

## LEBANON THIS WEEK

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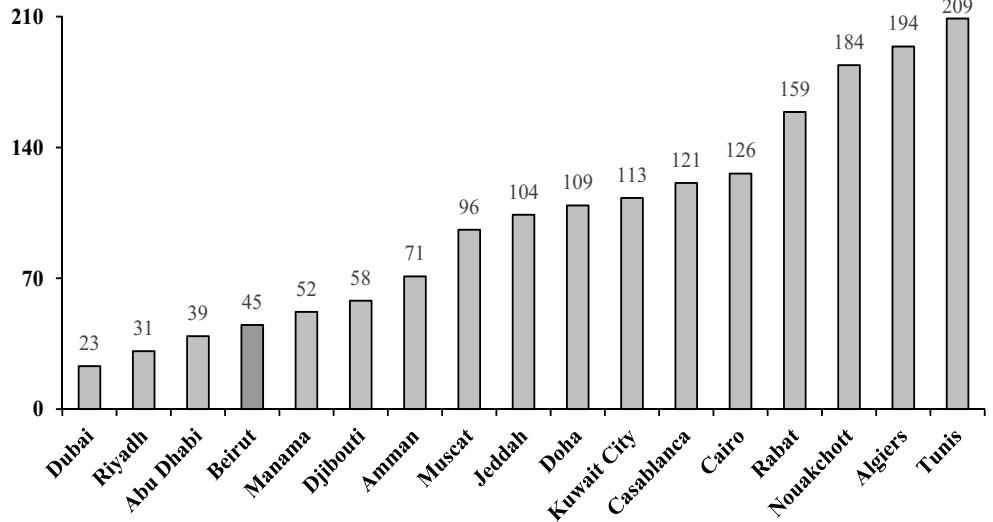
Byblos Bank noteholders approve repurchase of notes due in 2021

Eight Lebanese universities among 1000 ranked universities worldwide

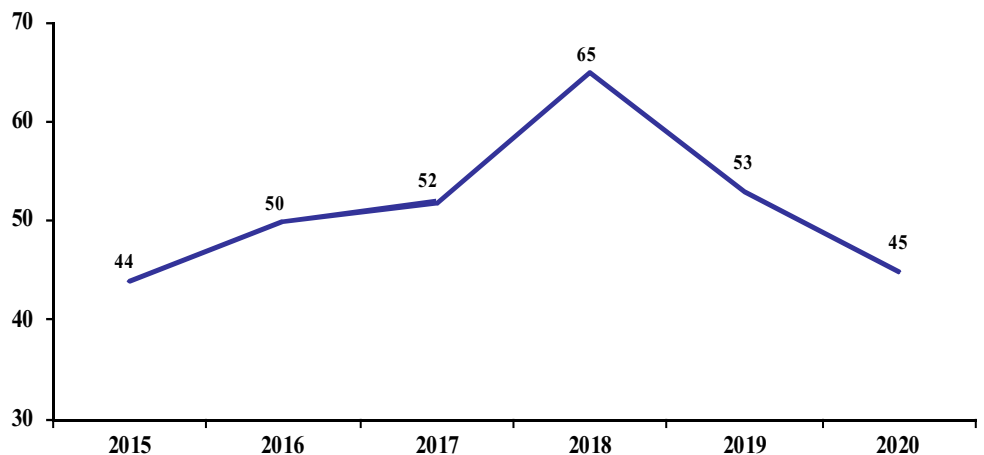
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### Charts of the Week

Rank of Arab Cities on Cost of living Index in 2020\*



Rank of Beirut on Cost of Living Index\*



\*rank out of 209 cities worldwide; higher rank reflects a more expensive cost of living  
Source: Mercer, Byblos Bank

### Quote to Note

"Not all of the economic slowdown in Lebanon between 2010 and 2018 can be attributed to the Syrian conflict."

*The World Bank, on the domestic and other factors that contributed to the slowdown in economic activity during the covered period*

### Number of the Week

**90.6%:** Percentage of Lebanese who think that economic conditions in the country will be worse off in October 2020 than they were last April, according to the April 2020 survey of the Byblos Bank/AUB Consumer Confidence Index

## Lebanon in the News

\$m (unless otherwise mentioned)	2019	Jan-Mar 2019	Jan-Mar 2020	% Change*	Mar-19	Feb-20	Mar-20
Exports	3,731	856	914	6.8	320	343	238
Imports	19,239	4,949	2,931	(40.8)	2,181	951	826
Trade Balance	(15,508)	(4,093)	(2,017)	(50.7)	(1,861)	(608)	(589)
Balance of Payments	(5,851)	(2,005)	(1,062)	(47.0)	(75)	(347)	(557)
Checks Cleared in LBP	22,146	5,475	5,645	3.1	1,837	2,221	1,144
Checks Cleared in FC	34,827	9,347	10,432	11.6	3,230	3,611	2,409
Total Checks Cleared	56,973	14,822	16,077	8.5	5,067	5,832	3,553
Fiscal Deficit/Surplus	(5,837)	(969)	(1,655)	70.9	(311)	(487)	(498)
Primary Balance	(287)	30	(676)	-	119	(211)	(138)
Airport Passengers	8,684,937	1,749,693	1,165,094	(33.4)	618,617	454,841	187,570
Consumer Price Index	2.9	3.5	13	948bps	4.1	11.4	17.5

\$bn (unless otherwise mentioned)	Dec-18	Mar-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	% Change*
BdL FX Reserves	32.51	31.09	29.55	28.96	28.34	28.23	(9.2)
In months of Imports	20.72	14.26	21.95	30.45	29.80	34.17	139.6
Public Debt	85.14	86.22	91.64	91.99	92.24	92.40	7.2
Bank Assets	249.48	252.75	216.78**	213.80	210.34	208.55	(17.5)
Bank Deposits (Private Sector)	174.28	172.52	158.86	155.10	151.71	149.59	(13.3)
Bank Loans to Private Sector	59.39	57.33	49.77	47.91	46.08	45.02	(21.5)
Money Supply M2	50.96	50.40	42.11	40.82	39.59	39.60	(21.4)
Money Supply M3	141.29	140.20	134.55	132.56	130.95	130.34	(7.0)
LBP Lending Rate (%)	9.97	10.58	9.09	9.86	9.33	9.41	(117bps)
LBP Deposit Rate (%)	8.30	8.75	7.36	6.62	5.81	5.13	(362bps)
USD Lending Rate (%)	8.57	9.31	10.84	10.07	9.11	8.55	(76bps)
USD Deposit Rate (%)	5.15	5.69	4.62	4.00	3.22	2.53	(316bps)

\*year-on-year \*\*The decline in assets in December 2019 is mainly due to the "netting" on the assets and liabilities' sides of the consolidated balance sheet of commercial banks as part of the implementation of international accounting standard IFRS 7

Source: Association of Banks in Lebanon, Banque du Liban, Ministry of Finance, Central Administration of Statistics, Byblos Research

## Capital Markets

Most Traded Stocks on BSE	Last Price (\$)	% Change*	Total Volume	Weight in Market Capitalization
Solidere "A"	11.99	9.20	591,887	18.66%
Solidere "B"	12.00	10.29	111,641	12.14%
BLOM Listed	4.62	32.38	9,000	15.46%
Audi Listed	0.97	(3.00)	7,511	8.89%
HOLCIM	10.46	2.55	1,739	3.18%
Audi GDR	1.39	0.00	-	2.59%
BLOM GDR	3.50	0.00	-	4.03%
Byblos Common	0.60	0.00	-	5.28%
Byblos Pref. 08	49.95	0.00	-	1.56%
Byblos Pref. 09	52.75	0.00	-	1.64%

Source: Beirut Stock Exchange (BSE); \*week-on-week

Sovereign Eurobonds	Coupon %	Mid Price \$	Mid Yield %
Apr 2021	8.25	19.38	355.86
Oct 2022	6.10	18.88	88.26
Jan 2023	6.00	19.25	74.75
Jun 2025	6.25	18.75	36.69
Nov 2026	6.60	18.75	27.81
Feb 2030	6.65	17.63	18.77
Apr 2031	7.00	18.63	16.14
May 2033	8.20	17.00	14.22
Nov 2035	7.05	19.00	11.11
Mar 2037	7.25	20.25	9.77

Source: Byblos Bank Capital Markets, Refinitiv

	June 15-19	June 8-12	% Change	May 2020	May 2019	% Change
Total shares traded	721,818	1,124,418	(35.8)	6,731,749	2,118,259	217.8
Total value traded	\$8,107,021	\$3,221,628	151.6	\$27,765,737	\$11,598,740	139.4
Market capitalization	\$6.42bn	\$6.01bn	6.8	\$5.98bn	\$8.51bn	(29.8)

Source: Beirut Stock Exchange (BSE)

CDS Lebanon	Mar 20, 2020	June 12, 2020	% Change
CDS 1-year*	24,762	0	-
CDS 3-year*	17,668	0	-
CDS 5-year*	14,717	0	-

Source: ICE CMA; \*mid-spread in bps

CDX EM 30*	June 12, 2020	June 19, 2020	% Change***
CDS 5-year**	250.00	170.69	(31.7)

Source: ICE CMA; \* CDX Emerging Market CDS Index-Series 30  
\*\*mid-spread in bps \*\*\*week-on-week

### Foreign direct investments down 16% to \$2.2bn in 2019, equivalent to 4.3% of GDP

Figures released by Banque du Liban and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) show that foreign direct investments (FDI) in Lebanon totaled \$2.22bn in 2019, constituting a decline of 16.2% from \$2.65bn in 2018. In comparison, FDI inflows to Arab economies grew by 2.5% year-on-year, while FDI inflows to West Asia decreased by 7.2% in 2019.

The FDI figures for Lebanon are based on the official figures issued by Banque du Liban (BdL). According to BdL's methodology, the sources of FDI figures in Lebanon consist of public sector data, various indicators that estimate non-resident real estate investments, banking sector statistics, as well as statistics from administrative records on the acquisition of real estate by foreigners.

FDI inflows to Lebanon in 2019 were 21.2% lower than the annual average flows of \$2.82bn during the 2010-18 period, and came 49.2% below the peak of \$4.38bn posted in 2009. Lebanon was the fifth largest recipient of FDI among 18 Arab countries and among 12 countries in West Asia in 2019. Also, it was the 66<sup>th</sup> largest FDI recipient globally among 140 economies with a nominal GDP of \$10bn or more. FDI inflows to Lebanon accounted for 6.5% of total FDI in Arab countries last year relative to a share of 7.9% in 2018. They also represented 7.9% of FDI flows to West Asia in 2019 compared to a share of 8.8% in the previous year.

Further, FDI inflows to Lebanon were equivalent to 4.3% of GDP in 2019, down from 4.8% of GDP in 2018, and compared to a peak of 15.5% of GDP in 2005. FDI inflows to Lebanon were the third highest in the Arab world in 2019, behind only Mauritania (15.7% of GDP) and Djibouti (5.7% of GDP). Also, FDI inflows to Lebanon as a percentage of GDP were the 24<sup>th</sup> highest in 2019 among 131 countries with positive FDI inflows and a nominal GDP of \$10bn or more.

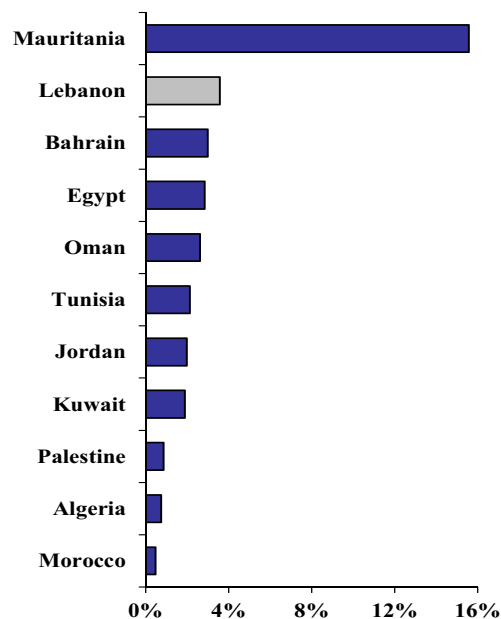
In parallel, FDI outflows from Lebanon totaled \$354m in 2019, constituting a decrease of 42.1% from \$611m in 2018, and compared to an annual average of \$1.03bn during the 2010-18 period and to a peak of \$2bn registered in 2013. Lebanon was the seventh largest source of FDI outflows among 17 Arab countries with available figures and the sixth largest among West Asian countries in 2019. As such, net FDI flows to Lebanon reached \$1.87bn in 2019, the fourth highest level in the Arab world, constituting a decline of 8.5% from \$2.04bn in 2018 and compared to a peak of \$3.25bn in 2009. Net FDI flows to Lebanon were equivalent to 3.6% of GDP in 2019 relative to 3.7% of GDP in 2018.

### Foreign Direct Investment in Arab Countries (\$m)

Country	2019	2018	Change (%)
UAE	13,787	10,385	32.8
Egypt	9,010	8,141	10.7
Saudi Arabia	4,562	4,247	7.4
Oman	3,125	4,191	(25.4)
<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>2,223</b>	<b>2,654</b>	<b>(16.2)</b>
Morocco	1,599	3,559	(55.1)
Algeria	1,382	1,466	(5.7)
Bahrain	942	1,654	(43.0)
Jordan	916	955	(4.1)
Mauritania	885	773	14.5
Tunisia	845	1,036	(18.4)
Sudan	825	1,136	(27.4)
Djibouti	182	170	7.1
Palestine	176	252	(30.2)
Kuwait	104	204	(49.0)
Yemen	(371)	(282)	31.6
Qatar	(2,813)	(2,186)	28.7
Iraq	(3,076)	(4,885)	(37.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,303</b>	<b>33,470</b>	<b>2.5</b>

Source: Banque du Liban, UNCTAD, Byblos Research

### Net FDI inflows to Arab Countries in 2019 (% of GDP)



Source: Banque du Liban, UNCTAD, IIF, IMF, Byblos Research

### Banque du Liban's foreign assets at \$33.1bn, gold reserves at \$15.8bn at mid-June 2020

Banque du Liban's (BdL) interim balance sheet totaled \$150.7bn on June 15, 2020, nearly unchanged from the end of May 2020, and constituting an increase of 6.6% from \$141.4bn at the end of 2019.

Assets in foreign currency reached \$33.1bn at mid-June 2020, constituting a decline of 1.2% from \$33.5bn at the end of May and a decrease of 11.2% from \$37.3bn at end-2019. They included \$5.03bn in Lebanese Eurobonds at mid-June 2020, unchanged since end-March, and relative to \$5.7bn at the end of 2019.

BdL's assets in foreign currency, excluding Lebanese Eurobonds, reached \$28.1bn at mid-June 2020, constituting a decrease of \$414m from the end of May 2020. They declined by \$613.3m in January 2020, by \$684.6m in February, by \$67m in March, by \$812m in April, and by \$907m in May, resulting in a cumulative drop of \$3.5bn in the year to mid-June 2020. They also fell by \$7.4bn between the end of August 2019 and mid-June 2020.

The decline in BdL's assets in foreign currency, excluding Lebanese Eurobonds, is largely due to the fact that BdL has paid, at the request of the government, maturing Eurobonds and external debt servicing until early March 2020, to deposit outflows, as well as to the financing of the imports of hydrocarbons, wheat and medicine and, more recently, to BdL's intervention in the currency market. BdL's assets in foreign currency, including Lebanese Eurobonds, decreased by \$4.2bn since the start of 2020 and by \$5.6bn between the end of August 2019 and mid-June 2020.

In addition, the value of BdL's gold reserves reached \$15.8bn at mid-June 2020, constituting a decline of 0.5% from end-May 2020 and an increase of 13.6% from \$13.9bn at end-2019. The value of gold reserves reached a peak of \$16.7bn at the end of August 2011. Also, the securities portfolio of BdL totaled \$38.6bn at mid-June 2020, nearly unchanged from end-May 2020, and constituting an increase of 1.7% from the end of 2019. In addition, loans to the local financial sector regressed by 1.6% from end-2019 to \$14.7bn at mid-June 2020. Further, deposits of the financial sector reached \$111.6bn at mid-June 2020, constituting a decline of \$456m from end-2019. Also, public sector deposits at BdL totaled \$4.8bn at mid-June 2020 and regressed by \$619.5m from end-2019.

### Government to face difficulties in reaching deal with IMF

Global investment bank JPMorgan Chase expected economic activity in Lebanon to contract by 14% in 2020 and by 4% in 2021, following contractions of 6.9% in 2019 and 1.9% in 2018. It attributed the contraction in GDP this year to the prolonged debt and banking crisis, months of protests and political standstill, as well as to the outbreak of the coronavirus, which weighed on the tourism and hospitality sector that is crucial to the Lebanese economy. It considered that the short-term outlook is extremely challenging, given the large losses and the significant deleveraging in the economy, as well as the rising unemployment rate and high probability of additional political volatility.

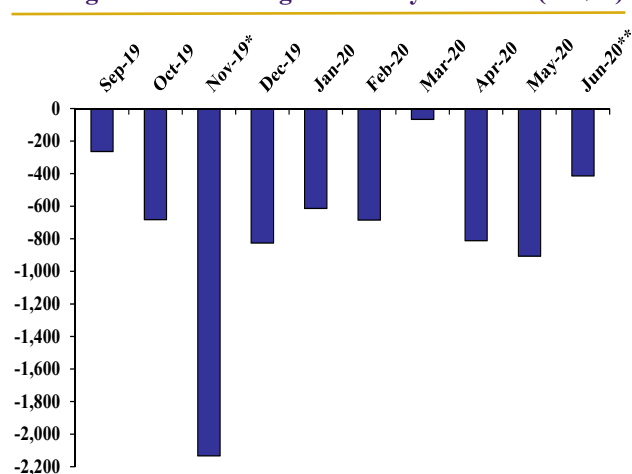
Further, it did not anticipate the government to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund any time soon, amid the prevailing uncertainties related to the debt restructuring plan, the differences in the timeline of fiscal reforms, the scope of structural reforms in the government's Financial Recovery Plan, as well as political issues.

In parallel, it projected the fiscal deficit to narrow from 11.1% of GDP in 2019 to 9.2% of GDP this year, partly due to Banque du Liban's (BdL) decision to repay the Ministry of Finance interest payments on its holdings of debt-denominated in Lebanese pounds. However, it expected the government's revenues to decline significantly as a result of high uncertainties and the coronavirus pandemic. It added that the fiscal outlook is uncertain given the impact of the pandemic, the collapse in economic activity, and the debt restructuring.

Moreover, it forecast the current account deficit to narrow from 23.4% of GDP in 2019 to 11.6% of GDP in 2020, supported by the decline in imports and low global oil prices. However, it indicated that the pandemic is weighing on tourism receipts and remittance inflows to Lebanon.

Further, it expected pressures on the Lebanese pound and foreign currency reserves to persist, as BdL's liquid foreign currency reserves declined to about \$20bn, equivalent to around 12 months of imports cover. It predicted that authorities will officially devalue the Lebanese pound by the end of this year or in early 2021, given the rising spread between the Lebanese pound's official exchange rate against the US dollar and the rate on the black market.

### Change in Gross Foreign Currency Reserves (US\$m)



\*BdL paid \$2.1bn in external public debt servicing in November  
\*\*as of mid-June

Source: Banque du Liban



### Consumer Price Index up 29% in first five months of 2020

The Central Administration of Statistics' Consumer Price Index increased by 28.6% in the first five months of 2020, compared to a growth of 3.6% in the same period of 2019. Also, the CPI expanded by 56.5% in May 2020 from the same month of 2019, the highest increase since December 2008. The cumulative surge in inflation in the first five months of 2020 is due in part to the deterioration of the Lebanese pound's exchange rate on the parallel market that encouraged opportunistic wholesalers and retailers to raise consumer prices disproportionately. It also reflects the authorities' inability to monitor and to contain the price hikes.

The CAS claimed that it has faced challenges in data collection since March 2020 due to missing items at outlets, the temporary closure of retail outlets, and restrictions on the movement of data collectors. As such, it imputed the missing data by using the price changes of similar products. As such, it said that 47% of the prices included in the March CPI basket were imputed, 80% of prices in the April basket were imputed, and 62.3% of prices in the May CPI basket were imputed.

According to CAS' adjusted methodology, prices at restaurants & hotels grew by 3.4 times annually in May 2020, followed by the prices of alcoholic beverages & tobacco (+3 times), food & non-alcoholic beverages (+2.9 times), the cost of clothing & footwear (+2.7 times), the prices of furnishings & household equipment (+2.4 times), miscellaneous goods & services (+93.6%), communication costs (+79.3%), recreation & entertainment (+60.5%), transportation (+30.2%), actual rents (+7.9%), healthcare costs (+5.8%), imputed rents (+5.2%), and the cost of education (+4%). In contrast, the prices of water, electricity, gas & other fuels decreased by 12.7% annually in May 2020. In addition, the distribution of actual rents shows that old rents grew by 10.4% and new rents increased by 6.2% in May 2020.

In parallel, the CPI increased by 6.9% in May 2020 from the previous month, compared to a month-on-month growth of 25.4% in April 2020. Prices at restaurants & hotels grew by 52.4% month-on-month in May 2020, followed by the prices of furnishings & household equipment (+28.9%), clothing & footwear (+15.9%), food & non-alcoholic beverages (+14.8%), alcoholic beverages & tobacco (+13.4%), the cost of miscellaneous goods & services (+11.5%), recreation & entertainment costs (+6%), transportation (+3.4%), healthcare costs (+1.5%), communication costs (+1.3%), and actual rents (+0.7%). In contrast, the cost of water, electricity, gas & other fuels declined by 3.2% month-on-month in May 2020, while the cost of education and imputed rents were unchanged in the covered month.

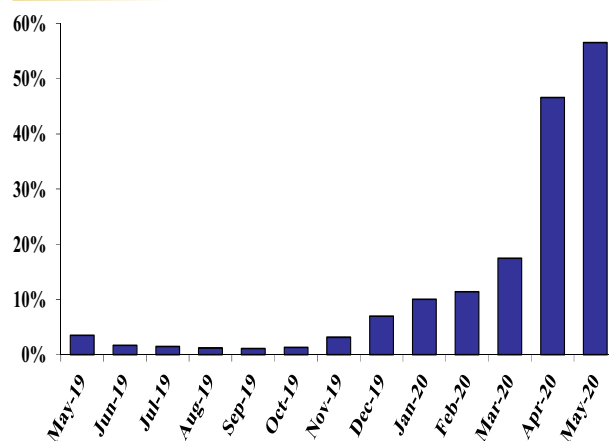
Further, the CPI increased by 7.3% in Mount Lebanon, by 7.2% in the North, by 6.9% in Beirut, by 6.6% in the South, by 6.1% in the Bekaa and by 5.5% in Nabatieh in May 2020. In parallel, the Fuel Price Index decreased by 4.1% month-on-month in May 2020, while the Education Price Index was unchanged in the covered month.

### Tourist arrivals down 48% in first quarter of 2020

The number of incoming visitors to Lebanon totaled 194,395 in the first quarter of 2020, constituting a decline of 48.3% from 375,815 tourists in the same quarter of 2019 and a drop of 50.6% from 393,212 visitors in the first quarter of 2010, the record year for tourist arrivals in Lebanon. Also, the number of incoming visitors reached 29,353 in March 2020, decreasing by 64.7% from 83,082 in February 2020 and declining by 79.7% from 144,760 in March 2019. Tourist arrivals in March 2020 reached their lowest monthly level on record due to the closure of the airport since March 18, 2020. The figures exclude Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian arrivals. Visitors from European countries accounted for 40% of the total in the covered quarter, followed by those from Arab countries with 28.1%, the Americas with 16.3%, Asia with 8.2%, Africa with 4.4%, and Oceania with 3%. Further, tourists from Iraq accounted for 10.5% of total visitors in the first quarter of 2020, followed by visitors from France (10.4%), the United States (8%), Egypt (5.4%), Canada (5.2%), Germany (4.7%), Jordan and the United Kingdom (4.4% each), Saudi Arabia (3%), Sweden (2.4%), Turkey (2%), Italy (1.9%), Brazil (1.6%), Kuwait (1.4%), Venezuela (0.6%), and the UAE (0.3%).

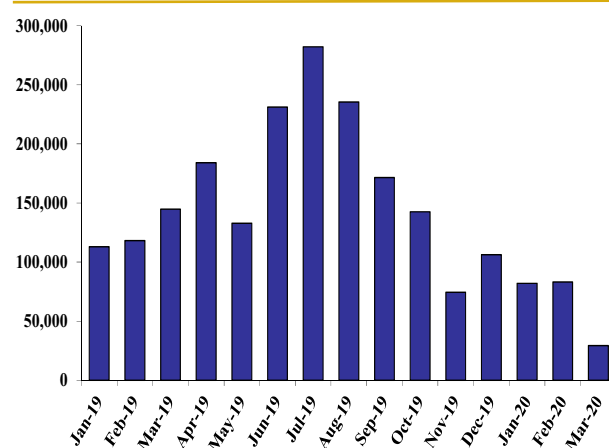
In parallel, the number of visitors from Arab countries dropped by 60% annually in the first quarter of 2020, followed by those from Oceania (-54.4%), Asia (-47.8%), Europe (-41%), the Americas (-40.1%), and Africa (-23.1%). On a country basis, the number of tourists from Kuwait declined by 75.3% annually in the covered quarter, followed by visitors from Saudi Arabia (-67.3%), Turkey (-59%), Iraq (-58.4%), Egypt (-56%), Jordan (-53.8%), Italy (-51.4%), the United States (-42.8%), Germany (-42%), the United Kingdom (-40.5%), Canada (-40.4%), France (-37.3%), Venezuela (-33%), Brazil (-27.8%), and Sweden (-27.5%); while the number of tourists from the UAE rose by 32.8% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2020.

Annual Change in CPI (%)



Source: Central Administration of Statistics, Byblos Research

Number of Tourist Arrivals to Lebanon



Source: Ministry of Tourism, Central Administration of Statistics, Byblos Research

### Progress on reforms unlikely in near term given political and social instability

Barclays Capital did not expect the Lebanese government to make progress in implementing reforms in the near term, given the prevailing social discontent and the lack of political consensus. It said that the progress on the restructuring of the public debt has been mixed since the government suspended the payments on the sovereign Eurobonds on March 7, 2020, as the COVID-19 outbreak shifted the authorities' priorities to address the healthcare crisis. Still, it considered that progress on the implementation of reforms has proved to be difficult due to the divisions among the political class. Also, it indicated that Lebanon's challenging economic backdrop and the weakening of the exchange rate on the parallel market have led to renewed social protests. It projected real GDP to retreat by 15% in 2020 following an estimated contraction of 6.5% in 2019, while it forecast the inflation rate to reach 76% at the end of 2020 relative to 6.9% a year earlier.

Further, it pointed out that the government's discussions with the International Monetary Fund about a funding program face elevated domestic and external challenges. It indicated that disagreements between Banque du Liban (BdL) and the Cabinet about the losses of BdL and the banking system, which the government's Financial Recovery Plan estimated at LBP241tn, have disrupted negotiations with the IMF. It also noted that the Association of Banks in Lebanon indicated that the government inflated the losses, and strongly opposed a haircut on deposits, as well as on the principal of Eurobonds and on the debt denominated in local currency. It considered that the government's ability to finalize a debt restructuring agreement with bondholders will depend on the banks' backing of the reform plan, given that they hold one-third of the Eurobonds stock.

In addition, Barclays pointed out that political bickering constitutes another domestic challenge to the debt restructuring process and to a potential deal with the IMF. It said that any agreement with the IMF will require a vote in Parliament, while the government's reform plan, the capital controls bill, or any official changes to the foreign currency peg will also need Parliament's approval. It added that a haircut on deposits will be very challenging to pass in Parliament due to broad-based opposition of several political factions, banks, the BdL and the population.

Lebanon's Macroeconomic Indicators					
	2016	2017	2018	2019e	2020f
Real GDP (%)	1.5	0.9	-1.9	-6.5	-15.0
CPI (% y/y, eop)	3.1	5.1	4.0	6.9	76.0
Fiscal Balance (% of GDP)	-9.7	-7.1	-11.4	-11.8	-13.6
Primary Balance (% of GDP)	-0.1	2.3	-1.6	-2.1	-3.5
Current Account (% of GDP)	-21.7	-22.8	-25.6	-27	-18.7
Gross Domestic Debt (% of GDP)	146.0	147.0	149.0	168.2	188.1
USD/LBP - Official Rate	1,507	1,507	1,507	1,507	1,507
USD/LBP - Parallel Market Rate (eop)	1,507	1,507	1,507	2,100	4,600

Source: Barclays Capital

### Value of cleared checks down 8%, returned checks down 21% in first five months of 2020

The value of cleared checks reached \$21.6bn in the first five months of 2020, constituting a decrease of 7.8% from \$23.4bn in the same period of 2019. In comparison, the value of cleared checks declined by 15.5% year-on-year in the first five months of 2019 and by 1.5% annually in the same period of 2018. The value of cleared checks in Lebanese pounds regressed by 11.3% year-on-year to the equivalent of \$7.7bn in the first five months of 2020, while the amount of cleared checks in US dollars decreased by 5.7% to \$13.8bn in the covered period. The dollarization rate of cleared checks expanded from 62.7% in the first five months of 2019 to 64.1% in the same period of 2020. There were 2.5 million cleared checks in the first five months of 2020, down by 41.5% from 4.3 million in the same period of 2019.

In addition, the value of cleared checks reached \$2.6bn in May 2020, constituting a decline of 12.7% from \$2.9bn in the preceding month, and compared to \$4.2bn in May 2019. The value of cleared checks in Lebanese pounds increased by 10.8% from the equivalent of \$1bn in April 2020 to \$1.1bn in the covered month, and the amount of cleared checks in US dollars fell by 24.7% month-on-month to \$1.5bn in May 2020. There were 300,262 cleared checks in May 2020 relative to 340,696 cleared checks in the preceding month.

In parallel, the amount of returned checks in domestic and foreign currencies was \$477m in the first five months of 2020 compared to \$606.3m in the same period of 2019 and to \$629m in the first five months of 2018. This constituted a decline of 21.3% in the first five months of 2020 relative to a decrease of 3.6% in the same period of 2019. Also, there were 71,530 returned checks in the covered period, down by 35.6% from 111,032 returned checks in the first five months of 2019. Further, the amount of returned checks in domestic and foreign currencies was \$45.8m in May 2020, constituting a decline of 55.2% from \$102.2m in the previous month, and compared to \$120m in May 2019. Also, there were 7,049 returned checks in May 2020, down by 52% from 14,673 returned checks in April 2020.

### **Association of Banks raises alarm about the government's financial recovery plan**

The Association of Banks in Lebanon (ABL) expressed strong concerns about the government's financial recovery plan, as it noted that the plan includes measures that will result in large haircuts on the banks' deposits and capital base. It considered that the government's plan is an accounting exercise rather than an economic plan, and that it does not offer an economic vision to drive the economy out of recession. Further, it noted that the numbers included in the government's plan do not constitute a solid base for a well-defined financial rescue plan. In addition, it reiterated that the government did not seek the opinion of ABL before introducing its financial recovery plan and submitting it to the International Monetary Fund, nor did it take into account Banque du Liban's (BdL) objections and the banking sector's alternative plan that was issued earlier in May.

Further, the ABL noted that its contribution to the government's plan aims to safeguard bank deposits, maintain financial stability, stimulate economic activity, and create job opportunities in the country. It said that its plan intends to restore confidence in the banking sector and in the Lebanese economy at large. It renewed its call on the government to create a \$40bn fund that would include the state assets to pay off the latter's debts. In its contribution to the government's plan, the ABL suggested for the government to create a "Government Debt Defeasance Fund" (GDDF), which will include public assets valued at \$40bn, such as the mobile telecommunication operators, public lands and other public real estate assets, and/or exploration rights and concessions. It proposed that the government owns 100% of GDDF's shares in exchange for the contributed assets. It added that the fund will then issue \$40bn worth of long-dated, interest bearing, covered securities to BdL in exchange for the debt that the government owes to BdL. The ABL considered that this mechanism will help reduce the public debt level and address the foreign currency shortages at BdL.

In parallel, the ABL pledged that commercial banks will bear any potential losses on their portfolio of loans to the private sector. It added that BdL and the Banking Control Commission of Lebanon will be responsible for evaluating the banking sector by assessing the status of each bank based on its business recovery and recapitalization plan, as well as by giving the banks a reasonable time to comply with international standards. The ABL reiterated its readiness to meet with the government to discuss the ongoing issues and challenges and to agree on a financial rescue plan, despite the government's refusal so far to organize an official meeting between the two sides.

### **Compensation of public-sector personnel absorbs 72% of public revenues in first two months of 2020**

Figures issued by the Ministry of Finance show that the compensation of public-sector personnel totaled \$1.22bn in the first two months of 2020, constituting an increase of 4.2% from \$1.17bn in the same period of 2019. Salaries, wages and related benefits accounted for 64% of the total in the covered period, followed by retirement benefits (25.7%), end-of-service indemnities (5.9%), and transfers to public institutions to cover salaries (4.4%).

The annual rise in the compensation of public-sector personnel is due to an 11% increase in salaries, wages and related benefits, a 9.7% growth in retirement benefits and an 83.8% rise in transfers to public institutions to cover salaries, which were partly offset by an annual decline of 52.4% in end-of-service indemnities. The compensation of public-sector personnel represented the largest component of current primary spending and accounted for 63.3% of such expenditures in the first two months of 2020 compared to 72.3% in the same period of 2019. It accounted for 42.8% of fiscal spending in the covered period relative to 47.4% in the first two months of 2019; while it absorbed 72.3% of public revenues in the first two months of 2020 relative to 64.6% of government receipts in the same period of 2019.

In parallel, salaries, wages and related benefits paid to public-sector employees amounted to \$777.4m in the first two months of 2020, up by 11% from \$700.4m in the same period of 2019. This category includes basic salaries, employment benefits, allowances, contributions to civil servants' cooperatives, as well as contributions to other mutual funds providing health insurance for specific categories of civil servants, mainly civil and religious judges, and employees at the Parliament.

Salaries and benefits of military personnel reached \$563.1m and accounted for 72.4% of salaries, wages and related benefits paid to the public sector in the first two months of 2020. The salaries and benefits of personnel in public education followed with \$108.1m (14% of the total), then civil staff with \$75.6m (9.7%), the government's contribution to the employees' cooperative with \$20m (2.6%), and the salaries and benefits of customs employees with \$11.2m (1.5%).

Also, the Lebanese Army's salaries totaled \$364.8m in the first two months of 2020 and represented 64.8% of the salaries and benefits of military personnel. The salaries of the Internal Security Forces followed with \$161.8m (28.7%), those of the General Security Forces with \$27.1m (4.8%), and the salaries of State Security Forces with \$9.2m (1.6%).

In addition, the breakdown of salaries, wages and related benefits paid to public-sector employees shows that allowances increased by \$98.1m annually; and benefits and other payments, such as bonuses, given to non-military bodies rose by \$18m; while basic salaries dropped by \$39m year-on-year. Basic salaries declined by 7.5% annually to \$481m in the first two months of 2020, allowances rose by 81% to \$219.5m, and benefits and other payments grew by 36.5% year-on-year to \$67m in the first two months of 2020.



### Remittance inflows to Lebanon up 6% to \$7.4bn in 2019

Figures released by Banque du Liban show that the inflows of expatriates' remittances to Lebanon totaled \$7.4bn in 2019, constituting an increase of 6.2% from \$7bn in 2018, relative to a decline of 1.2% in 2018. Remittance inflows to Lebanon increased by 6.6% year-on-year to \$1.91bn in the first quarter of 2019, while they rose by 11.5% annually to \$1.97bn in the second quarter, grew by 12.8% year-on-year to \$1.93bn in the third quarter, and dropped by 6.3% annually to \$1.6bn in the fourth quarter of 2019, their lowest level since the fourth quarter of 2012. The figures include workers' remittances and the compensation of employees, according to the World Bank's definition of remittances. Banque du Liban's figures are the only official data on remittance flows to and from Lebanon.

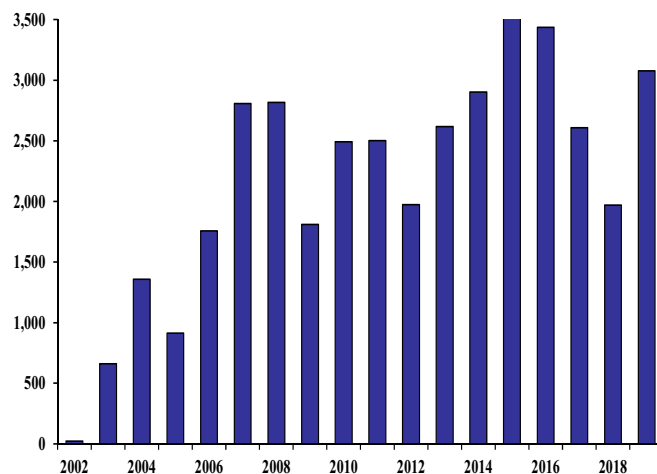
In addition, remittance inflows to Lebanon in 2019 reached their fifth highest annual level between 2002 and 2019, with a high of \$7.6bn in 2016 and a low of \$2.54bn in 2002. They averaged \$6.4bn annually between 2002 and 2019, but they increased from an annual average of \$4.8bn during the 2002-07 period to a yearly average of \$7.2bn between 2008 and 2019. Further, remittance inflows were equivalent to 14.2% of GDP in 2019 compared to 12.7% of GDP in 2018.

In parallel, remittance outflows from Lebanon amounted to \$4.3bn in 2019, down by 13.5% from \$5bn in 2018, and relative to an increase of 12.4% in 2018. Remittance outflows from Lebanon declined by 1.6% annually to \$1.2bn in the first quarter of 2019, while they decreased by 4.7% year-on-year to \$1.17bn in the second quarter, regressed by 14.5% to \$1.1bn in the third quarter, and dropped by 32.3% to \$861m in the fourth quarter of 2019, their lowest level since the third quarter of 2007.

In addition, remittance outflows in 2019 reached their ninth highest annual level during the 2002-19 period, with a high of \$5.75bn in 2009 and a low of \$2.5bn in 2002. They averaged \$4.2bn annually between 2002 and 2019, but they increased from an annual average of \$3.5bn during the 2002-07 period to a yearly average of \$4.5bn between 2008 and 2019. Further, remittance outflows from Lebanon were equivalent to 8.3% of GDP in 2019 compared to 9.1% of GDP in 2018.

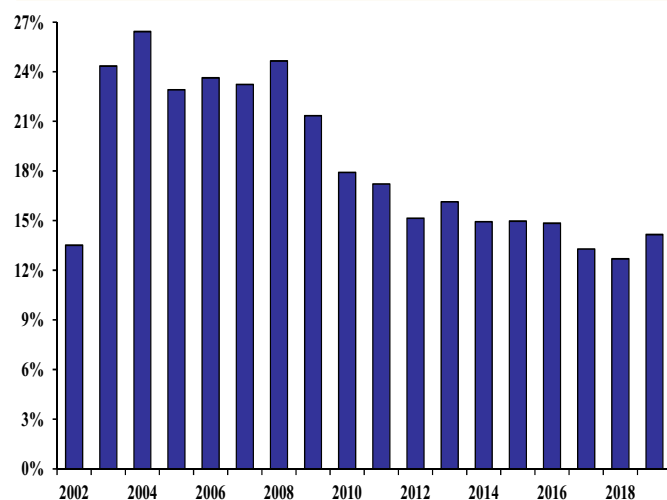
As such, net remittance inflows to Lebanon totaled \$3.1bn in 2019, constituting a jump of 56.1% from \$2bn in 2018, and relative to a decrease of 24.5% in 2018. Net remittance inflows to Lebanon in 2019 reached their third highest annual level during the 2002-19 period, compared to \$3.8bn in 2015 and \$3.4bn in 2016. They averaged \$2.2bn annually between 2002 and 2019, but they increased from an annual average of \$1.25bn during the 2002-07 period to a yearly average of \$2.67bn between 2008 and 2019. Net remittance inflows to Lebanon were equivalent to 5.9% of GDP in 2019, compared to 3.6% of GDP in 2018.

### Net Remittance Inflows to Lebanon (US\$m)



Source: Banque du Liban, Byblos Research

### Remittance Inflows to Lebanon (% of GDP)



Source: Banque du Liban, National Accounts, IIF, Byblos Research



### Trade deficit narrows by 50% to \$2.6bn in first four months of 2020

Total imports reached \$3.68bn in the first four months of 2020, constituting a decrease of 41.7% from \$6.3bn in the same period of 2019; while aggregate exports declined by 3.3% annually to \$1.08bn in the first four months of 2020. As such, the trade deficit narrowed by 50% to \$2.6bn in the first four months of 2020 due to a decline of \$2.63bn in imports that was partly offset by a decrease of \$36.8m in exports.

Non-hydrocarbon imports decreased by \$1.94bn annually to \$2.5bn in the first four months of 2020, while imports of oil & mineral fuels regressed by \$693.4m year-on-year to nearly \$1.16bn and accounted for 31.5% of total imports in the covered period. Lebanon imported 2.4 million tons of mineral fuel & oil in the first four months of 2020 relative to 3.3 million tons in the same period of 2019.

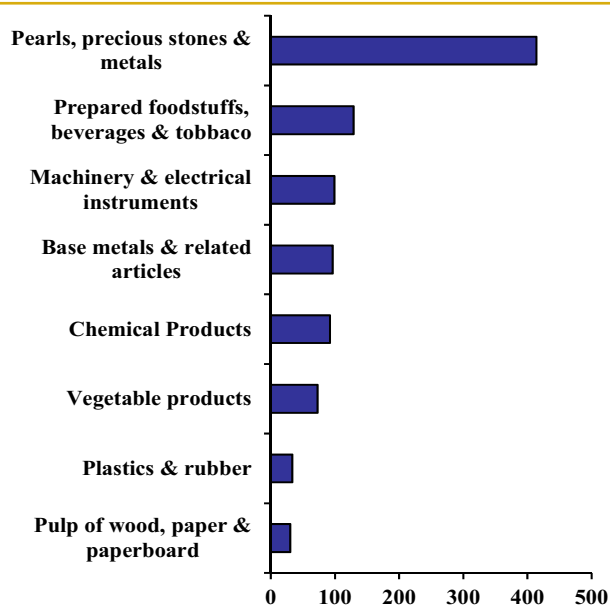
The decline in exports in the covered period was mainly due to a decrease of \$28.8m, or of 81.2%, in the exports of mineral products; a decrease of \$25m (-20%) in the exports of machinery & electrical instruments; a contraction of \$22.6m (-40.3%) in the exports of plastics & rubber; a drop of \$17.2m (-15.7%) in exported chemical products; a fall of \$13.7m (-12.4%) in exported base metal; a contraction of \$13.3m (-30.3%) in the exports of pulp of wood, and a decline of \$10.8m (-7.7%) in exported prepared foodstuff. The decrease in exports was partly offset by a rise of \$67.5m (+19.5%) in the exports of jewelry, mostly unwrought gold, as well as by an increase of \$23.6m (+48%) in the exports of vegetable products.

Exports to Switzerland jumped by 93.6% in the first four months of 2020, and those to Iraq grew by 4.4%. The surge in exports to Switzerland is due to higher gold exports, mostly unwrought gold. In contrast, exported goods to Syria dropped by 47.7% in the covered period, those to Greece fell by 11.8%, exports to the UAE declined by 8.5%, those to Qatar decreased by 5.8%, exports to Jordan dropped by 5%, those to the U.S. regressed by 1.3% and exports to Saudi Arabia declined by 1.1%. Re-exports totaled \$79.3m in the first four months of 2020 compared to \$139.1m in the same period of 2019. The Hariri International Airport was the exit point for 46.8% of Lebanon's exports in the first four months of 2020, followed by the Port of Beirut (40%), the Masnaa crossing point (5.6%), the Port of Tripoli (4.6%), the Port of Saida (1.6%), and the Arida crossing point (1.2%).

Lebanon's main non-hydrocarbon imports were chemical products that reached \$516.4m in the first four months of 2020 and that declined by 24% from the same period of 2019. Imports of vegetable products followed with \$297m (-23.7%), then imported jewelry with \$291.5m (-2.8%), prepared foodstuff with \$258.7m (-39%), machinery & electrical instruments with \$232.6m (-61%), animal products with \$215.2m (-23%), vehicles, aircraft & vessels with \$131.8m (-67.5%), and base metals with \$100.5m (-67%). The Port of Beirut was the entry point for 64.8% of Lebanon's merchandise imports in the first four months of 2020, followed by the Hariri International Airport (23.6%), the Port of Tripoli (6.6%), the Port of Saida (3.5%), and the Masnaa crossing point (1%).

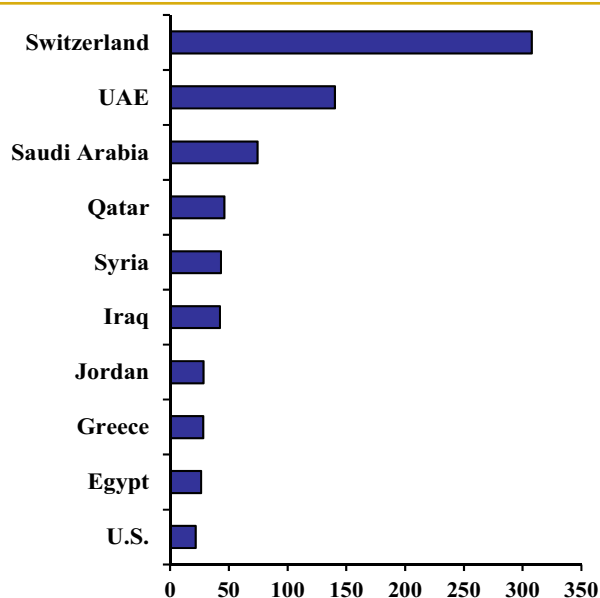
Greece was the main source of imports with \$307.8m, or 8.4% of the total, in the first four months of 2020, followed by Turkey with \$262.7m (7.1%), the U.S. with \$258.6m and Italy with \$258m (7% each), China with \$212m (5.8%), the UAE with \$205.1m (5.6%), Russia with \$197.1m (5.4%), and Germany with \$175.2m (4.8%). Imported goods from Russia dropped by 67.6%, those from China fell by 62.3%, imports from Germany decreased by 44%, those from Italy declined by 40.2%, imported goods from Greece contracted by 32.6%, those from the U.S. dropped by 15.2%, imports from the UAE regressed by 4.1%, and imported goods from Turkey decreased by 1.7% year-on-year in the first four months of 2020.

### Main Lebanese Exports in First Four Months of 2020 (US\$m)



Source: Lebanese Customs Administration, Byblos Research

### Main Destinations of Lebanese Exports in First Four Months of 2020 (US\$m)



Source: Lebanese Customs Administration, Byblos Research

### Gross public debt at \$92.4bn at end-March 2020

Lebanon's gross public debt reached \$92.4bn at the end of March 2020, constituting an increase of 0.8% from \$91.6bn at the end of 2019, and a rise of 7.2% from \$86.2bn at the end of March 2019. In nominal terms, the gross public debt grew by \$774.8m in the first quarter of 2020, relative to an increase of \$1.1bn in the same period of 2019. Debt denominated in Lebanese pounds totaled \$58.3bn at the end of March 2020 and expanded by 0.8% from end-2019 and by 11.2% from end-March 2019; while debt denominated in foreign currency stood at \$34.1bn and grew by 1% from end-2019 and by 0.9% from a year earlier.

On March 7, 2020, the Lebanese government decided to withhold all payments on the \$1.2bn Eurobond that matures on March 9, 2020 in order to safeguard the country's foreign currency reserves. It further announced on March 23, 2020 that Lebanon will discontinue payments on all of its outstanding Eurobonds.

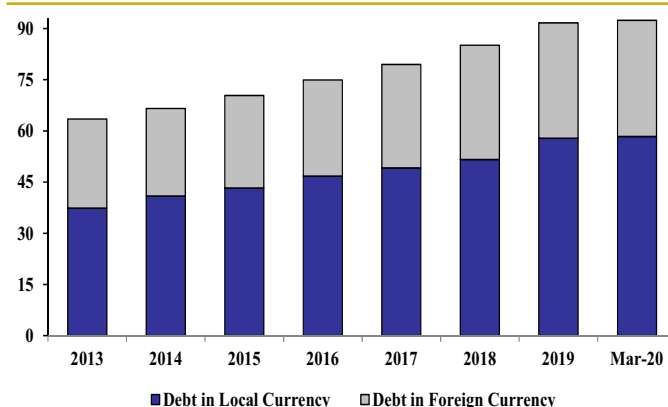
The year-on-year increase of the local-currency debt was mostly due to the Ministry of Finance's (MoF) issuance in November and December of LBP1,500bn and LBP3,000bn 10-year Treasury bonds, respectively, at a rate of 1%, which were entirely subscribed by Banque du Liban (BdL). The two issuances were part of a deal between the MoF and BdL, which stipulated that the MoF issues \$3bn worth of Eurobonds to BdL to cover external debt payments that BdL made on behalf of the government throughout 2019, in exchange for BdL subscribing to LBP4,500bn worth of Treasury bonds.

Local currency debt accounted for 63.1% of the gross public debt at the end of March 2020 compared to 60.8% a year earlier, while foreign currency-denominated debt represented the balance of 36.9% relative to 39.2% at end-March 2019. The weighted interest rate on outstanding Treasury bills was 6.5% in March 2020, while the weighted life of Treasury bills and bonds was 1,752 days.

BdL accounted for 42.4% of the public debt at the end of March 2020, followed by commercial banks (29.5%), and non-bank resident financial institutions (8.3%); while other investors, including foreign investors, held 17.6% of the debt, and multilateral institutions and foreign governments accounted for 2.2%.

BdL held 58.6% of the Lebanese pound-denominated public debt at the end of March 2020 compared to 51.5% a year earlier, while commercial banks accounted for 28.3% of the local debt compared to 34.1% at end-March 2019. Also, public agencies, financial institutions and the public held 13.1% of the local debt at end-March 2020 relative to 14.4% at end-March 2019. Further, holders of Eurobonds and special T-bills in foreign currencies accounted for 94.1% of foreign currency-denominated debt holders at the end of March 2020, followed by multilateral institutions with 4.1% and foreign governments with 1.8%. In addition, the net public debt, which excludes public sector deposits at BdL and at commercial and investment banks from overall debt figures, grew by 7.8% annually to \$83.2bn at the end of March 2020. Further, the gross market debt accounted for about 54% of the public debt. The gross market debt is the total public debt less the portfolios of BdL, the National Social Security Fund, as well as bilateral and multilateral loans.

Lebanon's Gross Public Debt (US\$bn)



Source: Ministry of Finance, Byblos Research

### **Byblos Bank noteholders approve repurchase of notes due in 2021**

Byblos Bank sal announced that holders of \$211.8m, or nearly 71% of its \$300m notes due in 2021, approved to amend the terms and conditions of the notes to provide for their early redemption.

Byblos Bank launched on May 28, 2020 a tender offer and consent solicitation to repurchase its \$300m notes that are due in 2021. It said that the repurchase is subject to specific terms set in the Tender Offer and Consent Solicitation Memorandum dated May 28, 2020. It also noted, at the time, that the transaction is subject to a vote by noteholders to approve an amendment to the terms and conditions of the notes, in order to allow for the early redemption. The Bank will pay the outstanding nominal principal amount of the notes and all unpaid and accrued interest until the settlement date. It will also settle all related payments to noteholders in bank accounts in Lebanon.

The Bank indicated that the noteholders who have not already participated in the tender have until June 26 at 10:00am to do so, in accordance with the procedures set out in the memorandum. It added that noteholders who miss the June 26 deadline will still have their notes redeemed at the redemption amount, "but will not receive any other amounts from the Bank other than subject to and in accordance with the terms of the Payment Deed".

Byblos Bank issued a 10-year \$300m US dollar-denominated note in September 2011. The Bank had to double the size of the issue to \$300m in order to meet the high demand for the bond. Retail investors accounted for 59% of subscriptions, while institutional investors subscribed to 41% of the total. The bond carries an annual coupon rate of 7% that is paid semi-annually.

### **Eight Lebanese universities among 1000 ranked universities worldwide**

The QS World University Rankings for 2021 included eight Lebanese universities among 1000 covered universities worldwide. The list ranked the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 220<sup>th</sup> place globally and in fourth place among 42 Arab universities included in the survey. AUB's global rank improved by 24 spots from the preceding year, while its regional rank regressed by one place year-on-year. AUB came in 244<sup>th</sup> place in 2020, in 237<sup>th</sup> place in 2019, in 235<sup>th</sup> place in 2018, and in 228<sup>th</sup> place in 2017.

Also, the survey ranked the University of Balamand in the 501-510 range globally and in 12<sup>th</sup> place among Arab universities. In comparison, the university came in the 581-590 range in the 2020 survey, and in the 591-600 range in 2019. Université Saint-Joseph (USJ) followed in the 541-550 range globally in the 2021 survey, while it came in the 561-570 range in the 2020 survey and in 500<sup>th</sup> place in 2019.

Further, the Lebanese American University (LAU) came in the 551-560 range globally in the 2021 survey, while it ranked in the 581-590 range in the 2020 survey. The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik followed in the 601-650 range, unchanged from the 2020 survey; while Notre Dame University ranked in the 701-750 range, compared to the 801-1000 range in the previous survey. Also, the survey included for the first time the Lebanese University, which came in the 701-750 range. Finally, the Beirut Arab University came in the 801-1000 range, unchanged from the previous survey.

AUB received a score of 40.4 points, which is lower than the average score of 43.2 points for the top five universities in the region. The top ranked Arab university is King Abdulaziz University that came in 143<sup>rd</sup> place globally with a score of 51.7 points, while the Massachusetts Institute of Technology ranked first worldwide and received a score of 100 points.

The rankings are based on a weighted average of six factors that are academic reputation with a 40% weight, faculty-to-student ratio and citations per faculty (20% each), employer reputation (10%), and international faculty ratio and international student ratio (5% each). The QS World University Rankings are compiled by Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, a company specializing in education and study abroad.

## Ratio Highlights

(in % unless specified)	2017	2018	2019	Change*
Nominal GDP (\$bn)	53.1	55.0	56.8	1.85
Public Debt in Foreign Currency / GDP	57.2	60.9	59.4	(1.54)
Public Debt in Local Currency / GDP	92.5	94.0	101.9	7.94
Gross Public Debt / GDP	149.7	154.9	161.3	6.40
Total Gross External Debt / GDP**	139.2	137.0	128.4	(8.62)
Trade Balance / GDP	(31.5)	(31.0)	(27.3)	3.69
Exports / Imports	14.5	14.8	19.4	4.62
Fiscal Revenues / GDP	21.9	21.0	19.5	(1.53)
Fiscal Expenditures / GDP	28.9	32.4	29.7	(2.62)
Fiscal Balance / GDP	(7.1)	(11.4)	(10.3)	1.09
Primary Balance / GDP	2.7	(1.2)	(0.5)	0.65
Gross Foreign Currency Reserves / M2	68.2	63.8	70.2	6.38
M3 / GDP	260.8	257.1	236.7	(20.33)
Commercial Banks Assets / GDP	413.7	453.9	381.6	(72.37)***
Private Sector Deposits / GDP	317.4	317.1	279.6	(37.48)
Private Sector Loans / GDP****	112.3	108.1	87.6	(20.45)
Private Sector Deposits Dollarization Rate	68.7	70.6	76.0	5.41
Private Sector Lending Dollarization Rate	68.6	69.2	68.7	(0.50)

\*change in percentage points 19/18; \*\*includes portion of public debt owed to non-residents, liabilities to non-resident banks, non-resident deposits (estimated by the IMF), Bank for International Settlements' claims on Lebanese non-banks; \*\*\*The decline in assets in 2019 is mainly due to the "netting" on the assets and liabilities' sides of the consolidated balance sheet of commercial banks as part of the implementation of international accounting standard IFRS 7; \*\*\*\* in January 2018, Lebanese banks started reporting their financials based on international accounting standard IFRS 9, and revised the 2017 figures accordingly  
Source: Association of Banks in Lebanon, Institute of International Finance, Central Administration of Statistics, Byblos Research Estimates & Calculations  
Note: M2 includes money in circulation and deposits in LBP, M3 includes M2 plus Deposits in FC and bonds

## Risk Metrics

Lebanon	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Feb 2019	Change**	Risk Level
Political Risk Rating	55.0	54.0	54.0	▲	High
Financial Risk Rating	33.0	31.5	31.5	▲	Moderate
Economic Risk Rating	28.5	24.0	24.0	▲	Very High
Composite Risk Rating	58.25	54.75	54.75	▲	High

MENA Average*	Feb 2018	Jan 2019	Feb 2019	Change**	Risk Level
Political Risk Rating	58.2	58.1	58.2	↔	High
Financial Risk Rating	37.9	39.1	39.2	▼	Low
Economic Risk Rating	31.4	33.8	33.8	▼	Moderate
Composite Risk Rating	63.8	65.5	65.6	▼	Moderate

\*excluding Lebanon

\*\*year-on-year change in risk

Source: The PRS Group, Byblos Research

Note: Political & Composite Risk Ratings range from 0 to 100 (where 100 indicates the lowest risk)

Financial & Economic Risk ratings range from 0 to 50 (where 50 indicates the lowest risk)

## Ratings & Outlook

Sovereign Ratings	Foreign Currency			Local Currency		
	LT	ST	Outlook	LT	ST	Outlook
Moody's Investors Service	Ca	NP	Stable	Ca		Stable
Fitch Ratings	RD	C	-	CC	C	-
S&P Global Ratings	SD	SD	-	CC	C	Negative
Capital Intelligence Ratings	SD	SD	-	C-	C	Negative

\*for downgrade

\*\*CreditWatch negative

Source: Rating agencies

### Banking Sector Ratings

Banking Sector Ratings	Outlook
Moody's Investors Service	Negative

Source: Moody's Investors Service





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**Economic Research & Analysis Department**  
**Byblos Bank Group**  
**P.O. Box 11-5605**  
**Beirut – Lebanon**  
**Tel: (961) 1 338 100**  
**Fax: (961) 1 217 774**  
**E-mail: [research@byblosbank.com.lb](mailto:research@byblosbank.com.lb)**  
**[www.byblosbank.com](http://www.byblosbank.com)**

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# BYBLOS BANK GROUP

## LEBANON

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Byblos Bank S.A.L  
Achrafieh - Beirut  
Elias Sarkis Avenue - Byblos Bank Tower  
P.O.Box: 11-5605 Riad El Solh - Beirut 1107 2811- Lebanon  
Phone: (+ 961) 1 335200  
Fax: (+ 961) 1 339436

## IRAQ

---

Erbil Branch, Kurdistan, Iraq  
Street 60, Near Sports Stadium  
P.O.Box: 34 - 0383 Erbil - Iraq  
Phone: (+ 964) 66 2233457/8/9 - 2560017/9  
E-mail: [erbilbranch@byblosbank.com.lb](mailto:erbilbranch@byblosbank.com.lb)

Sulaymaniyah Branch, Kurdistan, Iraq  
Salem street, Kurdistan Mall - Sulaymaniyah  
Phone: (+ 964) 773 042 1010 / (+ 964) 773 041 1010

Baghdad Branch, Iraq  
Al Karrada - Salman Faeq Street  
Al Wahda District, No. 904/14, Facing Al Shuruk Building  
P.O.Box: 3085 Badalat Al Olwiya – Iraq  
Phone: (+ 964) 770 6527807 / (+ 964) 780 9133031/2  
E-mail: [baghdadbranch@byblosbank.com.lb](mailto:baghdadbranch@byblosbank.com.lb)

Basra Branch, Iraq  
Intersection of July 14th, Manawi Basha Street, Al Basra – Iraq  
Phone: (+ 964) 770 4931900 / (+ 964) 770 4931919  
E-mail: [basrabranch@byblosbank.com.lb](mailto:basrabranch@byblosbank.com.lb)

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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Byblos Bank Abu Dhabi Representative Office  
Al Reem Island - Sky Tower - Office 2206  
P.O.Box: 73893 Abu Dhabi - UAE  
Phone: (+ 971) 2 6336050 - 2 6336400  
Fax: (+ 971) 2 6338400  
E-mail: [abudhabirepoffice@byblosbank.com.lb](mailto:abudhabirepoffice@byblosbank.com.lb)

## ARMENIA

---

Byblos Bank Armenia CJSC  
18/3 Amiryan Street - Area 0002  
Yerevan - Republic of Armenia  
Phone: (+ 374) 10 530362 Fax: (+ 374) 10 535296  
E-mail: [infoarm@byblosbank.com](mailto:infoarm@byblosbank.com)

## NIGERIA

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Byblos Bank Nigeria Representative Office  
161C Rafu Taylor Close - Off Idejo Street  
Victoria Island, Lagos - Nigeria  
Phone: (+ 234) 706 112 5800  
(+ 234) 808 839 9122  
E-mail: [nigeriarepresentativeoffice@byblosbank.com.lb](mailto:nigeriarepresentativeoffice@byblosbank.com.lb)

## BELGIUM

---

Byblos Bank Europe S.A.  
Brussels Head Office  
Boulevard Bischoffsheim 1-8  
1000 Brussels  
Phone: (+ 32) 2 551 00 20  
Fax: (+ 32) 2 513 05 26  
E-mail: [byblos.europe@byblosbankeur.com](mailto:byblos.europe@byblosbankeur.com)

## UNITED KINGDOM

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Byblos Bank Europe S.A., London Branch  
Berkeley Square House  
Berkeley Square  
GB - London W1J 6BS - United Kingdom  
Phone: (+ 44) 20 7518 8100  
Fax: (+ 44) 20 7518 8129  
E-mail: [byblos.london@byblosbankeur.com](mailto:byblos.london@byblosbankeur.com)

## FRANCE

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Byblos Bank Europe S.A., Paris Branch  
15 Rue Lord Byron  
F- 75008 Paris - France  
Phone: (+33) 1 45 63 10 01  
Fax: (+33) 1 45 61 15 77  
E-mail: [byblos.europe@byblosbankeur.com](mailto:byblos.europe@byblosbankeur.com)

## CYPRUS

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Limassol Branch  
1, Archbishop Kyprianou Street, Loucaides Building  
P.O.Box 50218  
3602 Limassol - Cyprus  
Phone: (+ 357) 25 341433/4/5 Fax: (+ 357) 25 367139  
E-mail: [byblosbankcyprus@byblosbank.com.lb](mailto:byblosbankcyprus@byblosbank.com.lb)

## ADIR INSURANCE

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Dora Highway - Aya Commercial Center  
P.O.Box: 90-1446  
Jdeidet El Metn - 1202 2119 Lebanon  
Phone: (+ 961) 1 256290  
Fax: (+ 961) 1 256293