

# LEBANON CHILD LABOUR SCOPING STUDY

SUMMARY REPORT

January 2024



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The drawings in this report were done by children engaged in child labour across Tripoli, Bekaa and Beirut to depict their hopes, aspirations and fears.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the onset of the Syria war, and subsequent influx of refugees into Lebanon, the 2019 covid-19 pandemic and 2020 Beirut port blast, Lebanon has been gripped by a far-reaching economic and financial crisis. More than eight out of ten people live in multidimensional poverty.<sup>1</sup> Many economically vulnerable households have been forced to turn to harmful coping mechanisms, including hazardous work and worst forms of child labour (WFCL).

Between January and June 2023, the top two most reported child protection concerns in the real time monitoring conducted by the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG)<sup>2</sup> were child labour and street children. The latest protection monitoring data by IRC found that in 2023, an average 13% of households reported having at least one child engaged in child labour.<sup>3</sup> Whilst Lebanon does have a relatively robust legal framework for addressing child labour, including WFCL, state-led coordination mechanisms had weakened after the covid-19 pandemic. However, in 2023, such policies have regained momentum. Nonetheless, the policies do not necessarily reflect the changing dynamics of child labour triggered by the current socioeconomic and political conditions. Funding has been depleted and established programmes that previously supported children affected by child labour have been forced to reduce their reach.

Against this backdrop, the Freedom Fund commissioned a scoping study in 2022 in three locations across Lebanon – Tripoli, Beirut and Bekaa – to assess the feasibility of a ‘hotspot’ programme focused on child labour. The study aimed to better understand the dynamics of child labour and operating environments in each location, including an analysis of the existing child protection response. The study combined participant observation in specific locations, with over 300 interviews and focus group discussions with children, caregivers, employers, and other key stakeholders. The findings highlight that children frequently engage in work which violates Lebanese labour laws and constitutes WFCL. WFCL includes being expected to undertake very physically demanding work, work very long hours a day with minimal breaks, work below the legal minimum wage and receive very low compensation – ranging from in-kind food or shelter to weekly payments of just 100,000-300,000 Lebanese pounds (US\$3–\$8). The scoping study also found a perceived increase in the use of children for forms of work that are in their nature illegal, such as trafficking of drugs or other illicit goods and commercial sexual exploitation.

Based on the study’s findings, recommendations were made with the aim of guiding the Freedom Fund’s pilot programming in the proposed hotspot.<sup>4</sup> A summary of the recommendations is provided here, with full details in the main body of the report:

## STRENGTHENING POLICY AND SYSTEMS FOR ADDRESSING WFCL AND CHILD EXPLOITATION

### Government of Lebanon to:

- Update the National Action Plan (NAP) and other relevant legislation, policies, and action plans to cover changing trends relating to WFCL.
- Meaningfully involve children currently or formerly engaged in child labour in policy and programme planning at national, governorate, and local levels.

## RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT WFCL AND CHILD EXPLOITATION AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY

### Civil society actors to:

- Sensitise key national- and governorate-level child protection actors on emerging forms of WFCL, their prevalence and impact, increase their capacity to understand them and modify existing policies and programmes to prevent WFCL as well as withdraw and rehabilitate affected children in a survivor-centred manner.

- Provide sensitisation for the Special Unit for Combating Trafficking in Persons on child trafficking, with a focus on exploitative and forced labour.
- Sensitise employers of children about child labour laws, including Decree 8987 on WFCL, and the intermediate and longer-term harmful effects of child labour on a child's well-being, safety, and development.
- Raise awareness on the WFCL, child exploitation and child trafficking among the public at large through the Ministries of Labour and Communication, religious organisations, Ministry of Social Affairs, area- and community-based media events, and school and NGO-based programs for children and parents.
- Contextualise awareness on child labour risks to each locality.

## **STRENGTHEN HOLISTIC SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY WFCL AND EXPLOITATION**

### **Civil society and, where resources allow, state actors to:**

- Strengthen coordination between key actors who provide services to children and families affected by WFCL and child exploitation, and increase resources to coordination mechanisms, as required.
- Offer a holistic package of care to children and families affected by WFCL/exploitation.
- Strengthen the resilience of economically vulnerable households whose children are currently engaged in, or at risk of engaging in, child labour.

## **INCREASE PRIORITISATION OF WFCL AND CHILD EXPLOITATION AMONGST THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON, MULTILATERAL AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL DONOR COMMUNITY**

### **Government of Lebanon and civil society actors to:**

- Engage multilateral agencies and the international donor community on the need for increased funding and technical assistance to prevent and address WFCL and child exploitation in areas of high prevalence.

### **Government of Lebanon and international donor community to:**

- Prioritise funding for implementation of the NAP and other relevant legislation.

## **INCREASE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD LABOUR IN THE LEBANESE CONTEXT**

### **Government of Lebanon, civil society and research actors with a focus on child labour to:**

- Increase knowledge about WFCL and child exploitation through data collection on new trends to ensure evidence-based policies and systems.
- Conduct research to better understand the role of intermediaries in facilitating the exploitation and possible trafficking of children in Lebanese contexts.
- Explore lessons for successfully responding to and preventing to WFCL and child exploitation from countries across the region, such as Egypt, and adapt these within national- and governorate-level action plans.

# ACRONYMS

<b>CLU</b>	Child Labour Unit
<b>ITS</b>	Informal Tented Settlements
<b>NSC</b>	National Steering Committee Against Child Labour
<b>CIMIC</b>	Child Military Relations Department
<b>CLMS</b>	Child Labour Monitoring System
<b>ESCWA</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MoI</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>MoL</b>	Ministry of Labour
<b>MoSA</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>WFCL</b>	Worst Forms of Child Labour



فلمني ستر استقام مسير دكتوراة

وفلمني مسير ضيفه طيران

*My dream is to travel, to  
be come a doctor or a  
flight hostess*

# KEY TERMS

**Child:** According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as a person below the age of 18, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

**Child labour:** Work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity and which is harmful to their physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and deprives children of the opportunity to attend school, forces them to leave school prematurely, or requires them to combine school attendance with excessively long hours and heavy work.

**Child work:** Not all work done by children should be classified as child labour and targeted for elimination. Work that does not affect the health and personal development of a child, or interfere with their schooling, is generally regarded as potentially positive. This includes activities such as helping parents around the home, assisting in a family business or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays.

**Hazardous child labour or hazardous work:** Work that by its nature is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children is considered hazardous. Guidance for governments on hazardous work activities that should be prohibited is defined in article 3 of International Labour Organization (ILO) Recommendation No. 190.

**Worst forms of child labour:** All forms of slavery such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, pornography or for pornographic performances; the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, particularly the production or trafficking of drugs; and work that by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children (see article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182).

**Forced or compulsory labour:** For the purposes of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), the term forced or compulsory labour shall mean all work or service that is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily. However, the term forced labour does not include the following:

- a. any work or service exacted in virtue of compulsory military service laws for work of a purely military character;
- b. any work or service that forms part of the normal civic obligations of the citizens of a fully self-governing country;
- c. any work or service exacted from any person as a consequence of a conviction in a court of law, provided that the said work or service is carried out under the supervision and control of a public authority and that the said person is not hired to, or placed at, the disposal of private individuals, companies or associations;
- d. any work or service exacted in cases of emergency, such as war or a calamity or threat of calamity, such as fire, flood, famine, earthquake, violent epidemic or epizootic diseases, and any circumstance that would endanger the existence or wellbeing of the population;
- e. minor communal services being performed by the members of the community in the direct interest of the community can be considered as normal civic obligations incumbent upon the members of the community, provided that community members or their direct representatives have the right to be consulted.

**Bonded labour:** Bonded labour is defined as forced labour in which labourers work as a security against a loan or when labourers inherit a debt. Bonded labour, often known as debt bondage, is a type of forced work in which persuasion into slavery is based on credit.



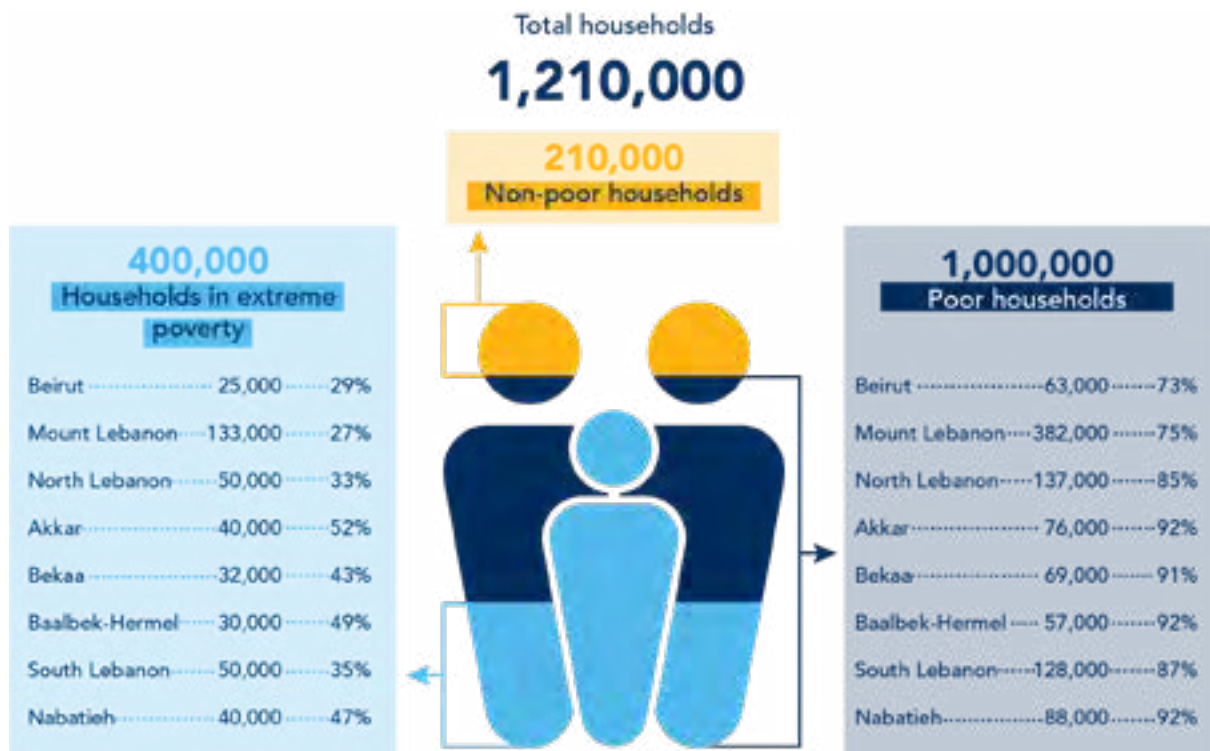
# BACKGROUND

Multiple crises have beset Lebanon over the past two decades – the assassination of a prime minister, political instability, economic stagnation, the 2010 Syrian war and significant influx of Syrian refugees, the covid-19 pandemic and the Beirut port blast. An estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees currently remain in Lebanon.<sup>5,6</sup> Compounding these events, in February 2023, the Lebanese pound was devalued by 90%, paralysing an already stressed banking system.<sup>7</sup>

The World Bank has argued that the financial and economic crisis in Lebanon is in the top three most severe economic collapses since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> From 2019 to 2021, the multidimensional poverty rate in Lebanon doubled from 42% to 82%.<sup>9</sup> At least 4 million people, or approximately 1 million households,<sup>10</sup> are living in multidimensional poverty, including approximately 745,000 Lebanese households. A labour force study found unemployment rates of 29.6% in January 2022, with 32.7% of women without work.<sup>11</sup> The 2023 Lebanon Emergency Response Plan (ERP), which includes support to 3.9 million people in need,<sup>12</sup> is currently only 28% funded.<sup>13</sup>

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of Lebanon’s worsening socioeconomic conditions.<sup>14</sup> An assessment by UNICEF in March 2021 found that 30% of families had at least one child who skipped a meal or went to bed hungry.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in 2022, ACAPS observed that the current economic crisis was reducing children’s access to education and health care (including mental health and psychosocial support services), and increasing their risk of early marriage and child labour.<sup>16</sup> Supporting this analysis, children’s access to education has notably reduced; in 2021-2022, only 43% of school-age children were enrolled in education. Girls and children with disabilities were at the highest risk of not returning to school.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 1. Households experiencing multidimensional poverty and extreme multidimensional poverty, by governorate (number and share of population)**





## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Freedom Fund is exploring the possibility to work in Lebanon on child labour and exploitation. The Freedom Fund is a leader in the global movement to end modern slavery. We identify and invest in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate modern slavery in countries and sectors where it is most prevalent.

The scoping study informs a one year inception phase which will allow us to gather lessons from local organisations and co-develop with them a proposed programming framework to address child labour and exploitation. With this in mind, the study aims to understand the dynamics of child labour in three geographical locations across Lebanon where this issue is believed to be especially prevalent, identifying priority needs and possible interventions that may reduce child labour, or at least the WFCL. The study also looks to gain a better understanding of the operating environment in possible locations. This does not mean that other locations in Lebanon are not also facing child labour and its worst forms. However, the Freedom Fund is unable to cover all areas within the limitations of this scoping study.



أريد أن أصبح  
دكتور

*I want to become a doctor*

# APPROACH TO THE STUDY

The scoping study focused on Tripoli, Bekaa Valley and areas of Beirut. These locations were identified based on the lead researcher's extensive work on child labour in Lebanon and review of secondary data from the development and humanitarian sectors. The study included a literature review built on a 2016 report by the Freedom Fund.<sup>18</sup> Semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions were conducted with over 160 children and over 100 caregivers from the three locations. Similar interviews with over 35 employers engaged in legal work (small establishments, agriculture, small industries, and service shops) were also conducted in addition to over 20 key informant interviews (KIIs) with representatives from 18 local municipalities, relevant governmental institutions, and national and international organisations, and CSOs. The lead consultant also engaged in participant observation of children engaged in child labour in the three locations, conducted at different times of the day with the support of experienced field workers and coordinating NGOs. The study design was developed in collaboration with key child labour actors and ministries and adhered to ethical research standards.<sup>19</sup> See Annex B for more details.



# CHILD LABOUR IN LEBANON

Although child labour is not a new problem in Lebanon, the worsening socioeconomic conditions increase the risk of children being forced to work to help their families with basic needs. State-led national data on child labour in Lebanon remains relatively limited. The last National Child Labour Survey was conducted in 2015 and did not include Syrian child labour nor informal work where the worst forms of child labour are most prevalent. Furthermore, whilst child labour was previously measured through regular household surveys conducted by UNICEF and Central Administration for Statistics in Lebanon,<sup>20</sup> the last survey was halted in 2020 due to covid-19.

Nonetheless, civil society and international governmental actors have continued to collect research<sup>21</sup> and protection monitoring data. Recent statistics have illustrated that child labour is one of the most pertinent protection issues facing children in Lebanon at the current time. For example, between January and June 2023, the top child protection concern reported in the real time monitoring conducted by the Child Protection Working Group was child labour.<sup>22</sup> When considering the scale of child labour, a 2021 study by UNICEF estimated that around 12% of families in Lebanon sent their children to work, with a sevenfold increase in Lebanese families resorting to child labour (7%).<sup>23</sup> The 12% rate is similar to the latest IRC Protection Monitoring data, which found that the mean percentage of households reporting at least one child engaged in child labour increased from 11% to 13% between Q2 of 2022 and 2023.<sup>24</sup>

Children are not just engaging in work, but also work that constitutes WFCL. Reflecting this, according to Activity Info (the humanitarian activity tracker), the top reported reason for providing child protection case management in the first half of 2023 was exploitation (including WFCL).<sup>25</sup> Across Lebanon, children as young as 6 years are engaged in work that is either unsuited to their age or poses a threat to their safety and well-being. This includes working on the streets, in agricultural fields (including potato, tobacco farms and greenhouses), or on construction sites without suitable safety measures.<sup>26</sup> Added to this, there is a reported increase in the number of children being subjected to sexual exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.<sup>27</sup> Children who are unregistered (see Box 1) are at heightened risk of being out of education, potentially pushing them prematurely into WFCL.<sup>28</sup>

## **Box 1: Unregistered children: a group facing additional vulnerability to WFCL and trafficking**

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Children who were born in Lebanon cannot access official schooling, university, or work if their birth is not formally and fully registered. Syrian children have been particularly affected, with the main reasons for non-registration being lack of awareness of the process (including the time frames for certain steps) and financial constraints.<sup>29</sup> A 2018 UN Vulnerability Study found that less than one in five Syrian children had their births registered with the appropriate civil authority.<sup>30</sup> Regulations were relaxed between 2018 and 2019 to allow for backdated registration (NRC). Yet, by 2022, only 36% of Syrian births were registered at the Foreigners' Registry, three quarters of Palestinian refugee births are not fully registered, and it is not known what the figure is for Lebanese citizens.<sup>31</sup> During the scoping study fieldwork, it was apparent that a good number of working children are not officially registered, particularly evident in Tripoli. They, therefore, cannot receive any form of official schooling or vocational training, since they are legally non-existent, impacting their ability to access education<sup>32</sup> and potentially, in the longer-term, formal employment and social protection.

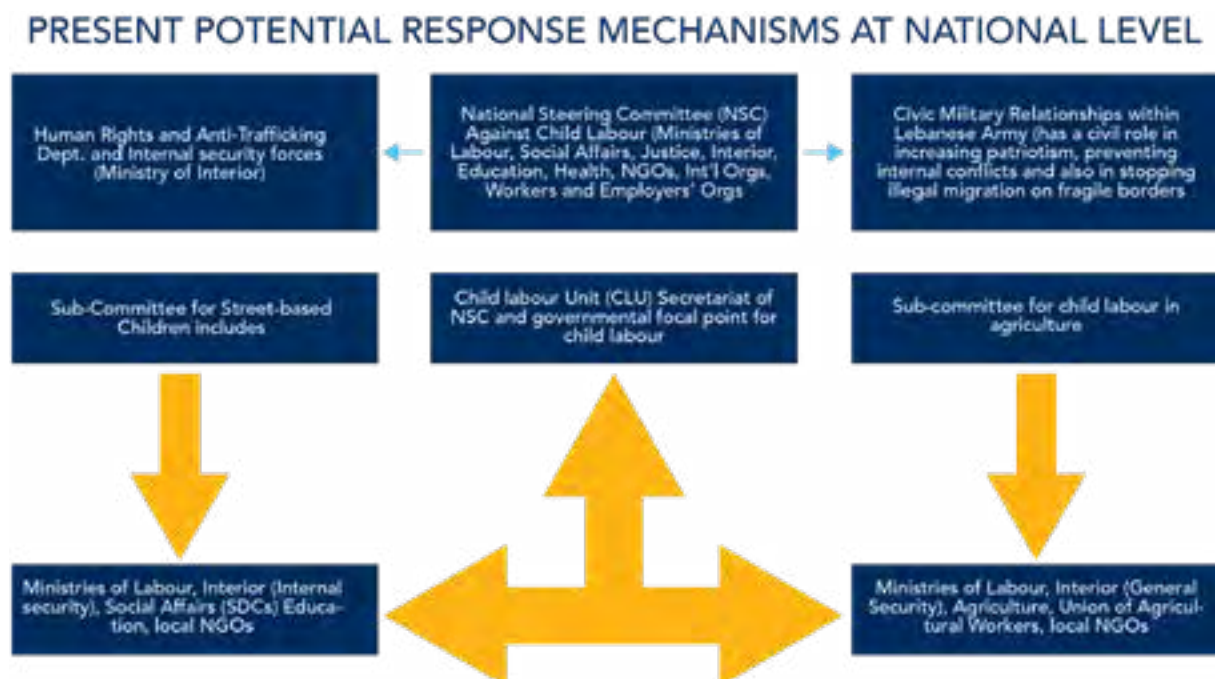
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# CURRENT FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONDING TO CHILD LABOUR IN LEBANON

Lebanon has a relatively comprehensive legal framework for responding to and preventing harmful forms of child labour. The main legislation, Decree 8987, prohibits children engaging in different WFCL; lists are provided that specify which forms of labour are prohibited for all children (under 18 years) and which are only prohibited for children under the age of 16 years.<sup>33</sup> However, although no child is permitted to work more than 6 hours a day, children can work from 14 years of age if the work is not prohibited under Decree 8987.<sup>34</sup> Memo 99, Annex 10 was also reviewed by the General Security to stop employment of children in agriculture under the age of 16 years.<sup>35</sup> Lebanon also has a clear anti-trafficking legislative framework, Law No. 164 (2011) on the Punishment for the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, which criminalises trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual or labour exploitation. However, whilst the legislative framework is promising, there is a need to raise awareness of the legislative framework among all relevant parties. There are also gaps, such as the fact that under Law 164, children can be detained or punished for illegal acts they commit while being trafficked rather than being referred swiftly and safely for appropriate, holistic protective services.<sup>36</sup>

Recognising that child labour requires a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to effectively implement the legal framework, a National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Lebanon<sup>37</sup> was developed in 2013, and then revised—but not published—in 2016. In addition, different committees/units have been established to tackle child labour, as outlined in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Mechanisms for responding to child labour at a national level**



The presence of multiple specialised policies and mechanisms for addressing child labour demonstrates a commendable recognition of the importance of reducing WFCL and sets the foundation for collaborative work that combines state, civil society, and private sector actors.

**Table 1: Overview of key policies and mechanisms for addressing child labour in Lebanon**

<b>POLICIES FOR ADDRESSING CHILD LABOUR</b>
<b>The National Action Plan for the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour in Lebanon</b>
<b>Overview</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Action Plan for the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour was launched in 2013. It recognises that a multisectoral approach is needed to address WFCL and lists key actors’ roles and responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Gaps and opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This was updated in 2016 to include Syrian refugees but has not been officially published since. The current published plan therefore omits a large, at-risk group of children, which should be included in future published drafts as a matter of urgency.</li> <li>The National Action Plan would benefit from being updated to also include the current socio-economic conditions, levels of child labour, and changing trends in child labour.</li> </ul>
<b>MECHANISMS FOR ADDRESSING CHILD LABOUR</b>
<b>National Steering Committee against Child Labour</b>
<b>Overview</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Steering Committee Against Child Labour (NSC) is headed by the Ministry of Labour (MoL). It includes all relevant governmental, non-governmental, workers’ and employers’ organisations, in addition to relevant international organisations who are present as observers.</li> <li>This ensures the inclusion of all relevant ministries’ representatives, NGOs and UN agencies in programming and initiatives to address child labour. The committee is chaired by the Minister of Labour or his/her representative.</li> </ul>
<b>Gaps and opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The NSC is currently inactive due to a combination of factors including a significant decrease in international support for child labour in the face of other priorities. High transport costs also limit the mobility of government staff and hinder subsequent coordination.</li> <li>The MoL has recently reactivated the NSC, although this may require financial support. The committee would benefit from being sensitised on child labour trends so that the National Action Plan can be updated and implemented in a nationally coordinated manner.</li> </ul>
<b>Sub-committees for child labour</b>
<b>Overview</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The NSC has two technical subcommittees that can be authoritative coordinating bodies to address two areas of child labour: one focusing on children engaged in street-based work, the other focusing on children working in agriculture. The subcommittees include governmental and non-governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), agricultural unions, representatives from Internal Security, relevant NGOs and others.</li> <li>The MoL has established child labour monitoring committees, including in Bekaa and Mount Lebanon.</li> </ul>
<b>Gaps and opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like the NSC, the two technical subcommittees are relatively inactive, however they have more flexibility in meeting than the NSC. The latter needs to issue an official invitation for stakeholders (from the Minister or whoever he deems appropriate to represent him). The subcommittees can meet if the child labour focal point calls for a meeting at any time. They have the potential to be more responsive to emerging issues. There is a need to reactivate these sub-committees and develop sectoral action plans. In addition, new sub-committees can be developed for any other emerging issue too.</li> </ul>



## Child Labour Unit

### Overview

- The Child Labour Unit (CLU) is the main focal point for child labour at the governmental level, as well as the Secretariat of the NSC.<sup>38</sup> The CLU has a significant and authoritative national role with regards to child labour.

### Gaps and opportunities

- The weakened financial position of the MoL has led to a reduced budget for transport and logistics funding needed to operate the unit and its activities at the field level.

## Special unit for combating trafficking in persons under the Ministry of Interior

### Overview

- This unit falls within the Ministry of Interior and focuses on trafficking in persons and prostitution, including children under the age of 18 years.

### Gaps and opportunities

- Although the unit is active in relation to trafficking in adults, its role is less clear regarding children.
- It would be helpful to develop the unit's capacity to address child trafficking. This could include co-developing a plan to raise awareness of the issue and co-developing an action plan for tackling child trafficking (including forced labour) and increasing prosecution of traffickers.

## Civil – Military Cooperation Unit in Lebanese Armed Forces

### Overview

- The Civil – Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Unit and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) coordinate on issues relating to trafficking of persons for the purpose of exploitative labour, including children. The CIMIC unit within the LAF is well-established, well organised, and committed. It is endeavouring to help combat trafficking and the use of children in political protests and armed conflicts.
- When consulted as part of the study,<sup>39</sup> CIMIC were interested in learning more about child labour and associated conventions, and how they can further work on preventing children being engaged in armed conflict.

### Gaps and opportunities

- The unit could benefit from capacity development on how to provide survivor-centred, trauma-informed support to children, and how to make safe referrals to appropriate services, such as child protection. Additional resources to support this work are also needed.

Previously, state mechanisms were complemented by large programmes focusing on issues relating to child labour, offered by international governmental organisations. However, many of these programmes ended in 2018. Of particular concern is the fact that several important programmes, such as UNICEF's education and cash transfer programming,<sup>40</sup> have had to reduce their activities and number of participants due to shortage of funding. A more detailed overview of the challenges faced by INGOs and NGOs when responding to or preventing child labour can be viewed in Annex C.

# HOTSPOTS FOR CHILD LABOUR

The main findings of the scoping study are presented according to geographical locations, focusing on Tripoli, Bekaa and Beirut. For each location, we present key themes that emerged from the data collection and an analysis of local mechanisms for addressing child labour.

**Figure 3: Map of hotspots for child labour**





## Box 2: Early Marriage as an economic coping mechanism

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Although the scoping study focused on child labour, a recurring finding was the use of early marriage as a negative coping mechanism for addressing socioeconomic hardship. Early marriage is a form of forced marriage and is thus an example of sexual exploitation and modern slavery, the core focus area of the Freedom Fund. The practice of early marriage is particularly evident amongst refugees, with the 2022 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon finding that around one in five Syrian refugee girls (15 to 19 years) were married.<sup>41</sup> Within our scoping study, girls as young as 12 were reported being married to much older men. Interviews with girls and their mothers revealed that protection and food security were the main motivations, with school closures in 2019 following covid-19 also acting as a push factor. However, mothers said that they would prefer their daughters not to marry if there were other livelihood alternatives. The decision to engage a girl in marriage was depicted as being (predominantly) the father's choice, and even if the girl resists, she is given no say in the decision. Marriages were reported as typically lasting only a short time, intended as interim protection, and it appears that formal marriage processes are not always followed.

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## TRIPOLI

### CONTEXT

Tripoli is one of the poorest cities on the Mediterranean,<sup>42</sup> with over 80% of the population estimated to be living in poverty.<sup>43</sup> Although the unemployment rate for the overall North Governorate was 32.3% in January 2022<sup>44</sup>, in 2021 there were reports of Tripoli city having unemployment rates of up to 60%.<sup>45</sup>

### CHILD LABOUR IN TRIPOLI

**Children in Tripoli are engaging in a range of visible and non-visible work.** Forms of child labour in Tripoli that were observed during data collection included:

- Children working in retail jobs or trades, including jobs in car mechanic shops, carpentry, welding, small grocery shops, hairdressing and small hidden garment factories.
- Children working in the fishing trade
- Children as young as 12 years selling small items or begging on the streets
- Cleaning homes and staircases of buildings
- Young girls engaged in commercial sexual exploitation for seemingly low-value exchanges.

These observations aligned with the findings from interviews with 42 Lebanese and Syrian children (eight years and above) who were interviewed in Tripoli (See Annex B for participants' details). The majority (62%) worked in small establishments. A further third worked in 'unclear' work, where the exact nature of the work was not immediately apparent. When children, caregivers and other community members were probed what this entailed, a range of activities were cited, including illicit income generating ventures:

- Driving tuk-tuks, which are sometimes used for trafficking drugs and commercial sexual exploitation
- Food delivery to shops and homes where drugs are sometimes reportedly planted with or without the knowledge of the child
- Children used in armed conflicts and political protests in Tripoli who, according to some observers, may also be taken to Beirut for protests
- Suspected trafficking of girls (below 18 years) under the guise of vocational training programmes in beauty-related professions. Girls are encouraged to travel abroad for allegedly professional opportunities that are promoted by local and international companies and agencies. One family had lost contact with their daughter after she had pursued such an opportunity.

**Children used in political protests and armed conflicts** The study found that poor and uneducated children in Tripoli continue to be used in political protests or armed conflicts for money and, in the

case of adolescents, to display some form of power. This is exacerbated by limited age appropriate work opportunities. For example, during the protests that took place in Beirut in 2019, children were reportedly carried in buses from Tripoli to downtown Beirut to destroy shops and street amenities, such as lights, benches and floor tiles, in return for payment. Media reports and visual images of the riots suggest that different political groups would use the children to send a certain political statement/message.

**Children's work is often hazardous in nature, meeting indicators of WFCL.** Not all forms of child labour identified in Tripoli clearly constitute WFCL, as per Decree 8987. However, many do, exposing the child to unsafe working conditions and violence. For instance, children engaged in the fishing trade were observed handling dynamite to kill fish and reported working on vessels in very high waves, carrying the risk of falling overboard and drowning. Similarly, over half (52%) of the 42 child participants reported using heavy/dangerous machinery (electrical machines, knives, and sharp tools), typically without protection. A further 63% reported carrying heavy weights (tyres, bags of garbage) that exceed weights suitable for their age during their work and 22% reported working with toxic materials, including paint, acid or gas.

Alongside the risks deriving from their type of work, the majority of children also reported abusive work conditions, including verbal abuse (74%), physical violence (44%) and sexual harassment (11%). Moreover, despite children being legally allowed to work 6 hours per day between 7am and 7pm,<sup>46</sup> 44% reported working 6-10 hours per day, 25% reported working evenings hours (5 to 7pm) and 44% said they worked more than 12 hours per day. Just over half (51%) were attending some form of schooling (including accelerated learning programmes), while only a third (33%) had at least one recreational activity/week.

**Children in Tripoli are often forced or coerced to engage in hazardous work.** Underpinned by poverty, children are falling victim to different types of WFCL to meet their basic needs. These include drug trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and engagement in political and armed conflicts. Participants reported that in the last two years, Tripoli has seen an increase in adults and children paying traffickers to illegally transport them via sea with the aim of reaching Europe. Children also reported wanting to help ease their families' suffering by contributing to the household income.

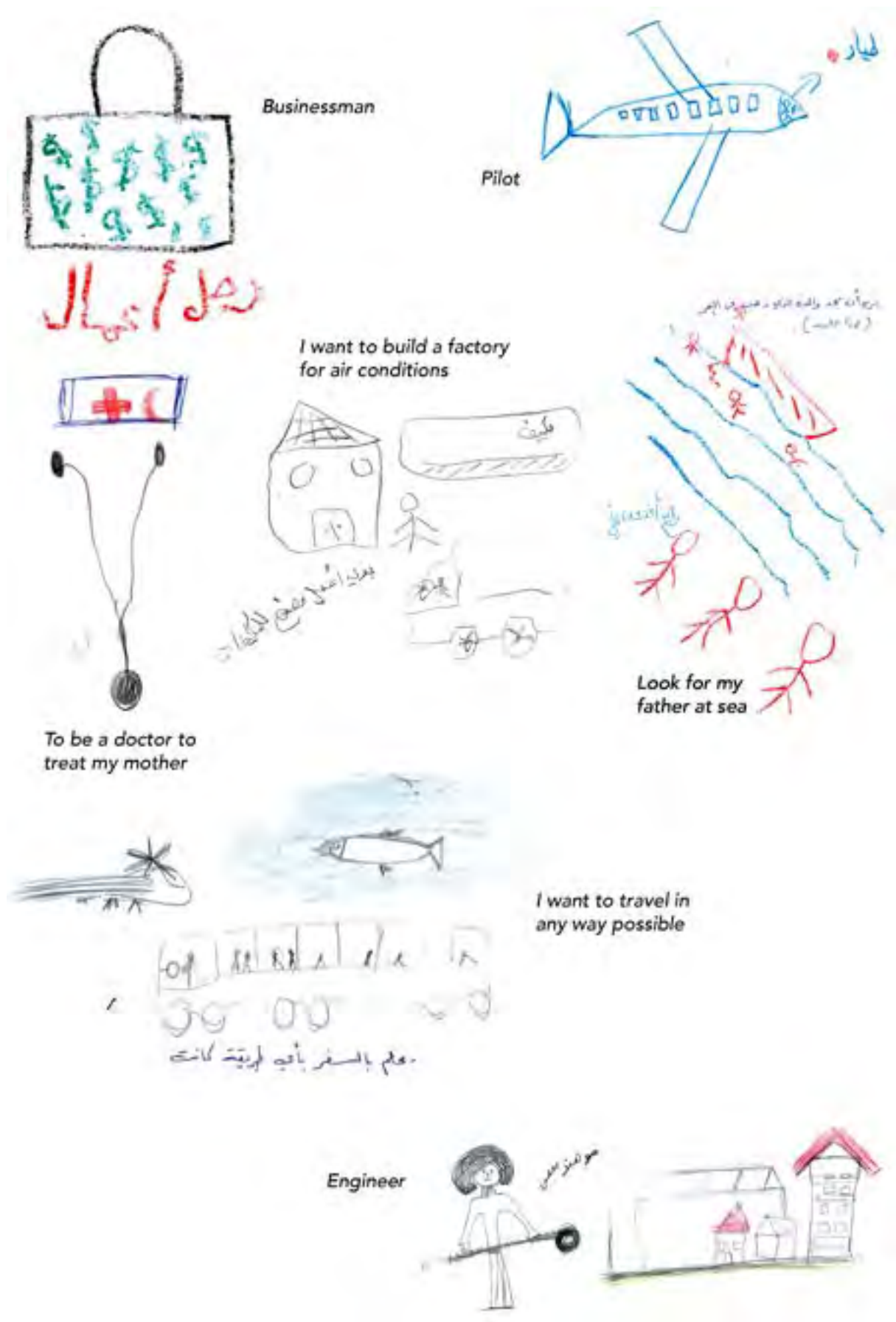
Employers reported actively choosing to hire children. Although only a third of approached employers agreed to answer questions (see Annex B), when asked why they employed children rather than adults, their responses included:

- Children are not going to school anymore, so it is better to have them working rather than staying on the streets
- Children can learn a skill that will help them as adults
- Children need the money to help their caregivers, particularly where the latter are sick
- Children are easier to handle and can be paid less than adults
- Adults ask for a percentage of profits from work but children do not.

All employers said that children working for them work up to nine hours per day, with some adding, "more at times". This corroborates the feedback from the children. About 60% of employers said that they provide 30-minutes rest time per day, while only 40% granted one hour. When asked if the children are given anything to eat during the long day, 80% said possibly a *mankoushe* (type of flatbread), while others said a piece of cake.

**Despite working in typically low skilled, manual labour, children aspire to work that exceeds their current opportunities.** As highlighted in Figure 4, when asked to express their dreams through drawing, some children focused on achieving formal, typically respected employment and others expressed feelings of responsibility in relation to their families. The overwhelming theme was that children wanted to exceed the boundaries of their current work opportunities.

Figure 4. Sample of dreams and aspirations from children engaged in child labour



Services for supporting children affected by hazardous forms of child labour are very limited in Tripoli. An analysis of key stakeholders found that the city does not have sufficient CSOs focusing on child labour. Formalised mechanisms exist in Tripoli for addressing child labour, but there are notable gaps and unrealised opportunities (Table 2).

**Table 2: Overview of child labour interventions in Tripoli**

Child labour interventions in Tripoli
<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is evidence of renewed municipal interest in tackling child labour, evidenced by reactivation of an old task force for child labour.</li> <li>• Local NGOs, such as Social Movement, Right To Play and BEYOND, have close ties with communities in economically vulnerable areas and experienced teams for delivering programming. This is complemented by other, small local NGOs that have good neighbourhood outreach.</li> <li>• INGOs and UN agencies, who have greater leverage of donor funding, have presence in Tripoli and are also working on child labour issues (e.g. IRC, UNICEF).</li> <li>• There is a child protection sub-working group covering the North Governorate which can focus on localised patterns of child labour and associated risks.</li> </ul>
<b>Gaps</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tripoli is a highly politically polarised city which can at times impede coordination between local NGOs’ activities.</li> <li>• Most NGOs deal with the WFCL in a partial manner, providing child protection programming that may provide holistic case management, but do not necessarily cover the more intensive economic recovery programming at a household level that is needed to reduce or prevent child exploitation.</li> <li>• Local NGOs that are closer to people and have good outreach tend to have poor financial resources that impede the reach and scale of their programming.</li> <li>• The current programming offered by INGOs tends to address very basic forms of child labour. Less attention is paid to hidden forms of child labour, such as domestic work or work in hidden factories, and forms of child labour where the child engages in illegal activities, such as drug trafficking or engagement in armed conflicts or political protests.</li> <li>• Although some Syrian children are educationally supported by international organisations and accelerated learning programmes are offered by local NGOs, the latter need to be enhanced and certified to ensure children have a second chance at accessing formal education.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority intervention areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce coordination of work against child labour through closer engagement of grassroots NGOs, municipalities and religious institutions, and strengthening of existing inter-agency humanitarian mechanisms for addressing child labour and WFCL, such as the Child Labour Task Force and Case Management Task Force.</li> <li>• Draft an action plan for coordination and capacity building of key local actors and build on the inter-agency referral systems that exist to improve the referral of children who are exploited and in situations of WFCL.</li> <li>• Provide direct support to families to prevent trafficking and labour exploitation of children (especially in the poorest and most vulnerable areas).</li> </ul>

## BEIRUT

### CONTEXT

Beirut has a number of informal settlements and refugee camps where children are particularly vulnerable to child labour. These were formed over the years as a result of various conflicts in the region that resulted in the movement of people within Beirut and from neighbouring countries such as Syria and Palestine. In January 2022, the unemployment rate was 24.8% for the Beirut governorate.

The 35 children consulted in these areas reported that most homes consist of one room with a shared toilet, which accommodates six to eight people. Water and electricity are rarely available, and both need to be purchased in US dollars. Only one child interviewed reported having three meals a day, with the majority receiving just two meals comprising rice and a legume. There are police and army patrols which intervene when conflicts arise amongst community members. However children said they were afraid of the sounds of alarms and bullets in their neighbourhoods, the darkness, family violence, and the presence of thieves in their neighbourhood.

## CHILD LABOUR IN BEIRUT

Children living in poverty pockets of Beirut are being sent to work to help meet their families' basic needs. Living under such conditions places immense stress on caregivers. Families are forced to move frequently due to many reasons including evictions, lack of resources to pay their rent, seasonal labour or security concerns. It was clear from the interviews that many believed that sending their children to work was their only available means of survival.

Children engaged in street work are particularly evident in Beirut poverty pockets. Children as young as seven or eight were seen working (including begging) and sleeping on the streets. Groups of children were either watched by an adult employer or worked unsupervised. "Employers" were also observed bringing groups of children to beg or sell flowers in a van, dropping them at different points in the town, such as traffic lights and restaurants. They were then picked up at the end of the day.

Child street work has been evident in Beirut for many years. Since the early 2000s, children have been brought from Syria to beg and sell in Beirut, returning either the same day or within a week or month.<sup>47</sup> The scoping study confirmed street work is still prevalent. However, the study also found that Lebanese and Palestinian children are increasingly observed on the streets of Beirut, but these are slightly older, starting at 11 and 12 years. Most of the children encountered on the streets came from poverty pockets, including informal settlement areas and refugee camps.

During the scoping study fieldwork, children were witnessed buying and selling US dollars and gasoline on the black market. We were told that their recruiters believe children are less likely to be noticed or prosecuted than an adult, meaning children are seen as a safer prospect for this illegal work. Other illicit activities in which children were visibly engaging or reported to be engaging included commercial sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, political protests, burning of tyres and other conflict-related activities. We were informed that affected children may travel from displaced communities outside Beirut or be trafficked from outside the city.

**Children are experiencing working conditions that violate Lebanese labour law.** Amongst the interviewed children, most reported working 10 to 12 hours per day, with no time for recreation, and only 10% of children aged 8 to 12 years were still in school. This suggests that very young children are at heightened risk of curtailed access to education due to their work. After sunset, a number of children were observed crossing long distances on foot within the city carrying twice their own weight in bags filled with tin and plastic scavenged from large garbage sites and sold to manufacturing and recycling agencies. In line with other literature on street-based work, this form of child labour involves a plethora of dangers, including sexual abuse, verbal and physical harassment, exposure to severe weather conditions and the risk of road traffic accidents.<sup>48</sup>

**Children want to leave their current lives in Beirut and have better long-term prospects.** It was clear that children experienced physically difficult working conditions and also recognised their inequality, noting that wealthy passers-by sometimes threw money at them from fancy cars. In retaliation to this inequality, they recalled incidents in which affluent cars had been hit with stones. The children reported a strong sense of humiliation, especially when treated violently by passers-by or the police. When asked about their dreams, the consulted children wanted to escape their present situation (Figure 4).

**Support to children working on the streets, especially those in WFCL, is limited at best.** A recurring theme was that assistance and services provided by the Government of Lebanon and NGOs is insufficient (Table 3). Children working on the streets typically have very complex situations. They are often internally displaced or refugees, live in informal settlements, may not be able to easily access services because of lack of civil documentation, and may also be involved in illicit activities. Thus, there is a

need for survivor-centred, child-friendly programmes and coordinated interventions which holistically address multiple needs, including, but not limited to, psychosocial, socioeconomic, education and legal aid needs.

**Table 3: Overview of child labour interventions in Beirut poverty pockets**

Child Labour Interventions in Beirut
<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The presence of key Ministries in Beirut (i.e., MoL, MoSA and Ministry of Interior) and their willingness to coordinate efforts on child labour, especially street-based children, is promising.</li> <li>• There is an official child labour monitoring system for street-based children under the MoL, although this has been inactive since covid-19 and the country’s subsequent economic deterioration.</li> <li>• The MoSA has an established street children program.</li> <li>• There is a large presence of international organisations in Beirut, many with expertise on child protection and economic recovery issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Gaps</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministries are in a very difficult financial situations and salaries are extremely low due to currency depreciation. This has a detrimental effect on Ministry-led programmes. For example, increased transportation costs restrict Ministry staff’s ability to travel to work.</li> <li>• Key actors, such as government personnel, who could make a greater impact are currently less active because of economic pressures.</li> <li>• There is still insufficient awareness about the WFCL and child exploitation at all levels, from state to household, and how to address those issues comprehensively.</li> <li>• A small number of NGOs focused on child labour, while many have been focusing on reconstruction work following the Beirut post blast.</li> </ul>
<b>Priority intervention areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with ministries and other local partners to support street-based children engaged in WFCL.</li> <li>• Share information, skills and provide governmental support to address trafficking and WFCL.</li> <li>• Re-activate coordination and monitoring mechanisms, and ensure coordination between relevant actors.</li> <li>• Increase coordination among all relevant UN and civil society actors to maximise efforts against street-based child work under the MoL’s and MoSA’s street-based children program.</li> <li>• Provide technical and/or financial support to local protection and education centres and programmes established by local NGOs.</li> <li>• Support a multifunctional mobile unit that can identify children engaged in WFCL and exploitation, provide mobile child protection services and/or referrals to local actors, and follow up with education and socioeconomic services through networking with other NGOs (e.g. Makhzoumi has a mobile unit that attends to some poverty pockets).</li> <li>• Share good practices from the Arab region on attending to and managing the problem of street-based children.</li> </ul>

## BEKAA VALLEY

### CONTEXT

The Bekaa Valley comprises two of Lebanon’s eight governorates – Baalbek-Hermel and Bekaa. It is the country’s main agricultural region.<sup>49</sup> However, the agricultural sector has been doing poorly for more than a decade, especially since Syrian borders were closed for Lebanese exports. Consequent-



ly, over 90% in the area live in multidimensional poverty, and approximately a third or more people are in extreme multidimensional poverty (Figure 1).<sup>50</sup> In January 2022, the unemployment rate for Baalbek-Hermel governorate was 40.7% and 35.2% for Bekaa governorate.<sup>51</sup> Child labour exploitation has been reported in many studies, most recently by the American University of Beirut.<sup>52</sup>

The Bekaa Valley is also home to high numbers of Syrian refugees. The Bekaa Valley shares a long border with Syria and even before the conflict, Syrian migrants crossed the border to participate in seasonal agricultural work.<sup>53</sup>

Baalbek-Hermel Governorate: 92 per cent live in multidimensional poverty, 49.3 per cent in extreme multidimensional poverty.

Bekaa Governorate: 91 per cent live in multidimensional and 32 per cent in extreme multidimensional poverty.

#### CHILD LABOUR IN THE BEKAA VALLEY

Since the Syria conflict there has been an increase in children engaging in agricultural work. Table 4 highlights push factors leading to an increase in both Syrian and Lebanese child labour:

**Table 4: Push factors leading to children engaging in agricultural work**

Reported push factors encouraging employers to use children in agricultural work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Declining profits from agricultural products in Lebanon (i.e. farmers buy seeds, pesticides and fertilisers with US dollars, but sell their products in Lebanese pounds at prices people can afford, so they do not make any profit).</li> <li>Declining income of farmers (from US \$435 before the economic crisis to barely US \$25).<sup>54</sup></li> <li>Restrictions on exports and the partial closure of the border with Syria.</li> <li>Insufficient actors (state and civil society) working with the private sector to prevent WFCL.</li> </ul>
Push factors encouraging families to engage their children in agricultural work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decline in the economic situation of agricultural workers, as well as people working for state institutions (such as teachers) impeding their ability to meet basic needs.</li> <li>Overcrowded public schools that cannot receive all students, even with the two-shift system, due to various barriers, including teacher shortages and registration challenges.</li> <li>Partial support from international organisations for educating Syrian refugees, leading some schools to give priority to Syrians and creating fewer opportunities for Lebanese children.</li> <li>Unaffordable tent rental prices for Syrian families, leading to families resorting to child labour.</li> <li>Inadequate access to social protection and humanitarian services.</li> <li>Declining government services, such as healthcare, for Lebanese and Syrians.</li> <li>Inadequate support for Lebanese families from donors and local partners.</li> </ul>

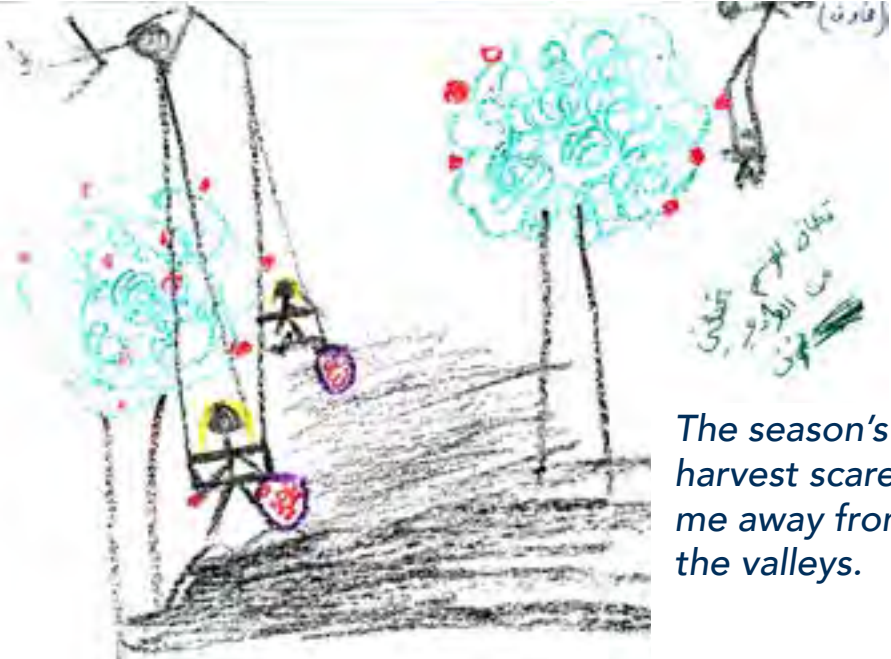
**Children in the Bekaa Valley are engaged in a range of different forms of labour, not just in the agricultural sector.** Prior to 2019, the most prevalent forms of child labour in the Bekaa Valley included work in small informal establishments, work on construction sites and mine quarries, work in all forms of agriculture, work on the streets (for children aged 11 to 12 years), and support to hunting.<sup>55</sup> The scoping study findings are similar. Of the 88 Lebanese and Syrian children consulted, 23% worked in agriculture, 22% in small establishments and 23% on the streets. The remaining children worked in construction (6%), hairdressing (6%) and unclear activities (19%). Furthermore, children also reported that commercial sexual exploitation was perceived to have increased dramatically, with girls becoming engaged in commercial sexual activities to pay for basic survival expenses. For example, one girl reported working as a virtual dancer, work which she implied was getting more popular despite her employers controlling when she works.

**Children report that new forms of child labour have emerged in Bekaa since the economic downturn, including illicit forms of work and forms of bonded labour.** For example, during petrol shortages and devaluation of the Lebanese pound, children reported that they sold petrol and US dollars on the black market. Furthermore, similar to Tripoli, the new and cheap 'tuk-tuk' transportation method is now being driven in Bekaa by very young children. It was quite well-known among community members that the children not only drive the tuk-tuks, but are being used to deliver drugs or persons for commercial sexual activity.



An additional area of work that warrants further investigation is employment of children by the shawish.<sup>56</sup> The shawish are mainly Syrian with good connections in Lebanon prior to the refugee crisis who, in return for helping families get shelter, are reportedly 'entitled' to use the families' children for work in what is arguably a form of bonded labour. The shawish were observed to typically have large numbers of very young children packed in small trucks to work on farmland for no less than ten consecutive hours with hardly any break or food. We were informed that they employ between 10 to 70 children on one farm, and children are picked up at 5 a.m. to at least 5 p.m, during which time they work without any parental supervision. Once in their place of work, children may also be left alone in isolated areas inside plastic tents.

**Figure 5: Depiction of a child's fears**



*The season's harvest scares me away from the valleys.*

**There is widespread use of children in hazardous forms of work in the Bekaa Valley.** Amongst the children consulted in Bekaa Valley, 17% reported using heavy or dangerous machinery (electrical machines, knives and sharp tools) without protection, 46% said they carry heavy weights, such as tyres and bags of garbage, as part of their work, and 22% reported using toxic materials in their work, such as paint, acid or gas, which carry risks if not handled correctly. Finally, as illustrated in Figure 5 depicting a child's fears, children are also lowered by rope down steep slopes to pick fruit.

**Children are engaged in working conditions which violate Lebanese labour law and may also meet indicators of the WFCL.** Of the children we consulted, over a third (38%) were aged between 8 to 12 years old, significantly younger than the legal working age of 14 years. Furthermore, they also reported working long working hours that violate Lebanese law, 29% said they worked 6 to 10 hours per day, 60% worked until night (5 to 7 p.m.) and 58% worked between 7 to 10 p.m. As in the other locations, this left little time for education, only 10% reported that they had ever attended formal school and only 19% reported currently attending some form of schooling (including accelerated learning programmes). Children experienced various forms of abuse in their workplace: 44% reported being verbally abused, 42% reported being physically abused and 33% reported experiencing sexual harassment.

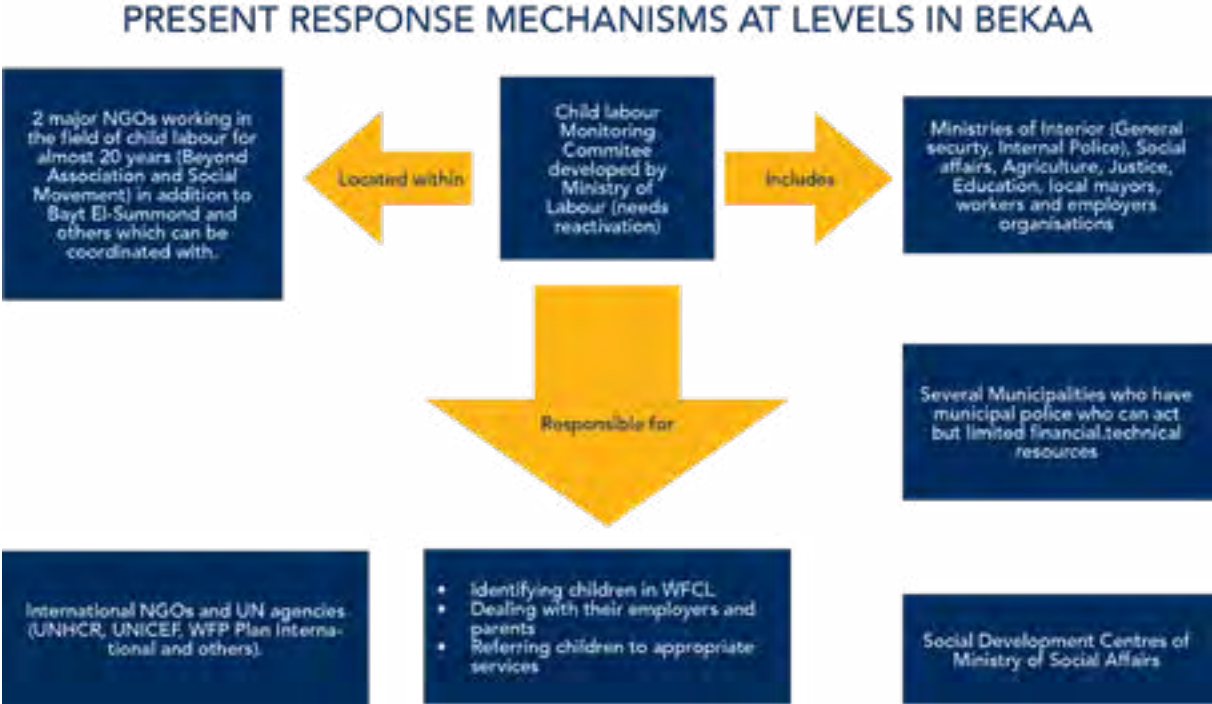
**Against this backdrop of violence, exploitation and socioeconomic hardship, children's dreams focused on leaving the Bekaa Valley.** As highlighted by the children's drawings in Figure 6, a dominant theme was a desire to travel away from Lebanon, either with their family or to be with family from whom they were separated. Other dreams focused on being a dancer or a bride, suggesting that girls may view the latter as a way of escaping their current life.

Employers in Bekaa use children for child labour because they are cheaper and easier to 'handle' but also depict employment opportunities for children as a means of 'assisting' economically vulnerable families. 27 employers in Bekaa were interviewed, although certain groups were more difficult to access than others, especially shawishes. The theme of child labour as a form of support was echoed by another employer who said, "We are helping their parents in these very difficult days". Some employers said that as children were not going to school, it was better for them to work and learn a skill. However, others also said that they hire children, especially boys, because they are more compliant than adults, are paid less, and do not request a share of profits.

Supporting the children's accounts of child labour, employers reported that children generally worked between 8 to 12 hours a day, with a half hour of rest. They were rarely offered food or snacks, although in some cases food was offered instead of cash payments (for example, one employer paid children two bags of potatoes per day of work). Where cash was offered, it was very low – 100,000 Lebanese pounds (US \$8 to \$10) per week. Thus, whilst some employers framed their offers of employment as a lifeline for economically vulnerable households, they provided clear examples of labour exploitation.

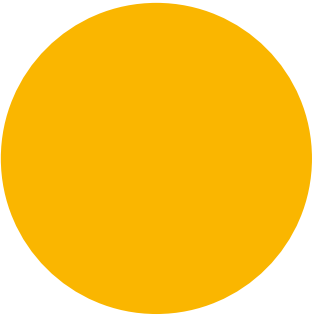
Although there are response mechanisms for addressing child labour in the Bekaa Valley these are limited compared to the scope of the issue. As highlighted by Table 5, a number of key gaps were evident.

Figure 6. Local mechanisms for responding to hazardous child labour in the Bekaa Valley



**Table 5: Assessment of child labour interventions in the Bekaa Valley**

Child labour interventions in the Bekaa Valle
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are only a couple of well-established, trusted and experienced frontline NGOs that specifically deal with WFCL among Syrians and Lebanese children (e.g. BEYOND Association Social Movement NGO).</li> <li>• A child labour monitoring system (CLMS) has been officially established with BEYOND by the MOL.</li> <li>• Municipalities in general are mandated to enrol children in school and therefore prevent and combat WFCL and in some areas of Bekaa this is being well implemented.</li> <li>• There is a child protection sub-working group covering Bekaa that can focus on locally prevalent WFCL and associated risks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gaps</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are long waiting lists for services relating to WFCL, with need exceeding current capacity.</li> <li>• Insufficient funding for Lebanese and Palestinian households, with increased need across all communities.</li> <li>• There is insufficient understanding on the issue of child labour, how to protect exploited children (including when children are engaged in illicit activities) and how to ensure the best interest of children. Awareness on some of those issues amongst key stakeholders, including enforcement bodies is required .</li> <li>• International aid was further cut in 2023<sup>57</sup> while regional aid is minimal, especially for issues such as child labour.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority intervention areas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of financial resources to state and civil society actors to increase staff, services, safe areas and capacity building on dealing with children involved in WFCL in the agricultural sector.</li> <li>• Strengthened coordination between key actors to ensure a consolidated area-based approach to addressing WFCL, with an area-based action plan and an effective, digitalised referral system.</li> <li>• Official reactivation of the CLMS monitoring system, including widespread sensitisation on how the mechanism works for all relevant local partners.</li> <li>• Capacity development with key actors such as municipalities, law enforcement actors and religious leaders on how to provide support to children affected by this issue.</li> </ul>



# CONCLUSION

This feasibility study presented a snapshot of the different forms of child labour that are evident in Lebanon, specifically within certain hotspots. Child labour appears to be increasingly used as a coping mechanism and there is strong evidence that children are engaging in WFCL across Lebanon, with individuals facilitating at times the exploitation of children. In rural areas, such as the Bekaa Valley, this includes physically hazardous agricultural work, which may be coupled with potential debt bondage to a shawish. In urban centres, children engage in street-based work, such as begging and tuk-tuk driving. A common theme across the locations was children’s engagement in illicit work, such as drug trafficking, the use of children in armed conflicts or protests and commercial sexual exploitation. At present, engagement in illicit forms of work can leave children in conflict with the law. All these forms of labour jeopardise children’s immediate and longer-term safety and well-being, and reduce their ability to realise their basic child rights.

Other factors at the institutional, community and family level have also contributed to this changing dynamic as reflected in Table 6. In order to achieve systemic changes, it will be important for key stakeholders to address those different factors at each level listed below.

**Table 6: Factors that may increase children’s vulnerability to child labour, including WFCL**

Factors that increase children’s vulnerability to child labour and exploitation
<b>Institution level</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The government cannot afford basic services for Lebanese citizens or other populations.</li> <li>• Financial support from UN agencies decreased by 30% to 40% in 2022. Subsequently, direct support to families in need decreased.</li> <li>• Support from international organisations and donors, including regional Arab organisations, for child labour issues is weak in Lebanon.</li> <li>• WFCL and exploitation of children (including trafficking) are complex and pressing issues that many organisations lack sufficient know-how to approach in a comprehensive manner. Most international and local organisations tend to prioritise child protection immediate response services, such as child protection case management. This is very important but needs to be accompanied by longer term preventative work on access to education and economic recovery for the most economically vulnerable families with children.</li> </ul>
<b>Community level</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipalities have weak financial and technical resources for addressing child labour, despite willingness to engage on the issue.</li> <li>• Weak coordination among service providers working on issues relating to WFCL.</li> <li>• Weak awareness interventions on child rights’ violations, such as WFCL and exploitation, and the impact on children’s short-term and long-term well-being.</li> <li>• Employers are willing to employ children due to their own reduced profits and stretched economies, with some believing they are ‘helping’ economically vulnerable families. This demonstrates potentially low awareness of the impact of child labour on children’s well-being and life opportunities.</li> </ul>
<b>Child and family level</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School has become both unaffordable and inaccessible, with insufficient spaces. Additionally, children without the required civil documentation are unlikely to be able to enrol.</li> <li>• The unemployment rate is high across Lebanon (almost 30%), with women less likely to be employed.</li> <li>• Wages are insufficient to feed a family or pay electricity bills.</li> <li>• Most families live without electricity or safe sources of water.</li> <li>• Child labour is increasingly viewed as a ‘solution’ to economic deprivation, with some children viewing it as a way of helping their families.</li> </ul>

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following interventions for addressing hazardous child labour, WFCL and/or child exploitation in the three locations are suggested.

## STRENGTHENING POLICY AND SYSTEMS FOR ADDRESSING WFCL AND CHILD EXPLOITATION

THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON TO:

- Update the NAP to include emerging WFCL, the current socioeconomic challenges, and changing prevalence and trends relating to WFCL. Consider updating other relevant legislation and policies, such as Law 164, which risks criminalising trafficked and exploited children who have been involved in illicit activities. Consider developing an action plan specifically for tackling child trafficking. Provide sensitisation for all key stakeholders, including municipalities and employers, on the NAP's contents and other relevant laws.
- Meaningfully involve children currently or formerly engaged in child labour in policy and programme planning at national, governorate, and local levels so that they can share their unique insights and act as advocates for themselves and their peers.

## RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT WFCL AND CHILD EXPLOITATION AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS TO:

- Sensitise key national- and governorate-level child protection actors on emerging forms of WFCL, its prevalence and impact, and increase capacity to understand the issue and modify existing policies and programmes to prevent all WFCL as well as withdraw and rehabilitate affected children in a survivor-centred manner. Relevant actors include the National Steering Committee who are responsible for updating the NAP, law enforcement bodies, and judicial actors.
- Provide sensitisation for the Special Unit for Combating Trafficking in Persons on child trafficking, with a focus on exploitative and forced labour.
- Sensitise employers of children about child labour laws, including Decree 8987 on WFCL, and the intermediate and longer-term harmful effects of child labour on a child's well-being, safety and development.
- Raise awareness on the WFCL, child exploitation and child trafficking among the public at large through the Ministries of Labour and Communication, religious organisations, Ministry of Social Affairs, area- and community-based media events, and school and NGO-based programmes for children and parents (e.g., ILO SCREAM Right to Play programmes and street-based children's programmes). Consider using community-based influencers and ex-child labourers as campaign spokespersons to increase campaign reach and ensure children's voices are heard.
- Contextualise awareness on child labour risks to each locality. For example, in Tripoli, awareness on the risks of migration for work is particularly important as children and families do not necessarily understand the conditions of modern slavery that children may face, including bonded labour.

## STRENGTHEN HOLISTIC SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY WFCL AND EXPLOITATION

### CIVIL SOCIETY AND, WHERE RESOURCES ALLOW, STATE ACTORS TO:

- Strengthen coordination between key actors who provide services to children and families affected by WFCL and child exploitation, and increase resources to coordination mechanisms, as required. Activities could include capacitating the newly reactivated National Steering Committee Against Child Labour and the committee for children engaged in agriculture work (under MoL), supporting coordination of activities under the MoSA street children programme, and developing and coordinating area-level hotspot action plans with key partners, including governmental organisations.
- Offer a holistic package of care to children and families affected by WFCL/exploitation that includes protection (e.g. child labour monitoring and referral systems, case management, psychosocial support), education (formal or informal), economic recovery, health, recreational, and legal aid services, as required.
- Strengthen the resilience of economically vulnerable households whose children are currently engaged in, or at risk of engaging in, child labour. This could include raising awareness about social protection programmes in the area and how to register; providing legal aid to obtain the civil documentation needed to access education, work and other social protection services; assessing labour market needs/opportunities; developing economic recovery interventions for youth and adults that are tailored to their needs and the context (including accredited skills training courses); creating a platform for linking participants to decent employment opportunities; and supporting the implementation of individual or group income generating activities.

## INCREASE PRIORITISATION OF WFCL AND CHILD EXPLOITATION AMONG THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON, MULTILATERAL AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL DONOR COMMUNITY.

### GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS TO:

- Engage multilateral agencies and the international donor community on the need for increased funding and technical assistance to prevent and address WFCL and child exploitation in areas of high prevalence.

### GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON AND INTERNATIONAL DONOR COMMUNITY TO:

- Prioritise funding for implementation of the NAP and other relevant legislation. This includes ensuring adequate staffing and resources for implementing national and governorate-level provisions within the action plan, including sufficient resourcing of the Child Labour Unit to increase their community presence.



## INCREASE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD LABOUR IN THE LEBANESE CONTEXT.

THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON, CIVIL SOCIETY AND LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ACTORS WHO FOCUS ON CHILD LABOUR TO:

- Increase knowledge about WFCL and child exploitation through data collection on new trends to ensure evidence-based policies and systems. This could include a new National Child Labour Survey, re-starting the regular household survey, which included questions on child labour, and conducting area-level surveys on WFCL and child trafficking. Reinitiate and/or develop digitalised child labour monitoring systems in areas of high prevalence of child labour.
- Conduct research to better understand the role of intermediaries in facilitating the exploitation and possible trafficking of children in Lebanese contexts.
- Explore lessons for successfully responding to and preventing WFCL and child exploitation from countries across the region, such as Egypt, and adapt these within national- and governorate-level action plans.

### GOAL





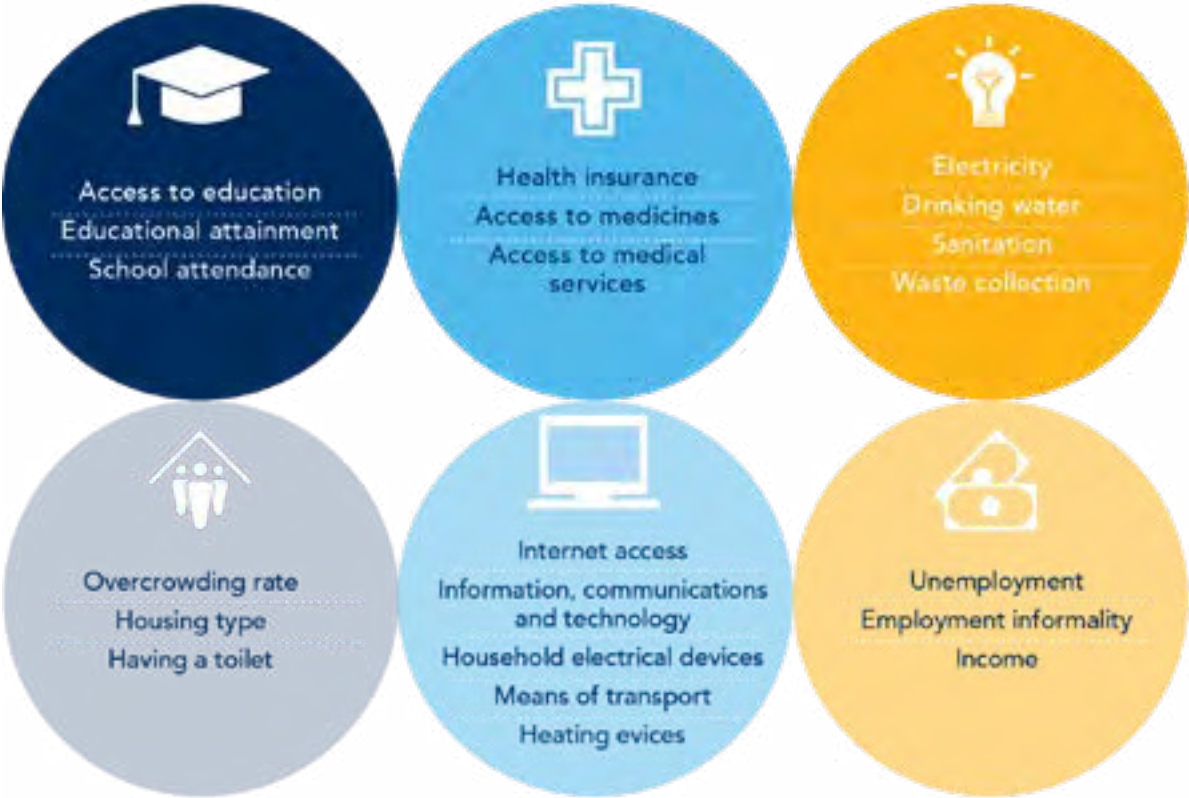
# ANNEX A: MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX

According to the latest United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) Multidimensional Poverty in Lebanon (2019–2021) report,<sup>58</sup> households are defined as multidimensionally poor if they are deprived in one or more dimensions illustrated in Figure 8.

**Figure 7: Multidimensional poverty index**

## MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX IN LEBANON

The Multidimensional Poverty Index consist of six dimensions and 20 indicators. A household is classified as living in multidimensional poverty if it is deprived in one or more dimensions, and in extreme multidimensional poverty if it is deprived in two more dimensions. Each dimension has several indicators.



Source: UN ESCWA (2021), [Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon \(2019-2021\): Painful reality and uncertain prospects \(unescwa.org\)](https://www.unescwa.org/).

# ANNEX B: LOCATION-SPECIFIC APPROACH

In each location, a variety of stakeholders were consulted, including children engaged in child labour.

North (Tripoli)	Beirut	Bekaa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 42 children (Lebanese, Syrian, other)</li> <li>• 31 parents and caregivers</li> <li>• 10 employers</li> <li>• 4 local authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 35 children (Syrian, Lebanese, likely other)</li> <li>• 2 local authorities</li> <li>• 10 parents and caregivers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 88 children (Syria, Lebanese, others)</li> <li>• 67 parents and caregivers</li> <li>• 27 employers</li> <li>• 18 local authorities</li> </ul>

## TRIPOLI

In Tripoli, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were carried out with a random sample of 42 boys and girls engaged in child labour from the heavily populated and very poor areas of Hay Wadi el-Nahle, El-Beddawi, El-Makueni, Jabal Mehsen and El-Tebbaneh. Of the 27 children who participated in the interviews, 31% were Lebanese, 52% Syrian and 17% were Palestinian or Iraqi. Of the 15 who participated in focus group discussions, 70% were Syrian and 30% were Lebanese. 40% were aged 8 to 12 years, 44% were 12 to 14 years, and 15% were 14 to 18 years. Children were also observed working on the streets in the Mina port area and the old markets, and a team of field researchers observed children's activities during night-time. Additionally, consultations were conducted with 31 mothers and caregivers, ten employers of child labourers and four municipal representatives. Only 10 out of 30 employers (3 Syrian, 7 Lebanese) of small establishments and industries in Tripoli who were approached by the researchers agreed to participate.

## BEIRUT

Focus group discussions were carried out with 15 street-based children from poverty pockets and informal settlements around Beirut, including areas where Syrian and Palestinian refugees reside.<sup>59</sup> A further 20 were interviewed. Many refused to disclose their ages or nationalities, which is typical of street-based children, especially non-Lebanese. They were asked about their home and finances, education, safety, nutrition, employment and their dreams and fears. Children were aged 8 to 12 years. Since many children would not say what they do, this was assessed through direct observation and through interviews with ten parents and adults in caregiver roles, such as social workers and teachers working for local NGOs.

## BEKAA VALLEY

BEYOND Association local child labour centre supported the team to access potential participants. 88 semi-structured interviews were conducted with boys and girls engaged in child labour. Of these, 31% were Lebanese, 53% Syrian and 16% other nationalities. When considering their age, 38% were aged 8 to 12 years, 38% aged 12 to 14 years and 25% aged 14 to 18 years. Focus group discussions were also conducted with 40 children working in child labour (mainly Syrian, but also some Lebanese and Palestinians), as well as semi-structured interviews with 67 parents and caregivers, 27 with employers of children (60% Lebanese, 40% Syrian) and 18 local authority representatives.<sup>60</sup> The structured data collection was complemented by observation of children working in various sites, including, but not limited to the streets, in small shops, agricultural areas and garbage collection sites.

# ANNEX C: CHALLENGES FACED BY INGOS AND NGOS ADDRESSING CHILD LABOUR

## Challenges faced by INGOs and NGOs/CBOs (according to responses)

1. Insufficient free of charge safe spaces for children
2. Lack of temporary shelters for victims of sexual abuse and/or trafficking effective referral system (no proper or efficient follow up of cases)
3. Lack of economic alternatives for families
4. Lack of quality informal education /alternative learning for children
5. Some communities' perceived closedness and lack of cooperation
6. Lack of comprehensive services such as medical care and mental health support, especially for children affected by wars and violence
7. Lack of child- and survivor-centred approaches at municipal level, especially when dealing with street children
8. Not enough donors for the increasing number of children, including from Lebanese host communities
9. Lack of comprehensive approaches to child labourers
10. Lack of coordination amongst all relevant stakeholders (potentially under NSC and at area-based levels)

Most important challenge for all: High number of child labour/WFCL cases and limited capacities to respond. In 2023, the situation worsened due to decrease in international funding while regional funding was limited.

## Top priority issues that need urgent support

1. Some important programs have had to reduce their activities and number of participants due to shortage of funding.
  2. Educational support is highly needed and is currently beyond capacity of existing projects.
  3. Vocational training and economic empowerment are critical to the issue of child labour and available programs are not sufficient.
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# ENDNOTES

- 1 See Annex A for details on how this is calculated.
- 2 Child Protection Working Group Lebanon (2023), [Monitoring Children's Situation between January and June 2023 \(August 2023\)](#)
- 3 Child Protection Working Group Lebanon (2023), [Monitoring Children's Situation between January and June 2023 \(August 2023\)](#)
- 4 Following this feasibility study, the Freedom Fund has invested in a 12-month inception phase where local organisations are being provided with inception funding to continue and learn from activities that address root causes of child labour, while working towards developing a full strategy to address child labour in selected geographical areas with high prevalence. The inception phase would allow to decide whether to move into a full-scale program implementation.
- 5 Lebanon Humanitarian Country Team (2023), [Escalating Needs in Lebanon: A 2023 Overview](#)
- 6 [ACAPS \(2020\), Lebanon: Explosion in Beirut. A crisis overview](#)
- 7 [Reuters, \(2023\), Lebanon devalues official exchange rate by 90% \(February 2023\)](#)
- 8 [World Bank \(2021\), Lebanon Sinking into One of the Most Severe Global Crises Episodes, amidst Deliberate Inaction \(June 2021\)](#)
- 9 See Annex A for details on how this is calculated.
- 10 A household is defined as a family consisting of two adults and two children.
- 11 Lebanon Central Administration of Statistics and ILO (2022), [Lebanon Follow Up Labour Force Survey: Fact Sheet](#)
- 12 Lebanon Humanitarian Country Team (2023), [Escalating Needs in Lebanon: A 2023 Overview](#)
- 13 UN OCHA (2023), [Lebanon Emergency Response Plan 2023: Financial Tracking Service](#)
- 14 [ACAPS \(2022\), Lebanon: Humanitarian impact of crisis on children \(May 2022\)](#)
- 15 [UNICEF \(2021\), Children's future on the line \(July 2021\)](#)
- 16 [ACAPS \(2022\), Lebanon: Humanitarian impact of crisis on children \(May 2022\)](#)
- 17 [UNICEF \(2022\), Lebanese crisis forcing youth out of learning, robbing them of their futures: UNICEF survey \(Jan 2022\)](#)
- 18 [The Freedom Fund \(2016\), Struggling to survive: Slavery and exploitation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon \(freedomfund.org\)](#)
- 19 [Informed consent were obtained, data anonymized and where children were identified as working in WFCL, referrals were provided.](#)
- 20 [UNICEF \(n/d\), Lebanon situation reports: Humanitarian action for children](#)
- 21 [Recent examples include Habib \(2021\), Work-related injuries among Syrian refugee child workers in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: A gender-sensitive analysis, Plan \(2019\), Worst forms of child labour in Jordan and Lebanon \(December 2019\), AUB et al \(2019\), Survey on Child Labour in Agriculture in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: The Case of Syrian Refugees and UNICEF \(2021\), Lebanon: Children's future on the line.](#)
- 22 Child Protection Working Group Lebanon (2023), [Monitoring Children's Situation between January and June 2023 \(August 2023\)](#)
- 23 UNICEF (2021), [Surviving without the basics: The ever-worsening Lebanon: Child Protection Working Group - Monitoring Children's Situation between January and June 2023 \(August 2023\)](#) Impact of Lebanon's crisis on children High Res (November 2021)
- 24 Child Protection Working Group Lebanon (2023), [Monitoring Children's Situation between January and June 2023 \(August 2023\)](#)
- 25 Child Protection Working Group Lebanon (2023), [Monitoring Children's Situation between January and June 2023 \(August 2023\)](#)
- 26 Save the Children (2021), [Lebanon Crisis: Children as Young as Five Face Violence, Dog Attacks as Forced onto Streets to Work](#); UNICEF (2021), [Lebanon: Escalating crisis puts children at risk as the majority of families cannot afford to meet the basic needs of their children](#); FAO and UNICEF (2019), [Child labour in agriculture: the demand side.](#)
- 27 Key informants and caregivers from selected regions; Abuelgasim, F (2021) UN: [Lebanese crisis exposes children to abuse, exploitation \(AP News\)](#)
- 28 Human Rights Watch (2021), [Lebanon: Syrian Refugee Children Blocked from School | Human Rights Watch: Education Ministry Should Remove Barriers; Extend Registration Deadline \(December 2021\)](#)
- 29 Malli, N (2019), [A second chance for unregistered children \(NRC\)](#)
- 30 Interagency Coordination Lebanon, UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF (2023) [VASyR 2022: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon \(May 2023\)](#)
- 31 Lebanon Humanitarian Country Team (2023), [Escalating Needs in Lebanon: A 2023 Overview](#)
- 32 Human Rights Watch (2021), [Lebanon: Syrian Refugee Children Blocked from School | Human Rights Watch: Education Ministry Should Remove Barriers; Extend Registration Deadline \(December 2021\)](#)
- 33 Unit for Combatting Child Labour in Lebanon, ILO and National Steering Committee against Child Labour (2015), [Guide of the Decree 8987 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour](#)
- 34 FAO and UNICEF (2019), [Child labour in agriculture: the demand side.](#)
- 35 Memo 99 Annex 10 said that foreign workers, who in reality were mostly Syrian adult workers, could bring their families and children over ten years old to Lebanon when they received their seasonal permit to work in agriculture. This provision existed before the Syria crisis. However, following the Syria crisis, it was observed that Syrian workers were using this permit to have their children work with them or for other people. Following identification of this issue, the memo was amended to prevent children under 16 years working in agriculture.
- 36 Personal communication, Ms Dima Haddad, IOM, [Rights Curtailed: Impact of covid-19 and economic crisis on child rights in Lebanon](#)
- 37 Ministry of Labour, ILO and National Steering Committee against Child Labour (2013), [National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Lebanon by 2016](#)

- 38 [Unit for the Combat of Child Labour in Lebanon \(accessed 07.11.23\)](#)
- 39 With the support of the Ministry of Labour Child Labour Unit.
- 40 UNICEF has two critical programmes. One focusing on supporting children (mainly Syrian) in formal basic education and the second providing cash transfers for economically vulnerable families (Syrian and Lebanese). However, funding is decreasing, with the programmes expected to serve 30 to 40% fewer people in 2023
- 41 Interagency Coordination Lebanon, UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF (2023) [VASyR 2022: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon](#) (May 2023)
- 42 [Portrait of Poverty as UN Visits Lebanon's Tripoli, Mediterranean's Poorest City | Asharq AL-awsat](#)
- 43 Independent (2022), [Closed for decades, theater returns to Lebanon's Tripoli](#)
- 44 Lebanon Central Administration of Statistics and ILO (2022), [Lebanon Follow Up Labour Force Survey: Fact Sheet](#)
- 45 Middle East Monitor (2021), [Unemployment, poverty rates reach 60% in Lebanon's Tripoli](#), September 2021
- 46 Mondaq (2021), [Labour and Employment Comparative Guide](#)
- 47 Ministry of Interior and ILO (2004), "A Study on Street-Based Children Carried Out by Ministry of Labour"
- 48 Ministry of Labour, ILO, UNICEF and FAO (2015), [Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude](#)
- 49 AUB et al (2019), [Survey on Child Labour in Agriculture in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: The Case of Syrian Refugees](#)
- 50 UN ESCWA (2021), [Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon \(2019-2021\): Painful reality and uncertain prospects](#)
- 51 Lebanon Central Administration of Statistics and ILO (2022), [Lebanon Follow Up Labour Force Survey: Fact Sheet](#)
- 52 AUB et al (2019), [Survey on Child Labour in Agriculture in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: The Case of Syrian Refugees](#)
- 53 Habib (2021), [Work-related injuries among Syrian refugee child workers in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: A gender-sensitive analysis.](#)
- 54 Sabaghi, D (2021), [Lebanese Farm Survey on Child Labour in Agriculture in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: The Case of Syrian Refugees Face Toughening Crisis \(DW, 15 June 2021\).](#)
- 55 Based on the researcher's own experience working in the area since 2012, local community informants, workshops and secondary data (AUB et al (2019), [Survey on Child Labour in Agriculture in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon: The Case of Syrian Refugees](#))
- 56 Shawish are male subcontractors who manage foreign labour and often supervise Syrian refugee camps in an informal manner. Refugees pay these subcontractors rent for their tent, which they can pay by working. The shawishes prefer employing children because they can pay them lower wages than adults. According to ILO Convention No. 182, this is considered a form of serfdom.
- 57 <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/124/summary/2023>
- 58 UN ESCWA (2021), [Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon \(2019-2021\): Painful reality and uncertain prospects \(uneswca.org\)](#)
- 59 Discussions took place with the support of the NGO Right To Play, a member of the National Coordinating Committee for Street Children Programmes at the Ministry of Social Affairs.
- 60 Attending or working at the child labour centre of BEYOND Association in Saadnayel, Bekaa, a member of the National Steering Committee Against Child Labour at the Ministry of Labour..

# VISION

Our vision is a world free of slavery.

# MISSION

Our mission is to mobilise the knowledge, capital and will needed to end slavery.

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