

## Lebanon Brief – Child Protection

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This brief has been produced by the Persons Affected by the Syrian Crisis Network (PASC) ahead of the Brussels IV Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region. PASC is a network of 27 local Non-Governmental Organizations supporting vulnerable Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians. It aims to amplify the capacity and influence of its members, increasing their ability to monitor, advocate, and discuss research findings on key national and international trends and issues pertaining to human rights and protection in Lebanon. As part of its mandate to advocate for a future anchored in human rights, this brief is part of a series of briefs designed to shed a light on the most important and pressing issues pertaining to child protection, forced evictions, the right to work, and deportations.

These briefs have been prepared using a questionnaire that PASC conducted from 12 February to 4 March 2020. The PASC questionnaire consisted of 82 questions that collected data at the individual level and the community level. Questions included those on demographics and the four themes studied: child protection, the right to work, forced evictions, and deportations. The questionnaires differed from one another dependent on the interviewee's nationality. In total, PASC was able to conduct 409 interviews (99 Lebanese, 205 Syrians, and 105 Palestinians (from Lebanon and Syria)) during this data collection exercise.<sup>1</sup> The main challenge faced by PASC was the COVID-19 pandemic that abruptly ended field visits.<sup>2</sup> This obviously means that the questionnaire did not take into account the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities, however, it can be said with confidence that the concerning trends identified on these four topics in March 2020 have deteriorated sharply since the advent of COVID-19.

### Progress Since Brussels III

On 31 January 2020, more than half of all Syrian refugees settled in Lebanon were children. 15.2% were aged between 0 and 4 years; 24.8% were aged between 5 and 11 years; and 15.3% were aged between 12 and 17 years.<sup>3</sup> Disturbingly, out of 705,000 displaced Syrian children in need aged between 3 and 18 years, a staggering 54% of these children are not enrolled in a certified education program – neither formal nor informal.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, there were 62,519 Palestinian refugee children from Lebanon and 14,041 Palestinian refugee children from Syria in need.<sup>5</sup> Two endemic risks result from this abyssal failure to educate refugee children are early marriage and child labour. The percentage of married Syrian girls aged between 15 and 19 stood at 27% in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, child labour is a common phenomenon in Lebanon, especially in the agricultural sector and Bekaa region, with 2.6% of Syrian children aged between 5 and 17 years engaged in child labour and 27% of these engaged in the agricultural sector.<sup>7</sup> It is thus self-evident

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<sup>1</sup> 70.17% of the respondents were female, while 29.83% were male. 17.36% were aged between 16 – 20; 30.07% were aged between 21-29; 23.47% were aged between 30 – 39; 13.94% were aged between 40-49; and 13.93% were aged over 50.

<sup>2</sup> The PASC questionnaire was available online between 16 March to 20 March 2020.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugees Situation, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

<sup>4</sup> Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017 – 2020 (2019). p. 11  
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67780.pdf> (accessed 22.06.2020).

<sup>5</sup> Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017 – 2020 (2019). p. 37  
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67780.pdf> (accessed 22.06.2020).

<sup>6</sup> Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (2019). p. 12.  
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73118.pdf> (accessed 22.06.2020).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

that the commitments made by the Government of Lebanon (GoL) and international partners at Brussels II to educate all children and reduce child marriage and child labour have not been achieved.

Gravely, these commitments will become even harder to realize as Lebanon's economic crisis, which has been accelerated by the lockdown in response to COVID-19, devastates livelihoods and leads to an increase in poverty. Self-isolation and staying home are a luxury that thousands of families cannot afford. The World Bank forecasted in November 2019 that more than 50% of Lebanese will fall below the poverty line in 2020 without substantial economic reforms.<sup>8</sup> Looking at the situation for Syrian and Palestinian refugees now, it has become a question of survival not poverty: "The poorest households are likely to fall below the survival threshold".<sup>9</sup>

In this context, there is a vital need for international donors to make good on their previous commitment to fund RACE II and ensure that all refugee children are provided a decent education. The failure to fully commit to fund RACE II and current economic disaster facing refugees increases the risk of child labour and child marriage. Further, the GoL should fully utilize international support to ensure sustainability of programs. Refugees are resorting to negative coping strategies such as pressuring young children to enter the labour market or relieving the economic burden of caring for a young daughter through child marriage.

### Access to Education

There was an increase from 55% in the 2017/18 school year to 58% in the 2018/19 school year in the number of out of school refugees.<sup>10</sup> The number of refugee children in need of an education has been outpacing the implementation of educational programs, as UNHCR made clear: despite an "increase in enrolment of non-Lebanese children in public basic education, 58% of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon remain out of school".<sup>11</sup> RACE II, which is the second national action plan for implementing previous pledges to educate all children in Lebanon, requires a further commitment of \$134 million dollars until 2023.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the failure in increasing access to education for children must be seen in the context of the broader economic crisis and its effect on financial and non-financial barriers to education for children. Accessing education has been impacted by the cost of transport, with many families unable to afford the cost of transport to schools. Here, municipalities have a role to play in either subsidizing the cost of transportation for families or providing free transport to and from schools. Municipalities facing financial difficulties should be supported to facilitate access to education for thousands of children. Likewise, children that have been unable to afford basic materials for school have forgone attendance or failed to

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<sup>8</sup> The World Bank (6 November 2019). "World Bank: Lebanon is in the Midst of Economic, Financial and Social Hardship, Situation Could Get worse". <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/11/06/world-bank-lebanon-is-in-the-midst-of-economic-financial-and-social-hardship-situation-could-get-worse#:~:text=By%202018%20estimates%2C%20about%20a,27.4%20percent%20in%202011%2D2012.&text=Pove%20rty%20could%20rise%20to%2050,and%20could%20further%20rise%20sharply>

<sup>9</sup> Durable Solutions Platform (May 2020). "Policy Brief: What next for livelihoods programs in Lebanon? Responding during economic crisis and COVID-19". p. 3 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/What%20Next%20for%20Livelihoods%20Programs%20Lebanon.pdf> (accessed 22.06.2020).

<sup>10</sup> Lebanon Civil Society Report for the Brussels IV Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region (June 2020). "Chapter: Education".

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR (2019). "Education: Factsheet". <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2019/04/Education-Factsheet.pdf> (accessed 22.06.2020).

<sup>12</sup> The World Bank. "Reaching All Children with Education in Lebanon Support Project". <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P159470?lang=en>

pass to the next year. Almost 40,000 Syrian children registered in 2018/2019 did not continue to attend school in the following school year despite nearly 45% of them having successfully completed the school year.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, the consequences of the economic crisis, protests which erupted on 17 October 2019, and March 2020 lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have had a catastrophic effect on school attendance for Syrian refugees. The economic crisis has diverted family resources to rent and basic necessities and away from school related expenditure; the protests have resulted in sporadic school closures in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2019; roadblocks have prevented children accessing school; the lockdown has resulted in school closures from March 2020; and the majority of Syrian and Palestinian refugees have been unable to utilize remote learning technology (if schools offer remote learning at all). The education of all children in Lebanon, from all nationalities, is at risk for the academic year 2020/2021. In 2019, Lebanese spent approximately 5%<sup>14</sup> of their household income on education, now, the current financial crisis has pushed families to spend more on basic necessities, meaning that it is very likely spending on education will be reduced and enrollment rates for children in 2020/2021 will fall if no measures are taken to protect access to education for children.

### Child Labour

Two interrelated reasons are the main causes driving child labour: lack of access to educational opportunities and family economic hardship. Livelihood opportunities for Syrian refugees are limited to the agriculture, construction, and cleaning sectors. Access to livelihood opportunities in these three sectors has been further constrained by a more rigid enforcement of the labour law in 2019, reducing the employability of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Moreover, Lebanese, who are struggling without a job, are increasingly seeking out lower paid jobs traditionally filled by migrants or Syrians. These reasons, in conjunction with curfews that affect Syrian men finding work or travelling to work, has led to a sharp increase in the number of families without a regular income. Under these desperate circumstances, parents turn to their children to bolster family income for basic necessities.

Obviously addressing the economic vulnerability that fuels child labour should be the priority, but there is also a clear lack of awareness on child labour in the country amongst Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians. Almost everyone surveyed by PASC knew about a case of child labour, however, only 44% of Lebanese, 49% of Palestinians and 25% of Syrians were aware about the existence of laws protecting children from child labour.<sup>15</sup> There is a clear disconnect between ignorance of the laws protecting children engaged in child labour and perceptions among all population groups about the unlawful nature of child labour: 83% of Lebanese, 81% of Palestinians and 76% of Syrians consider that children should not work. Therefore, there is a need to address this disconnect and increase advocacy directed at raising awareness of child labour, the laws against it, and the potential sanctions for violating such laws.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Independent Monitor's Report: Lebanon Commitments from the London and Brussels Conferences (May 2020). p. 12. <https://agulhas.co.uk/our-work/independent-monitors-report-on-the-lebanon-commitments-from-the-london-and-brussels-conferences/> (accessed 02.06.2020).

<sup>14</sup> BLOM Invest Bank: <https://blog.blominvestbank.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Patterns-in-Lebanon%E2%80%99s-Consumer-Spending-2019-2023.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> PASC Survey Results (February – March 2020).

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, *In Focus: Child Labour in Lebanon*, November 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67049>

## Child Marriage

Child marriage is “regulated by the 15 personal status laws that govern Lebanon’s 18 officially recognized religious sects” and there has not been an agreement to codify a nationwide minimum age for marriage.<sup>17</sup> It is thus unsurprising that more than 75% of respondents to the PASC survey said that they have heard about a child getting married. Moreover, unfortunately, the economic crisis and failure to ensure adequate education for the majority of refugees, especially the most vulnerable, will substantially increase the risk of child marriage in 2020 and beyond.

In addition, there is clearly a disconnect between those who think child marriage should be illegal (insofar as the minimum age should be raised) and those who would report a case of child marriage to the authorities. While 87% of Lebanese, 77% of Syrians and 72% of Palestinians think child marriage should be illegal, only 59% of Lebanese, 40% of Syrians, and 57% of Palestinians would report it to any sort of authority.<sup>18</sup>

The main reason for not reporting it stems from a lack of trust in the Lebanese authorities and a perception that it is not their responsibility to report it, which is likely exacerbated by the variety of different personal status laws governing child marriage and whether it is unlawful in specific cases. As such, rooting out child marriage is contingent upon raising the minimum age for marriage and harmonising it across the country and enhancing civic engagement and increasing responsibility of communities to report cases of child marriage to the authorities. Nevertheless, this necessarily requires local authorities to increase their capacity and competence in responding to cases of child marriage, fostering trust in NGOs, communities, and individuals to report cases of child marriage.

## Recommendations

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### *To the Government of Lebanon, Municipalities, and the Lebanese Parliament*

- The GoL must take concrete steps to increase access to education. Municipalities must respond creatively and contribute to transportation costs & educational materials costs.
- The Ministry of Education must clearly monitor private schools’ non-fee restrictions, such as discriminatory enrolment practices, on access to education for Syrian refugees.
- The GoL and Municipalities must increase access to information on child labour laws and the enforcement of child labour laws. This should involve a modification of Article 22 on child labour to raise the minimum age for work.
- Municipalities and schools must provide financial assistance to vulnerable families with children. Sanctions on businesses exploiting child labour must be raised.
- The GoL must increase cooperation between the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of Education to identify solutions to reduce barriers to accessing education, including the cost of school transport and materials.
- The Lebanese Parliament should legislate to raise the minimum age required to be married and ensure uniformity in this age across the country.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/no-i-dont-abolishing-child-marriage-lebanon> (accessed 24.02.2020)

<sup>18</sup> PASC Survey Results (February – March 2020).

### To Civil Society

- Religious leaders should ensure they play their full role in ending child marriage and enrol in prevention campaigns and refusing to conduct child marriages.
- Civil society must implement non-refugee specific policies and ensure that assistance is provided for all children engaged in child labour in Lebanon.
- Civil Society should conduct awareness campaigns about laws related to child labour and on the importance of education for children regardless of nationality and gender.

### To Donors

- Donors should meet their funding obligations, ensure that RACE II is fully funded, and honor past pledges and the Global Compact on Refugees.<sup>19</sup>
- Donors should continue to and increase funding to provide and cover transportation and school materials' costs for vulnerable communities.
- Donors should also increase their funding in terms of capacity building and trainings to support vulnerable parents contracting a job to ensure children are not victim of child labor.

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<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Education 2018/2019 short by \$49 million to enrol 250,000 students. Similar for 2020. This should be funded by international donors.



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