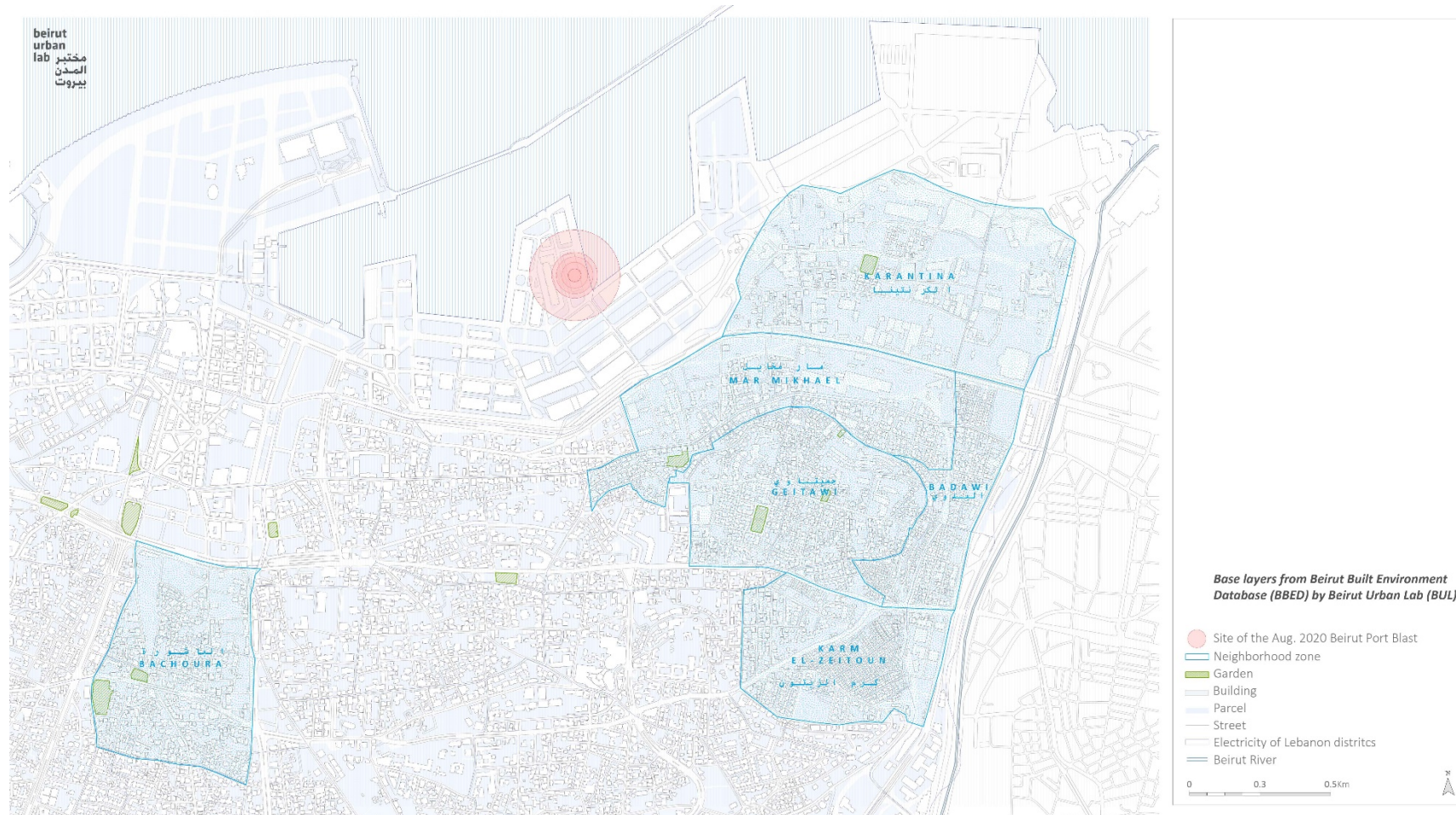


**Figure 16.** Winter Location of Garage Souk. Source: Luna Dayekh, 2020.

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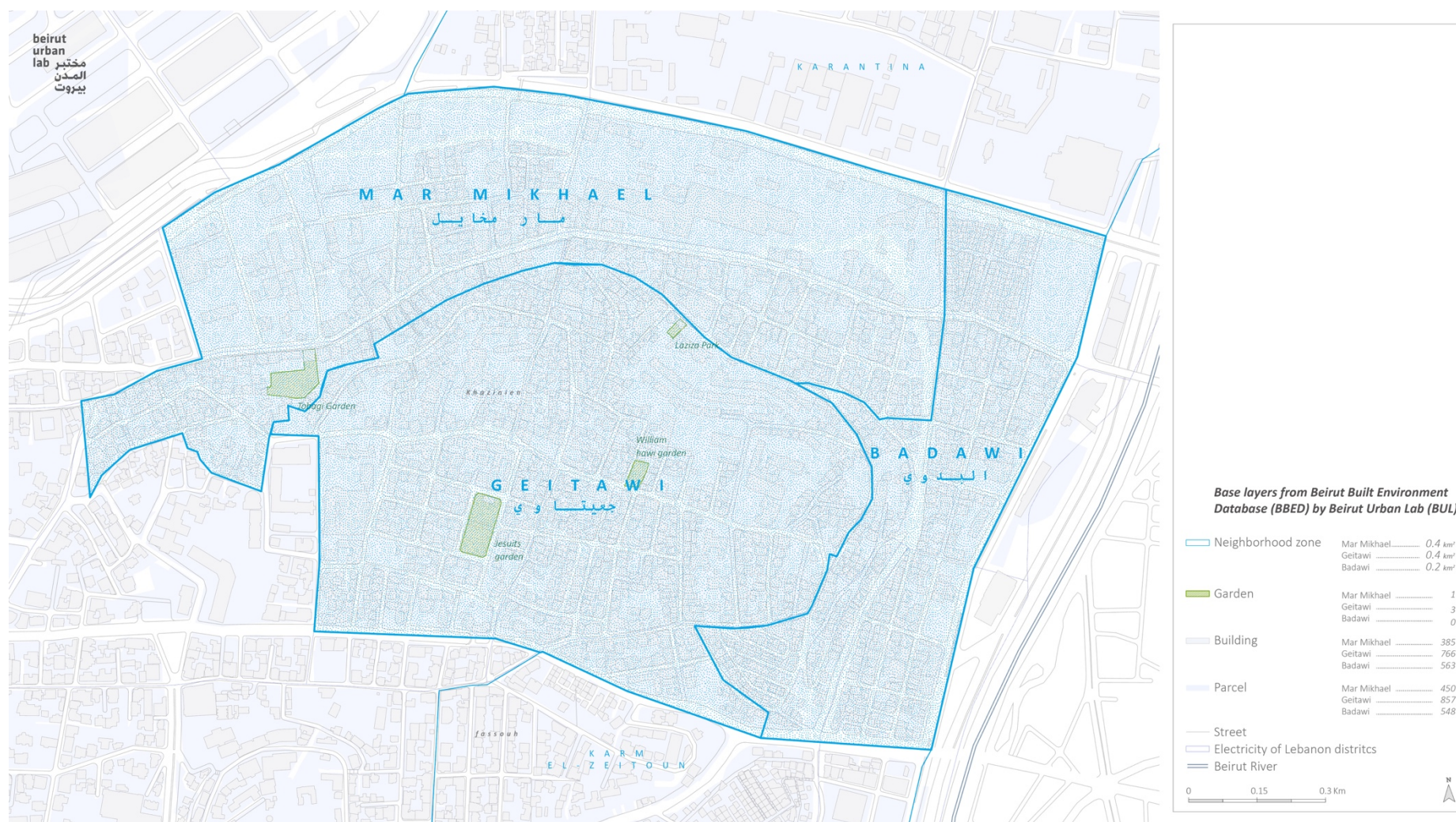


## V. ANNEX A



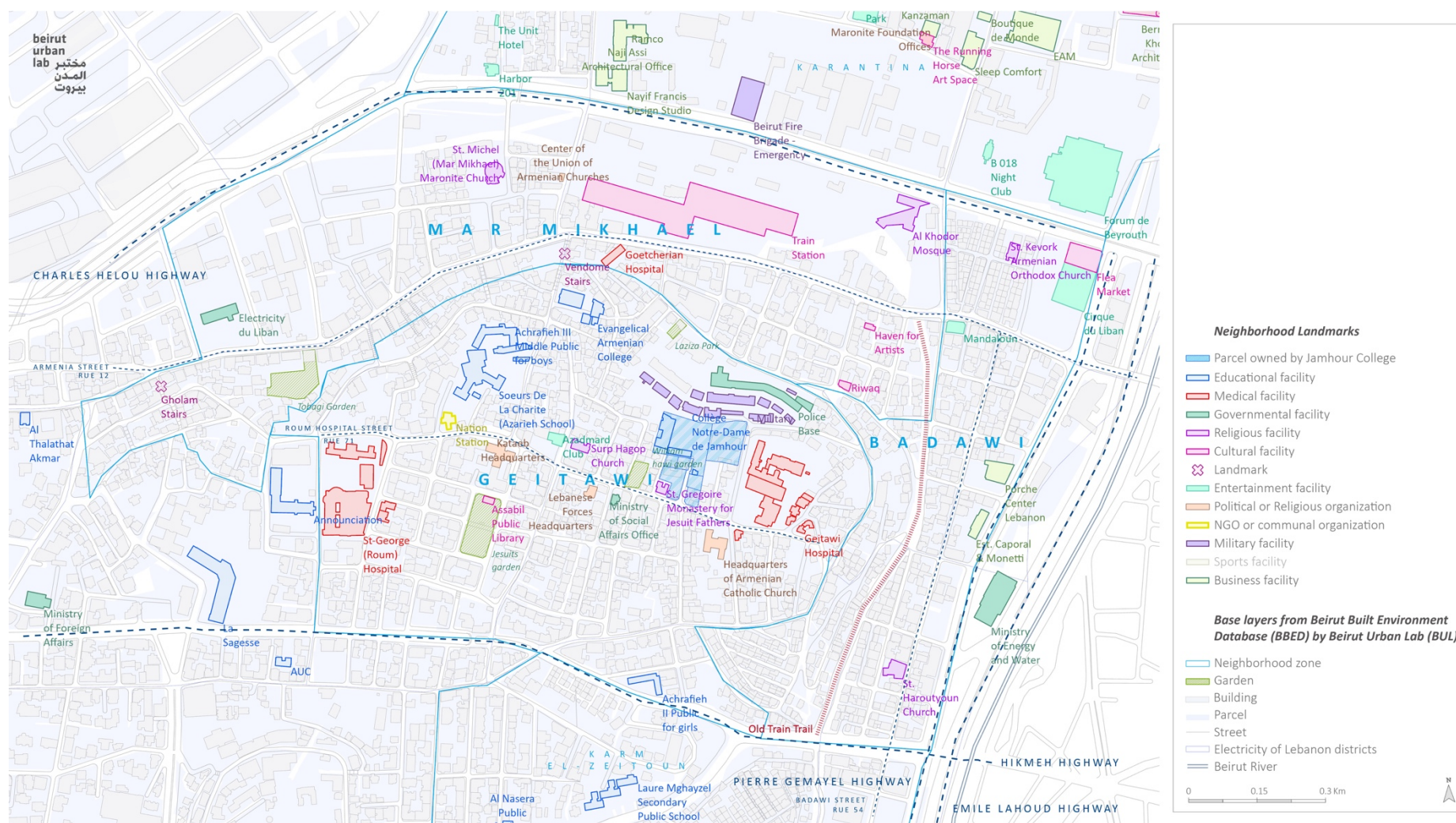
**Map 1:** Zone limits in all neighborhoods. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.





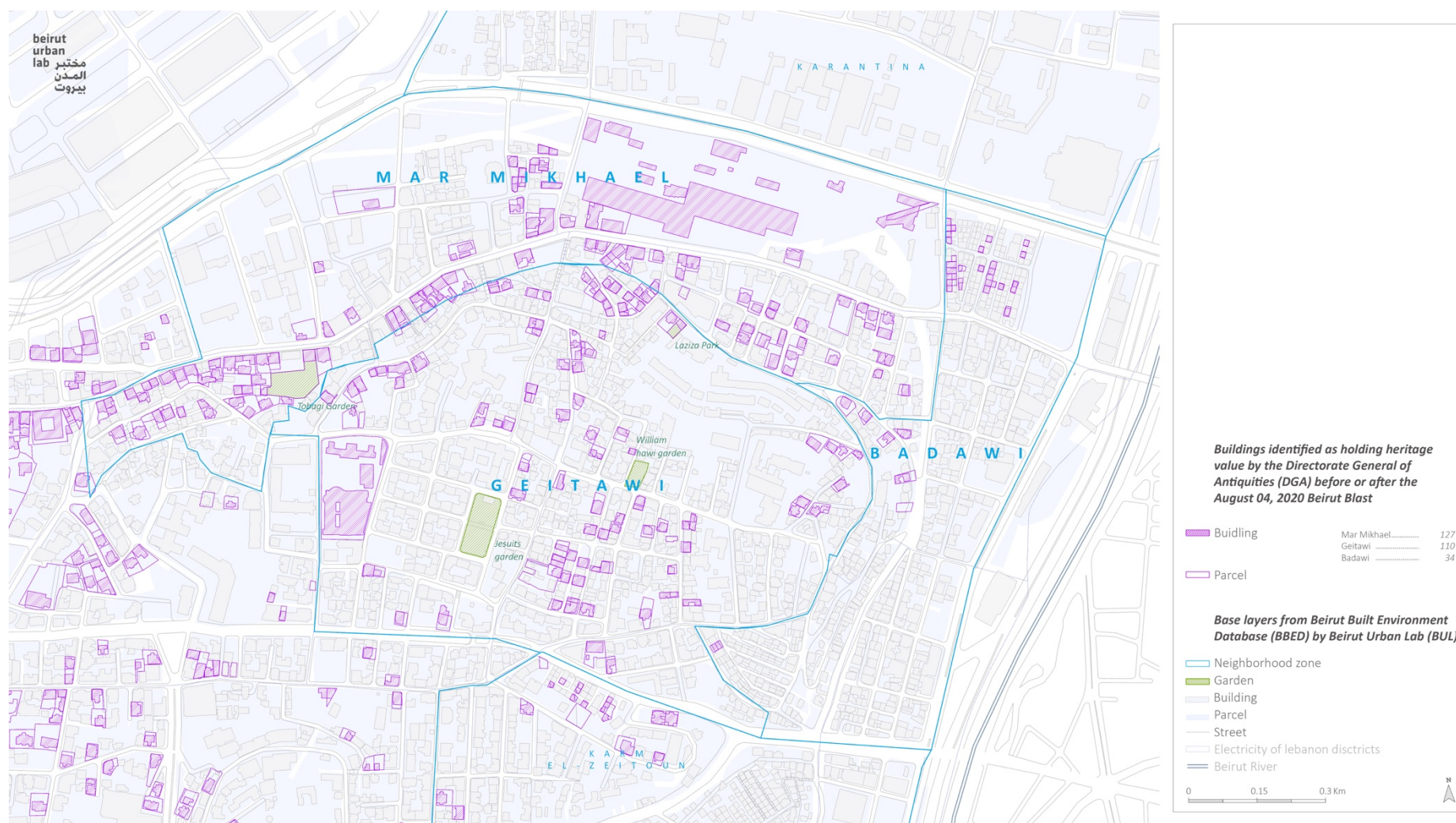
**Map 2:** Zone Limits in Mar Mikhael. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.





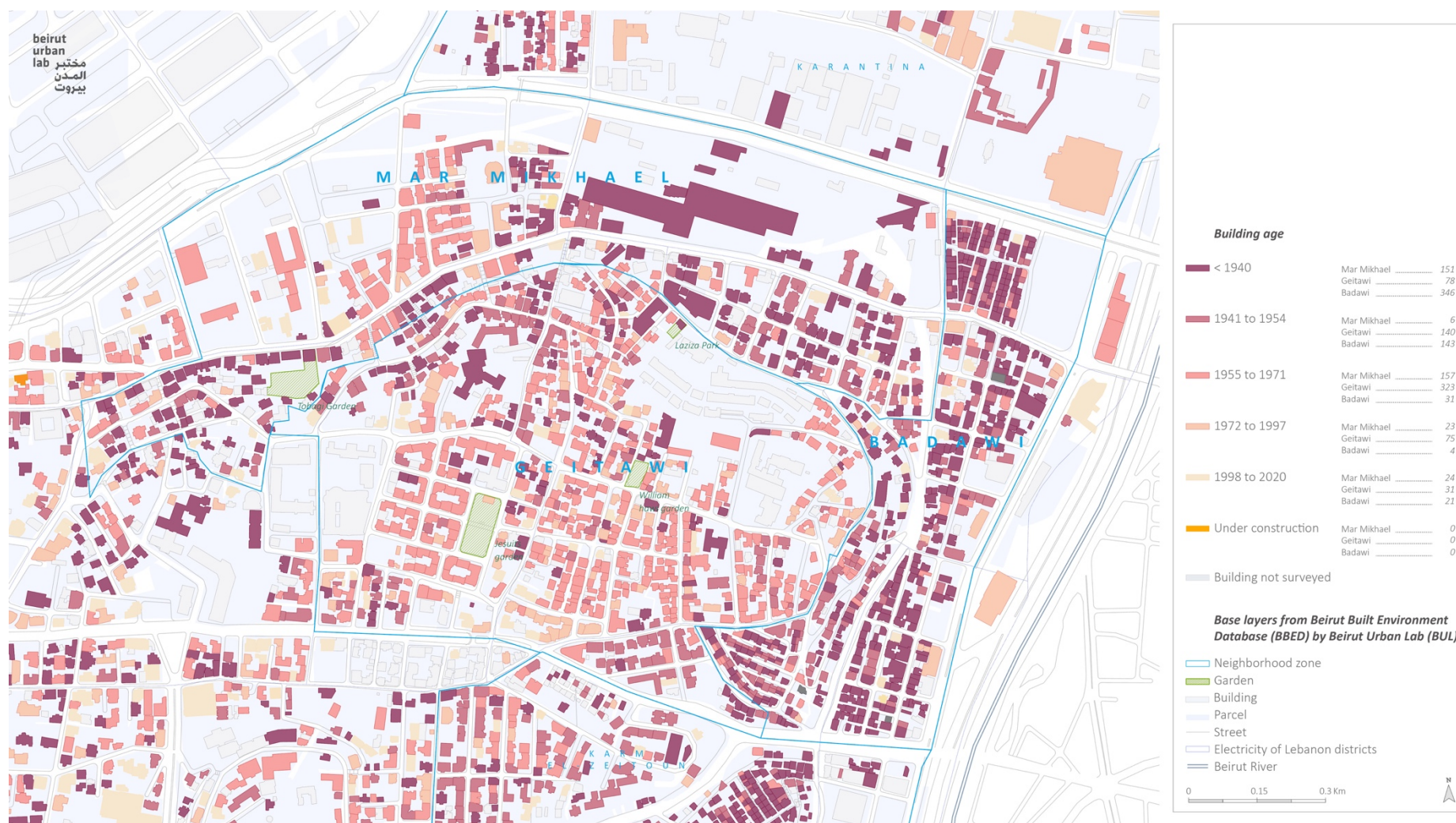
**Map 3:** Neighbourhood landmarks in Mar Mikhael. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.





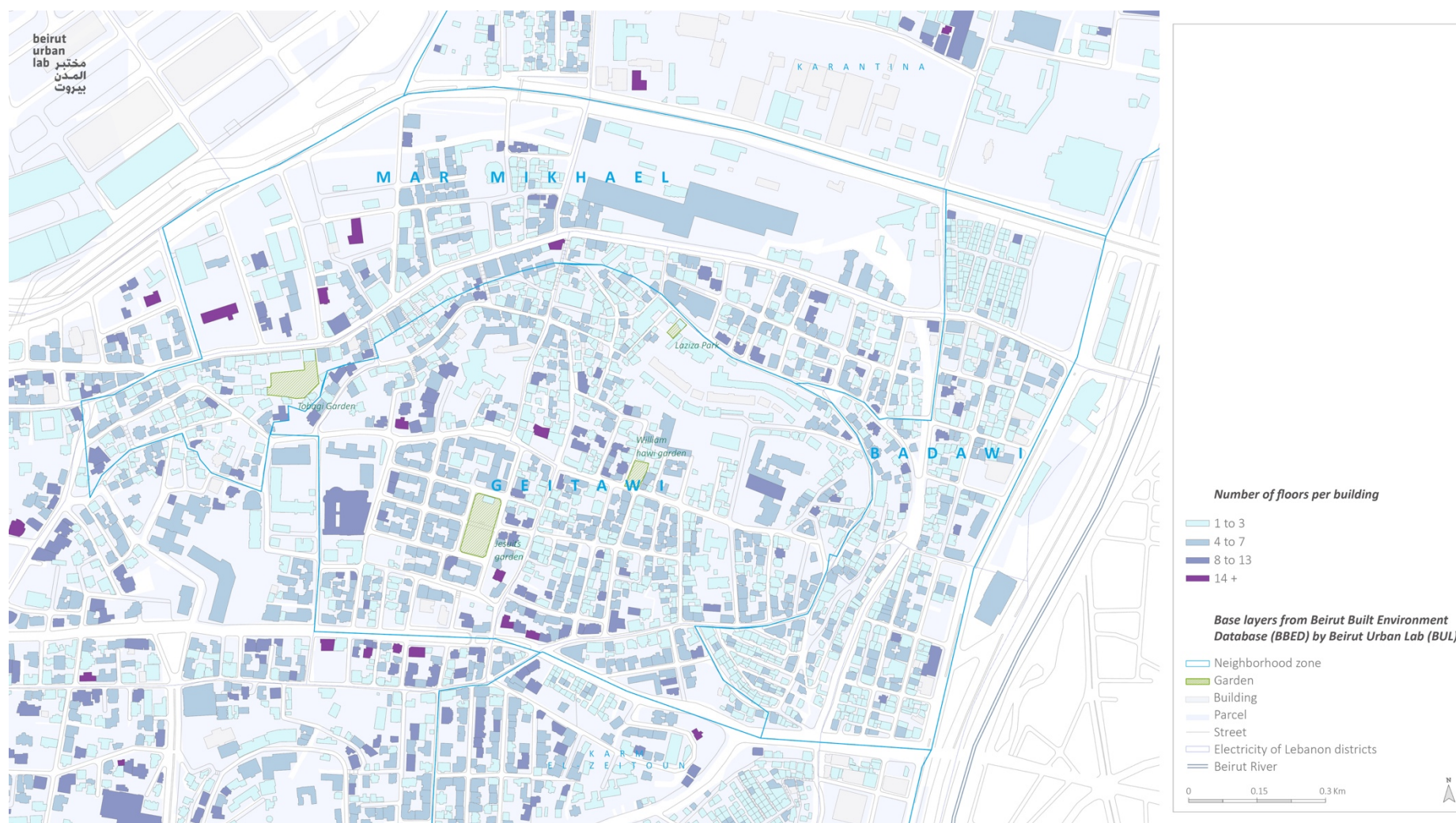
**Map 4:** Buildings identified as holding heritage value by the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) before or after the August 4, 2020 Beirut Blast.  
Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



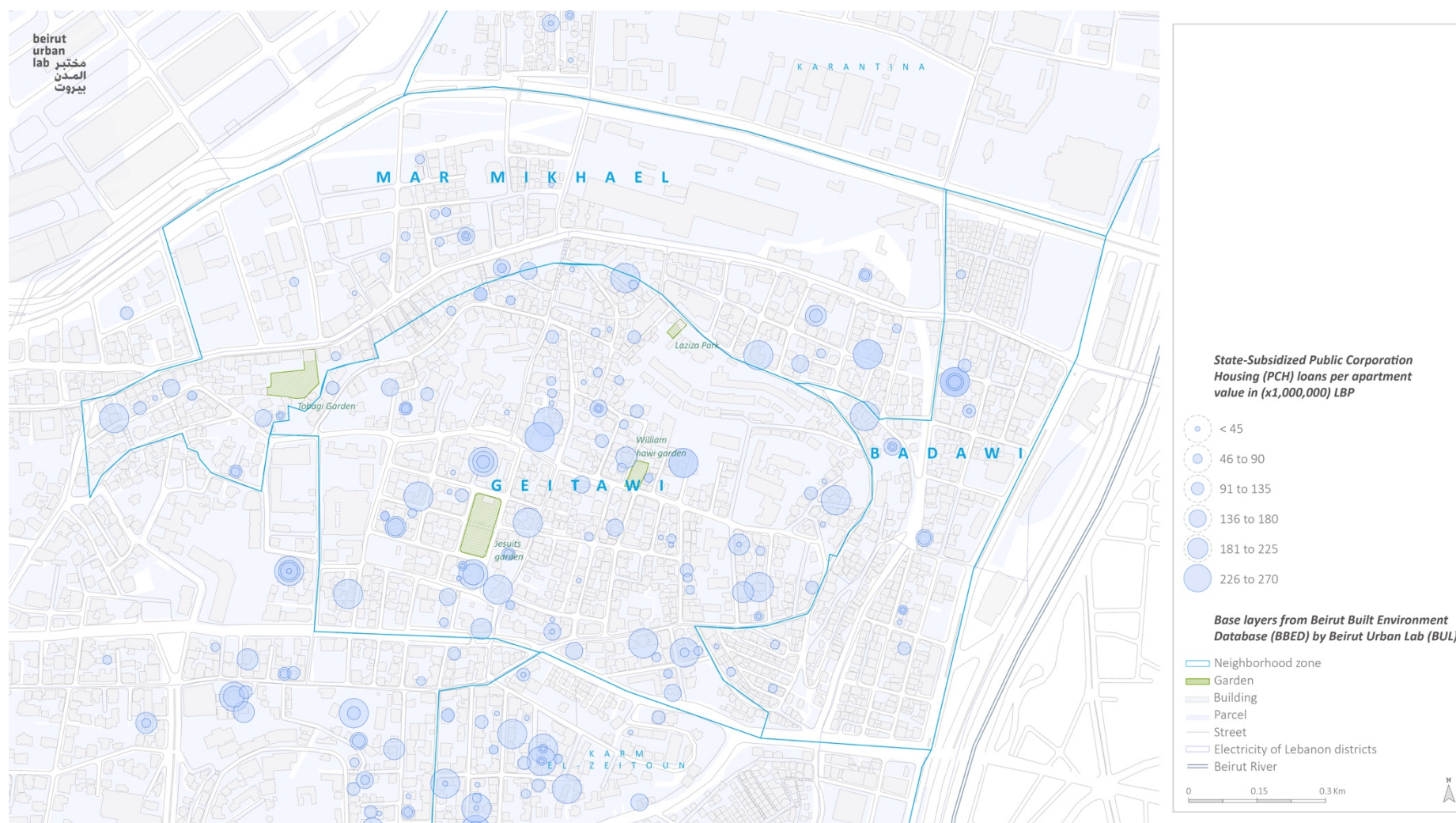


**Map 5:** Building age in Mar Mikhael. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



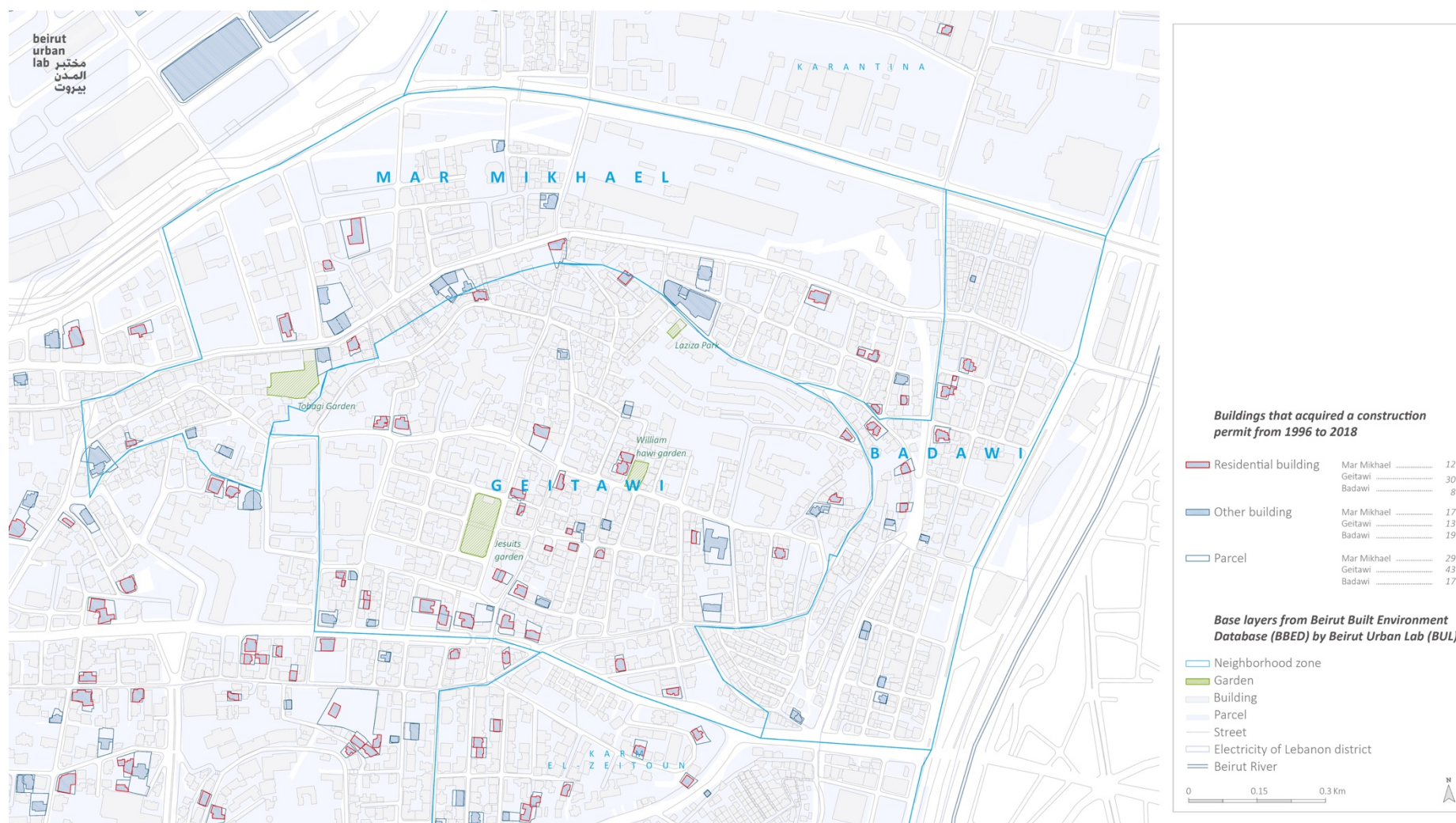


**Map 6:** Number of floors per building in Mar Mikhael. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



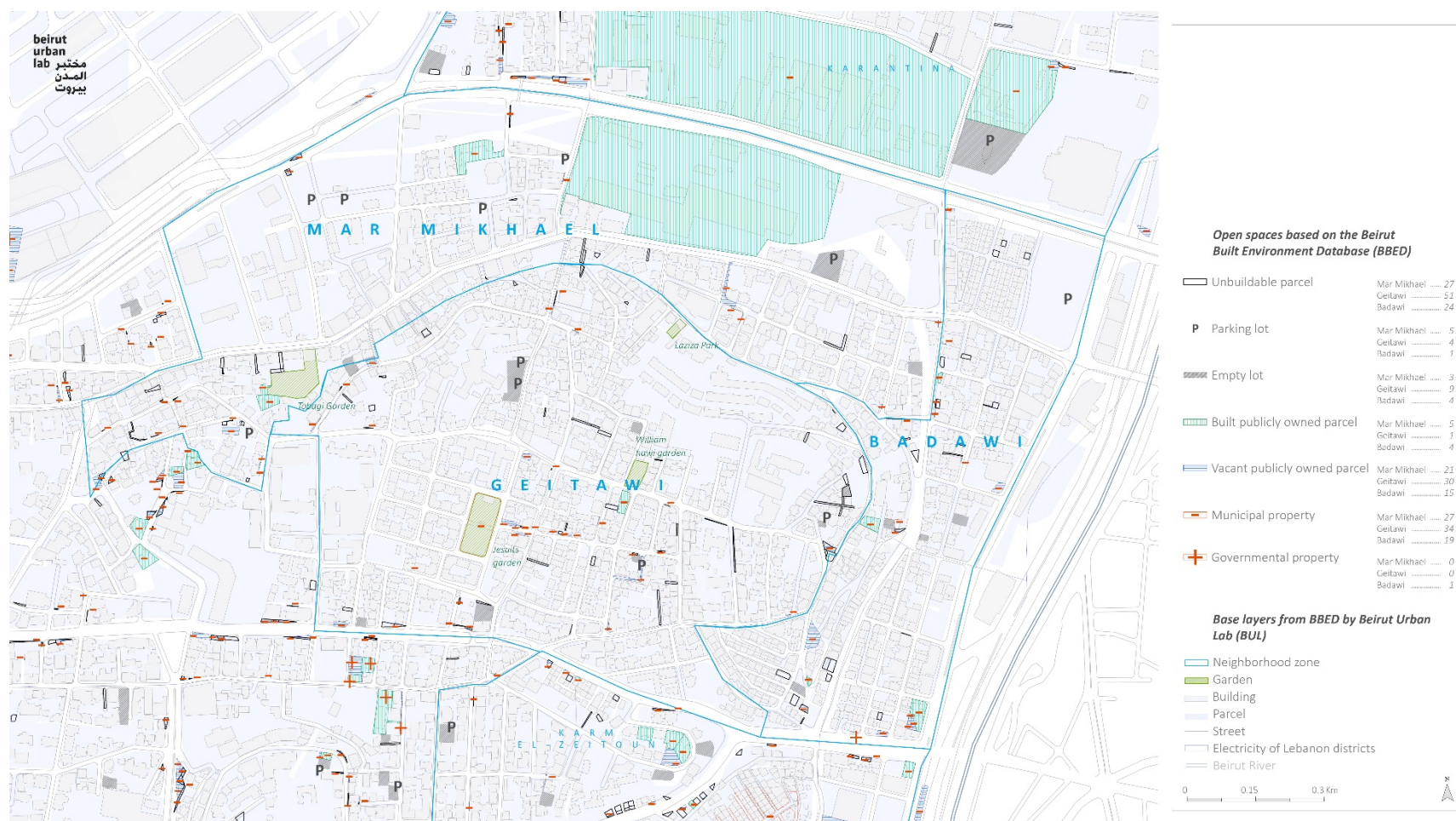
**Map 7:** State-subsidized Public Corporation of Housing (PCH) loans in Mar Mikhael. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



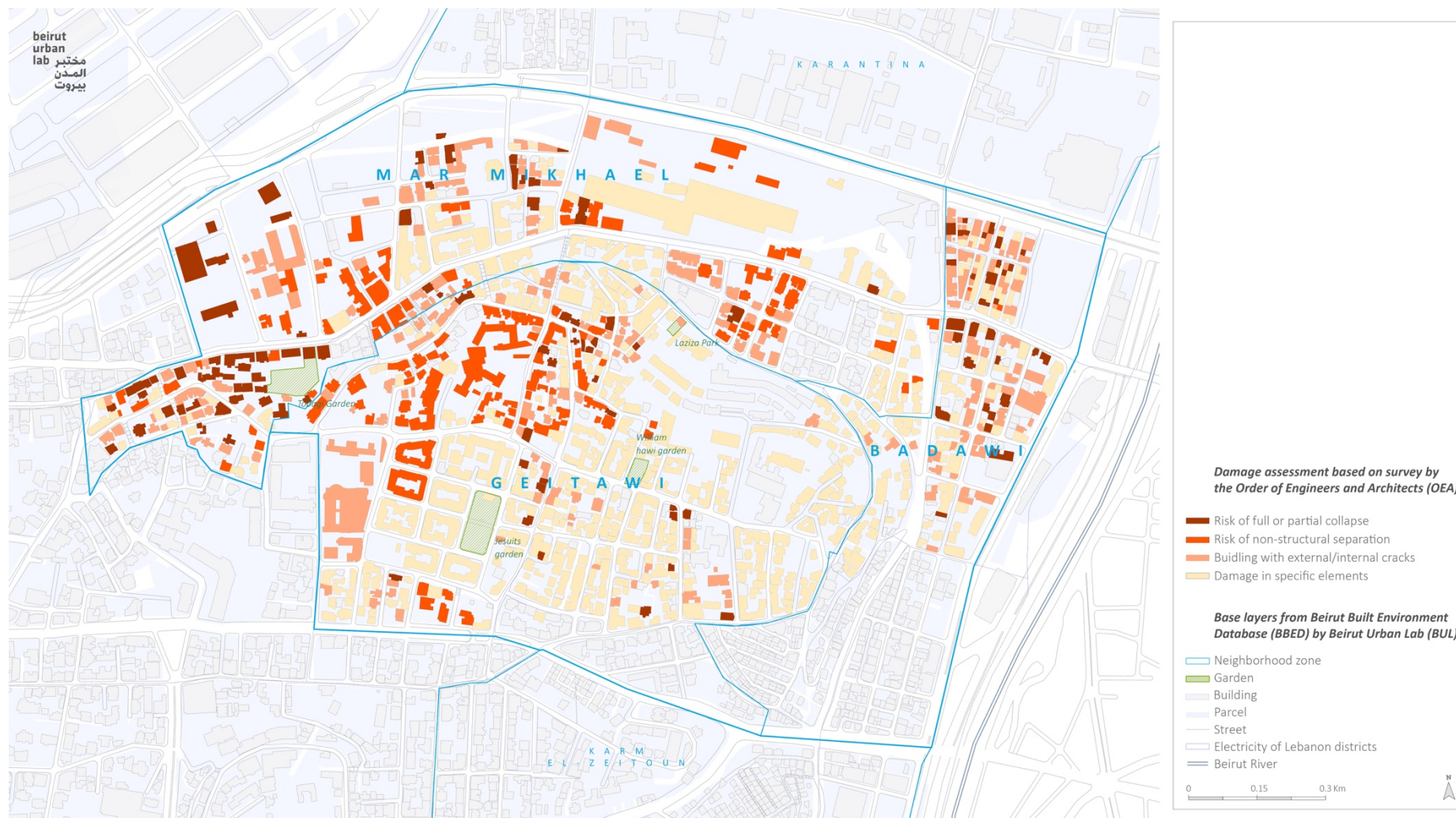


**Map 8:** Construction permits issued from 1996 to 2018. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.





**Map 9:** Open spaces in Mar Mikhael. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



**Map 10:** Damage Assessment in Mar Mikhael based on a survey by OEA. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.





## VI. ANNEX B

NAME OF ACTOR	TYPE OF ACTOR	TYPE OF ACTION	ZONE, (if specified) (MAR MIKHAEL ONLY)	ACTIVE (AS OF NOV. 2020)
1. Aa' Stouh Beirut	Local NGO	Shelter, Health	11 and 24	Yes
2. ACTED	International NGO	Food security and rehabilitation	10 and 11	Yes
3. ADRA Lebanon	International NGO	Food security, cash assistance for shelter	MM	Yes
4. AGBU (Armenian General Benevolent Union)	International (Faith-based)	Reconstruction	11 and 24	Yes
5. ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid)	International NGO	Shelter and health	24 and 39	Yes
6. Arcenciel	Local NGO	Shelter, food security, medicine	MM	Yes
7. AVSI (AssociaZone Volontari per il Servizio Intl)	International NGO	Shelter	24	N/A
8. Bab w Shebbak	Local NGO	Shelter	39 and 24	Yes
9. Basmeh & Zeitooneh	Local NGO	Rehabilitation	MM	Yes
10. Bassma	Local NGO	Renovations, appliances and furniture, psychological support, food security	MM	N/A
11. Beit El Baraka	Local NGO	Rehabilitation of businesses	MM	Yes



12. Berrad El Hay	Local NGO	Food security, daily meals, assistance to residents (located at the St. Michel Maronite church)	MM	Yes
13. 50 Best Discovery	Diaspora	Repairs some restaurants/bars in the neighborhood	MM	N/A
14. CARE	International NGO	Food Security	11	Yes
15. Caritas	International (Faith-based)	Shelter, food Security, medicine	10	Yes
16. Concern Worldwide	International NGO	Protection	24	Yes
17. DOMUS	International NGO (Faith-based)	Rehabilitation, cash assistance, legal assistance to parish	MM	Yes
18. Dorcas	International NGO (Faith-based)	Food security	11	N/A
19. DPNA	Local NGO	WASH, Food security	11, 24 and 39	Yes
20. Farah Social Foundation	Local NGO	Food security	11, 24 and 39	N/A
21. Ground 0	Local NGO (Political affiliation)	Shelter, Food Security	24	Yes
22. INARA	Local NGO	WASH	11	N/A
23. Intersos	International NGO	Shelter	24	Yes
24. IRC	International NGO	Food security	11, 24 and 39	Yes
25. Leb Relief	Local NGO	Shelter and WASH	10 and 24	N/A
26. Lebanese Army, FER (Forward Emergency Room)	Governmental	Cash distribution, coordination, assessments	MM	Yes

<b>27.</b> Lebanese Red Cross	International NGO with local headquarters	Shelter	10 and 11	Yes
<b>28.</b> Lebanon of Tomorrow	Local NGO	Shelter	24	N/A
<b>29.</b> Live Love Beirut	Local NGO	Shelter	11	N/A
<b>30.</b> LSESD (Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development)	Local NGO	Food security	39	N/A
<b>31.</b> MEDAIR	International NGO	Shelter	39 and 24	Yes
<b>32.</b> MERATH	Local NGO (Faith-based)	Food security	39	N/A
<b>33.</b> MSF	International NGO	Health	MM	Yes
<b>34.</b> MSFEA Post-Disaster Building Structure Safety	University	Building structure assessment	MM	No
<b>35.</b> Neo Leaders	International NGO (Faith-based)	Shelter	24	N/A
<b>36.</b> Nusaned	Local NGO	Reconstruction, food security, hygiene, set up an office in Zone 10	10, 11, 24 and 39 and based on hotline	Yes

<b>37. OCHA</b>	UN Agency	Coordination	MM	Yes
<b>38. OEA</b>	Professional Syndicate	Assessment	MM	Yes
<b>39. Offre Joie</b>	Local NGO	Reconstruction	11 (Rabbat Street)	Yes
<b>40. PARCiC</b>	International NGO	Food security, shelter, hygiene	MM	N/A
<b>41. Public Works</b>	Private Sector	Legal assistance in case of eviction, neighborhood meetings	MM	Yes
<b>42. Save the Children</b>	International NGO	Shelter	11, 24 and 39	Yes
<b>43. Shift Social Innovation Hub</b>	Local NGO	Psychological aid, cash assistance, technical support (electricity), mapping	MM	Yes
<b>44. Solidarity</b>	International NGO	Shelter	24	Yes
<b>45. Son of Man</b>	Local NGO (Faith-based)	Shelter	24, 11	Yes
<b>46. SoS Lebanon</b>	International NGO	Cash assistance and education support	MM	Yes
<b>47. Souk El Tayeb</b>	Private sector	Food distribution and communal kitchen "Matbakh El Ness" on Armenia Street	MM	Yes
<b>48. St. Michel Maronite Church Parish</b>	Religious institution	List of names, referrals, assistance and help to parish	MM	Yes
<b>49. Tamanna</b>	Local NGO	Reconstruction, food security, psycho-social support, physiotherapy, medication, elderly assistance	MM	N/A

<b>50.</b> Um-Al Fadi	Local NGO	Internal repairs, home appliances, cash assistance	MM	Yes
<b>51.</b> UNDP	UN Agency	Food security	24	Yes
<b>52.</b> UNICEF	UN Agency	WASH, shelter	10, 11, 24 and 39	Yes
<b>53.</b> WHO	UN Agency	Health	24	N/A
<b>54.</b> World Food Program	UN Agency	Food security	11	N/A
<b>55.</b> World Vision	International NGO (Faith-based)	Food security, shelter, protection	10, 24 and 39	Yes
<b>56.</b> WPF (World Patriarchal Maronite Foundation for Integral Development)	International NGO (Faith-based)	Reconstruction and food security	11 (Pharaon Street)	Yes
<b>57.</b> شركات ابنية جمعية المصارف (Building Company of Association of Banks)	Private Sector	Shelter	24	N/A



<b>58.</b> أبرشية بيروت المارونية - راعوية (المراة (The Maronite Diocese of Beirut - Pastoral Care of Women)	Local NGO (Faith-based)	Psychological support	MM	Yes
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