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# **WORKING CHILDREN IN CRISIS-HIT LEBANON: EXPLORING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN FOOD INSECURITY AND CHILD LABOUR**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food insecurity has increased significantly in Lebanon during the past year; nearly 97% of the Syrian refugees on Lebanese soil are marginally or completely food insecure. Food based-negative coping mechanisms have also increased and infant and young child feeding practices have deteriorated. Food is the main expenditure for the most vulnerable households. According to the last available figure on this topic (2016), at least 100,000 children were working in Lebanon and this trend is expected increase.

The objective of this report is to draw attention to the linkage between food insecurity and child labour, and its recent evolution in Lebanon. ACF and IRC developed questionnaires and interviewed 648 individuals between July and September 2020 in the Bekaa, Beirut, North and South Lebanon. The interviewees were mostly Syrian refugees but also Lebanese individuals and working children were included. The survey findings were complemented by existing research findings from NRC and CAMEALEON and data from the Lebanon Protection Consortium (LPC).

The findings from this study confirm the shrinking access to food and concerns over deteriorating nutrition practices, particularly since October 2019. They also confirm the increased use of child labour as a negative coping mechanism. The inability to provide food is one of the main triggers for parents to send their children to work and that the primary use of children's income is for food. Children are increasingly reporting becoming the main breadwinners for their families. There is a strong correlation between child labour and food insecurity among affected communities.

However, even though if they are working, the children and their families suffer acutely from food insecurity and food-based coping mechanisms. Since October 2019, 84% of the working children surveyed have been worried that their household would not have enough food to eat, including 53% reporting that it occurs often. Furthermore, 75% of household members reported eating a lower number of meals per day, 56% of the working children surveyed reported going to bed hungry and in 35% of households, the working children themselves or any household members reported spending a whole day and night without eating anything because there was not enough food.

Working children who are food-insecure are more likely to experience delays in growth in height and weight and thus of chronic malnutrition, acute malnutrition, and anaemia. They are also at higher risk of injury - 55% of them suffer from wounds - and diseases such as asthma, tuberculosis and silicosis, mental health issues and eventually also of mortality. They are also more frequently exposed to abuse, violence and exploitation, particularly sexual exploitation, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy. Only 2% of the working children surveyed linked emotions with a positive feeling. Food insecurity also leads to children dropping out of school or not enrolling at all since they are likely to be the main breadwinner of the family.

The recommendations focus on the need to mainstream efforts that address child labour into inter-sector priorities and programming, the urgent food security and basic assistance programmes for working children and their families, with a nutrition and a case management component; on the need for longer term child labour and joint food security and nutrition programmes with a strong infant and young child feeding component.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 2019, Lebanon has been facing an unprecedented array of crises that have pushed the country to the brink. The financial and socio-economic crisis, coupled with COVID-19 and the Beirut Blast have strained the country's resources, health system and businesses and pushed an increasing number of people into poverty. Over 50 percent of the Lebanese population lives below the poverty line<sup>1</sup> and 9 out of 10 Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty<sup>2</sup>. Unemployment has been on the rise in the past two years<sup>3,4</sup>, simultaneously affecting Lebanese and Syrian workers. Refugees report that daily labour has become scarce.

“ ‘Children are forced to work, it's our only way to provide food.’

A mother in Qarvanat ITS - Arsal

During the first nine months of 2020, around 36% of Lebanese households were unable to access food and other basic services and 22% of households consumed inadequate diets.<sup>5</sup> Nearly 50% of the Syrian refugees are food-insecure severely and moderately in addition to 47% of those who are marginally food insecure.<sup>6</sup> Negative food and livelihood based coping mechanisms are on the rise among Syrian refugees, particularly restricting food intake and child labour. Sixty-five percent of the registered Syrian refugees reported having to reduce the number of meals and food portions eaten per day,<sup>7</sup> a clear violation of their right to food.<sup>8</sup>

Figures from UNICEF in 2016 show that at least 100,000 children worked in Lebanon;<sup>9</sup> and among Syrian children, the rates of child labour have increased, reaching at least 11% - with a possibility of higher percentage due to the likelihood of under-reporting.<sup>10</sup> Concerns over child labour have grown after the end of the first COVID-19 lockdown.<sup>11,12</sup> Various studies have documented correlations between child labour and food insecurity: in the Bekaa in 2019, 74% of the households of working children living in informal settlements faced severe food insecurity.<sup>13</sup>

The objective of this brief is to draw attention to the linkages between food insecurity and child labour, and other protection-related consequences for children in Lebanon. This paper primarily focuses on working children within the Syrian refugee community, but it also includes information on Lebanese working children. In light of the current economic crisis and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut Port explosion, recent changes in the interaction process of food insecurity and child labour interact are also explored. The research questions are as follows:

- To what extent are working children affected by food insecurity? To what extent has the linkage between food insecurity and child labour evolved recently in Lebanon?
- What are the specific vulnerabilities and protection concerns of food-insecure working children? Are there any specific health and nutrition needs?
- What are the policy and programmatic recommendations towards the humanitarian community?

## METHODS

Following a secondary data review on linkages between child labour and food insecurity internationally and in Lebanon specifically, ACF and IRC developed a questionnaire to address the identified research questions. The **assessments were rolled out between July and September 2020 with 648 individuals**, including Lebanese but mostly Syrian refugees but also Lebanese, **in the Bekaa, Beirut, North and South Lebanon**. The respondents are being or have been supported by the respective agencies programmes and include working children.

Questions were developed in a way to ensure comparability of data. Gender-sensitive considerations were mainstreamed. All agencies ensured that adhered to strict child safeguarding policies in conducting the assessment. The survey questions were either integrated into routine programme assessments or used for dedicated individual interviews. Phone surveys were prioritised in order to minimise COVID-19 concerns. For the full list of surveys used for this paper, please refer to **Annex 1**.

In addition, GVC triangulated and analysed existing LPC data from the Community Protection Approach (CPA) in 2019-2020, a community engagement tool used by the Lebanon Protection Consortium. The qualitative data have been collected in informal tented settlements referred to as “communities”. 141 communities, which represent 47,224 Syrian refugees living in informal settlements in the North, Akkar, Baalbek-Hermel and Bekaa Governorates, have been consulted through the Narrated Community Perspective approach that includes Focus Group Discussions, Transect Walks, and Individual Interviews.

Finally, findings from research previously conducted by the International Rescue Committee, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)<sup>14</sup> and the Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Organisational Network (CAMEALEON)<sup>15</sup> provided additional insights pertaining to child labour and food insecurity.



## 1.1 DETERIORATING FOOD SECURITY, FOOD-BASED COPING MECHANISMS AND INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING PRACTICES IN LEBANON

Due to the current economic and financial crises in Lebanon, prices of goods have increased significantly. In August 2020, the price of food and non-alcoholic beverages had increased by 367% compared to August 2019.<sup>16</sup> The cost of the survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB) has also increased by 183% between October 2019 and December 2020.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Lebanon relies heavily on food imports, which have decreased by 13% in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period a year before,<sup>18</sup> affecting food availability and prices.

Increased prices of food items are the main concern reported by families to humanitarian agencies throughout 2020.<sup>19, 20, 21, 22</sup> In June 2020, 50% of Lebanese people, 63% of Palestinian refugees and 75% of Syrians worried about not having enough food to eat.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to increasing food prices, unemployment is at a record high, as 32% of the workers have lost their jobs between October 2019 and the outbreak of Covid-19.<sup>24</sup> Amongst refugee households, this trend is even more pronounced. Syrian refugees have been disproportionately impacted by the contraction of the labour market with 60% of Syrian refugees being permanently laid-off, compared to 39% of their Lebanese counterparts.<sup>25</sup>

**The recent increase in prices combined with decreased livelihood opportunities has naturally led to food insecurity increases and negative coping mechanisms.** Food insecurity rates among refugee households have increased from 29% to 49% between 2019 and 2020. An additional 47% of families were marginally food insecure and **only 4% of refugees are food secure.**<sup>26</sup> In the Bekaa, food insecurity is particularly worrying: 74% of the most vulnerable Syrian households are severely food insecure.<sup>27</sup> Working children have clearly identified that their access to food has deteriorated after the onset of the socio-economic crisis and due to the COVID-19 outbreak : IRC's survey found that 58% of surveyed children reported that they did not face challenges in accessing food regularly before October 2019, compared to 84% after October 2019 reporting that they are now worried that their household would not have enough food to eat.

Due to the crises, refugees are increasingly relying on **food-related coping mechanisms.** Between 2019 and 2020, the following food-related negative mechanisms have increased: spending days without eating (4 to 7%), reducing food portions (59 to 65%), and reducing the number of meals consumed per day (60 to 65%). As a result, 49% of refugee households have a borderline or poor food consumption<sup>28</sup>, doubling since last year. An ACF survey found that the access to food was more limited among unregistered refugee households or in households with no access to humanitarian assistance, demonstrating the critical role that such assistance plays.<sup>29</sup> In South-Lebanon and the Bekaa, 87% of the interviewees reported that, when they don't have enough food or money to buy food, they resort to at least one negative coping mechanism; the majority (52%) stated that they reduced the number of meals per day.<sup>30</sup>

These negative coping mechanisms lead to vulnerable families having **less nutritious and diverse diets.** 86% of surveyed mothers (including Syrian refugees, Lebanese and Palestinian) stated that they had changed their food consumption patterns since the start of COVID-19 and the economic crisis<sup>31</sup>. The main changes were a decrease in consumption of dairy and animal products, fruits, and vegetables. Caregivers and households with young children have also reported changes in their food consumption indicating increased food insecurity.

**2019****2020****59% Reduce food portions****Reduce food portions 56%****60% Reduce meals per day****Reduce meals per day 65%****4% Days without eating****Days without eating 7%**

In a consultation of 141 communities carried out by the Lebanon Protection Consortium (LPC) in Informal Tented Settlements (ITS),<sup>32</sup> 40% of the surveyed communities reported that their basic needs were unmet as a result of their economic situation. 36% observed a decrease in their ability to purchase food and in the diversity of their diets, and 15% reported a decrease in the consumption of essential nutritious foods such as meat. Fifteen percent of the communities reported malnutrition as a consequence of decreased nutritional intake.

Evidence on infant and young child feeding suggest that the food intake of children is alarming. Only 51.2% of the Syrian refugee children between 6 and 23 months are reported to have an acceptable meal frequency, a sharp decrease compared to 79.8% in 2019.<sup>33</sup> Only 11.6% of the Syrian refugees in this age bracket have a diet that meets the minimum requirements for diversity.<sup>34</sup>

Only 44% of the Syrian refugee babies under six months are exclusively breastfed, meaning that in other cases the caregivers rely either on breast-milk substitutes (formula), which are costly and if badly administered can put the infants' health at risk, or on cheap and inadequate substitutes. The high cost of infant formula often leaves vulnerable parents with no other option than to resort to diluted cow's milk, apple sauce, diluted formula, rice/flour with milk/water & sugar. This worrying trend is confirmed by ACF and IRC's programmatic data: IRC's protection monitoring report for October 2020<sup>35</sup> found that low levels of breastfeeding and high dependence on formula are a significant concern. Based on an ACF assessment, exclusive breastfeeding levels among Syrian refugees in the Bekaa was reported at 22%,<sup>36</sup> even lower than suggested by the VASyR.<sup>37</sup>

Changes in the quantity and diversity of food consumed are a major cause of micronutrient deficiencies and irreversible forms of malnutrition. Field actors repeatedly reported an increased number of cases of acute malnutrition to the health sector working group - particularly in the North and the Bekaa. The nutrition sector has raised the alarm that micronutrient deficiencies, chronic malnutrition and possibly acute malnutrition are on the rise among children, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly. Unfortunately, there is no up-to-date evidence available on the malnutrition in Lebanon despite the significant needs - given the lack of nutrition surveys, the lack of inclusion of nutrition in broader health or vulnerability surveys, the low capacity of the Ministry to carry nutrition surveillance, and the barriers preventing NGOs from monitoring malnutrition themselves.



## Quick summary of section 1.1

**84%**  
reported worry after October 2019 that their household would not have enough food to eat.

**86%**  
of mothers surveyed (including Syrian refugees, Lebanese and Palestinian) stated that they had changed their food consumption patterns since the start of COVID-19 and the economic crisis.

**15%**  
of the communities reported malnutrition as a consequence of decreased intake.

**11.6%**  
of the Syrian refugees between 6 and 23 months have a diet that meets the minimum requirements.

**Alarm on malnutrition**  
The nutrition sector has raised the alarm that micronutrient deficiencies, chronic malnutrition and possibly acute malnutrition are on the rise among children.



## 1.2 EFFECTS OF THE MULTIPLE CRISES ON CHILD LABOUR

Due to the scarcity of studies and updated information on child labour and the absence of a national information management system for child protection, child labour rates tend to be based on estimates. Furthermore, refugees are often reluctant to disclose their **children's economic activities** for multiple reasons, including fear of losing programme benefits, normalisation of child labour in certain communities as well as fear of law enforcement and of judgment.<sup>38</sup> In an ACF baseline survey with cash-for-work beneficiaries, programme teams noticed a significant tendency to downplay the occurrence of child labour.<sup>39</sup>

The last large-scale available figures show that in 2016, 62,000 Lebanese children, 37,000 Syrian children and 4,500 Palestinian children were engaged in child labour.<sup>40</sup> Syrian children were mostly affected with 6.7% of children aged 5 to 17 years who reported working. The number of working Lebanese children working has tripled between 2009 and 2016, reaching 6% of the 5-17 year-old population.

This trend is expected to have further deteriorated in the last years, particularly since the sudden deterioration of the economic situation in October 2019, especially given that, according to the literature, when households' income drops unexpectedly, child labour tends to increase.<sup>41</sup> In fact, 11% of the Syrian refugees monitored by the UNHCR have reported engaging children in income generating activities since October 2019, an increase of 6 percentage points compared to the case before the economic crisis.<sup>42</sup> An end-line survey by ACF in Baalbek- Hermel on July 2020 indicated that 12% of the households reported having a working child.<sup>43</sup> The IRC has also observed increases in the number of children on the street and of those engaged in child labour, with 50 new cases registered by the IRC alone during a two-month period around June 2020.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns, VASyR data has shown that child labour rates have increased by 5 points in 2020 compared to 2019.<sup>45</sup> In the survey conducted by the IRC with street-connected and working children between July and October 2020, child labour was reported to have increased from 71% to 78%, despite the lockdown.<sup>46</sup> In a survey by ACF of Lebanese and Syrian households across South Lebanon and the Bekaa, 18% of the families who had a working child reported that their child worked seven days per week, without any rest.<sup>47</sup>

The shrinking access to livelihoods in households is identified as one of the key drivers of child labour. **Thirty-four percent of the children targeted by the IRC's survey in 2020 stated that the male adult was the main income earner of the family prior to October 2019, while 40% said that they (i.e., the children) were the main earners. After October 2019, the percentage of children reporting that they were the main income earners within their family increased to 61%, with only 16% reporting that adult men were the main breadwinner. The percentages further deteriorated after the COVID-19 crisis with 67% of children confirming that they are the main earner for their families.** This figure is quite alarming, confirming that working children are likely to be seen as the only viable source of income for families struggling to meet their basic needs. In this context, child labour is placing children under immense pressure and responsibility to prevent homelessness or hunger within the household, which is a heavy psychological burden for a child. These children also have higher risks to be exposed to abuse, as studies have shown that the longer the children are on the street, the higher their chances to face incidents of violence.

Increasing food insecurity and poverty levels have placed an additional pressure on children of vulnerable households.<sup>48</sup> Before October 2019, 29% of the children and their families indicated that they faced challenges in accessing food regularly. Between November 2019 and the onset of the COVID crisis in February/March, the percentage of families with working children struggling to access food regularly increased to 38%. The reason for the food shortage as expressed by the surveyed children was mainly the increase in prices of goods. Some children also stated that receiving less assistance or no assistance is also a reason for the shortage of their food supplies.





It is important to note that restrictions faced by refugee men such as checkpoints are an additional cause of food insecurity and thus of child labour. Since 2015, Lebanon has been enforcing stricter regulations on refugees living on its territory. Syrian refugees above 15 years old who do not have valid legal residency (currently 80%)<sup>49</sup> risk arrest and detention at checkpoints. The fear of arrest and deportation of men encourages households to send women and children to work since they are less likely to get arrested and investigated at a checkpoint or during their commute to and from their workplace. Many adult refugees face municipal-level restrictions limiting their movements to go to shops, jobs or banks, and their access to food is further hindered, especially in case of municipal level or ITS isolation/quarantine of suspected/confirmed COVID cases. Syrian refugees living in ITS often rely on working children to maintain their livelihoods.<sup>50</sup> For example, women (43%) and children (30%) represent a large proportion of the workforce on farms compared to men (27%)<sup>51</sup>. In Bekaa, 69,7% of working household members are between the age of 4 and 18 years.<sup>52</sup>



## Quick summary of section 1.2



### In 2016

62,000 Lebanese children,  
37,000 Syrian children  
4,500 Palestinian children  
were engaged in child  
labour.



### 18%

of the families in the South and Bekaa  
who had a working child reported  
that their child worked seven days per  
week, without any rest.



### 69.7%

of working household members in Bekaa are between the age of 4 and 18  
years.

### BEFORE OCTOBER 2019

34% adult males were  
the main income earners

40% children were the  
main income earners

### AFTER OCTOBER 2019

16% adult males were  
the main income earners

61% children were the  
main income earners

### AFTER COVID-19

67% of children confirming they are the main earner for  
their families

## 1.3 LACK OF FOOD, A TRIGGER OF CHILD LABOUR

Poverty and food insecurity are typically considered key drivers of child labour.<sup>53</sup> The 2020 VASyR found that Syrian refugee households living in extreme poverty have increased from 55% in 2019 to 88% in 2020.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the percentage of Palestinian refugees living below the poverty line is also expected to have increased.<sup>55</sup>

Food is a major component of the Syrian refugee household's expenditure; with 47% of Syrian refugees spending more than 50% of their income on food that increased by 11 points compared to 2019.<sup>56</sup> The increasing economic vulnerabilities have led to an increase in food insecurity with households having to spend a greater share of their expenditure on food, while their income stagnates or declines.

Through IRC's survey (July and October 2020), children indicated that they initially worked to help their families pay for food, rent and medical expenses. Sixty-six percent **of the children indicated that the primary use of their income was for food.**<sup>57</sup> Similarly, 7.6% of the respondents to ACF's baseline survey of Lebanese and Syrian households across South Lebanon and the Bekaa, reported **explicitly** that they had to resort to child labour, as a direct result of not having enough food or money to buy food.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, the LPC has found that child labour and food insecurity are present simultaneously in over half of the communities consulted. Eighteen percent of the food-insecure communities have also reported the worst forms of child labour, including working in construction, carrying heavy weights, and using dangerous tools, which exposed them to harassment and violence.<sup>59</sup>



**66%**

**of the children indicated that the primary use of their income was for food.**



'My husband cannot work because of [an injury related to the Syrian conflict]. My 13-year-old son, Moumen, the youngest, goes with his older brother Ahmad, 16 years old, every day to the stone factory for a daily wage of 6, 7 or maximum 10 000 LBP (just over a dollar). It is our only way to provide some food and some of the medicine needed for my husband. We have no other choice, even if they come back exhausted every night'

A mother in Bounyan Qalamon ITS -Arsal

## 1.4 IS CHILD LABOUR HELPING FAMILIES TO BE FOOD SECURE?

Evidence in the literature is scarce on the impact of child labour on the food security status of the household and especially of working children. However, the evidence suggests that child labour perpetuates the cycle of poverty.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, children leaving school to work are unlikely to return and lose the possibility to improve their future socio-economic situation; they are likely to remain poor and to continue the intergenerational transmission of poverty.<sup>61</sup> Working children are generally not paid well enough to be able to support their families. Some children do not get paid at all for the work they do. For example, in a 2019 IRC study, surveyed children stated that they work in vegetable markets all day for free just to be able to gather leftover vegetables at the end of the day and take them to feed their families. Other children reported being exploited through debt bondage, serfdom<sup>62</sup> and working on land in exchange for shelter<sup>63</sup>.

The surveys and programme findings examined in this paper indicate that working children remain food insecure. Working children and their families still report high levels of food insecurity, despite the children working to address this issue. As highlighted previously, qualitative data from the LPC still show high food insecurity in communities with working children. This is also confirmed by the evidence from the IRC survey where the majority of working children and their families are still reporting that they are concerned about not having enough food.

Food insecurity persists in families with working children: 29% of the families of the working children interviewed had reported challenges in accessing food regularly before October 2019 and that with the sharp deterioration of the economic situation, 38% of them faced challenges to access food in the following months.<sup>64</sup>

Since October 2019 and the sharp deterioration of the economic situation, **84% of the working children are worried that their household would not have enough food to eat, with 53% of them reporting that they often worry about not having enough food.**

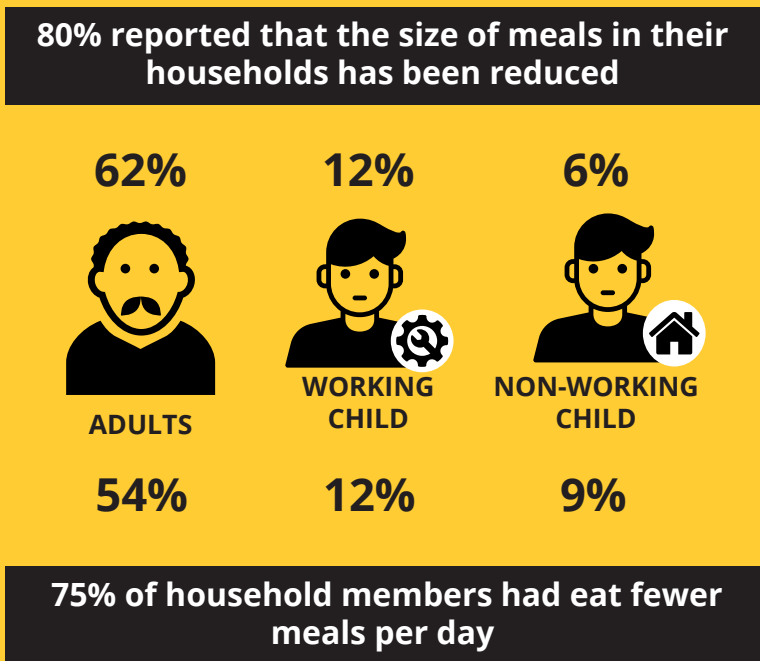
19% of the surveyed children reported that they have to limit the variety of foods eaten due to the lack of resources, and 50% reported that adults are the ones who adopt this coping strategy. This strategy was reported as often adopted in 45% of the households with working children.

Among the surveyed children, 80% reported that the size of meals in their households has been reduced - affecting adults first (62%), working children (12%) and non-working children (6%). Also, it has been reported that 75% of household members had eat fewer meals per day - mostly adults (54%), working children (12%) and non-working children (9%). This was reported to occur "often" to 43% of the households of working children.

During the month preceding the survey, **in 42% of the households of surveyed children, no food had been available at some point due to lack of resources. This was indicated to happen often to 24% of the families and to happen sometimes to 40% of them.** Only 36% reported that they rarely face this challenge.

**56% of the working children surveyed reported having gone to bed hungry. This challenge is faced "often" in 24% of the cases and "sometimes" in 48% of them,** a figure that sheds light on how life threatening the challenging context in Lebanon has become for working children and their families.

In 35% of the households, the working child himself or any household members reported having to spend a whole day and night without eating anything because there was not enough food during the four weeks preceding the survey. Boys were more likely than girls to adopt this measure (67% boys - 33% girls). Adults are reported to be the most common users of this coping mechanism. 8% of children reported that this coping strategy was adopted "often", 58% of the families experienced this "sometimes" and 34% reported it "rarely".



The limitation of the variety and quantity of foods eaten by working and non-working children is worrying as it is a clear causal factor of micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition. Inadequate dietary intake is a major basic cause of micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition, and it affects children's growth, development, and ability to realise their full potential.<sup>65</sup>

These figures suggest that working children and other children in their household are at high risk of food insecurity and malnutrition, as well as potential exploitation by employers and perpetrators on the street given their increased vulnerability.

## 2 WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES AND PROTECTION CONCERNS OF FOOD-INSECURE WORKING CHILDREN? ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC HEALTH AND NUTRITION NEEDS?

Child labour is used as a coping mechanism to help families improve their access to food, but this mechanism does not seem to be contributing to the alleviation of food insecurity while it is seen to increase vulnerabilities - indeed working children indeed are facing the negative effects of persisting food insecurity in addition to protection concerns stemming from child labour.

“ ‘Children are exposed to physical and verbal abuse at work. They hold heavyweights like stones, crops and boxes. Because they work in the field, they are exposed to sunlight for a long time, without protection. If they feel tired and work slowly, the employers hit and shout at them. They can only take a 15-minutes break a day, which affects their health.’

A Shawish from Baalbek-Hermel, Haouche Barada



## 2.1 EFFECTS ON PHYSICAL HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Based on the sections above, children engaging in child labour, and especially the worst forms of child labour, are likely to be food insecure, and to thus suffer from the health and nutrition consequences of food insecurity and of child labour. Indeed, beyond the loss of dignity associated with hunger, food insecurity has short and long term consequences on children.

IRC's study on access to services for working children also found that all of the surveyed working children were involved in the worst forms of child labour working for extensive hours in jobs that are a risk to their physical, mental and emotional health.

As highlighted previously, lack of access to diverse and nutritious foods is likely leads to increased micronutrient deficiencies, affecting growth, cognitive and physical development, weakening the immune system and increasing the risks of morbidity and mortality.<sup>66</sup>

In addition, child labour also leads to similar outcomes: children who work a lot and are exhausted are likely to consume more energy than they eat, and consequently, they are thus at risk of being underweight, which can lead to malnutrition and various health risks. Child labour, especially in its worst forms, has dire effects on growth in height and weight, risks of stunting, wasting, and anaemia,<sup>67</sup> and thus increases malnutrition.

Evidence also shows that if working children were previously malnourished, work is likely to deteriorate their condition. A malnourished child with micronutrient deficiencies can be weaker and would experience major physical issues such as fatigue, dizziness, and loss of muscle mass amongst other effects, therefore putting the child in increased danger when engaging in hazardous work environments, where children must carry heavy loads and work longer hours.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, evidence shows that working children are more likely to have health issues,<sup>69</sup> so they become very likely to further increase pre-existing malnutrition levels - as disease is a major basic cause of malnutrition.<sup>70</sup>

Child labour is also linked to varying negative health outcomes. Indeed, child labour is indeed related to early mortality, morbidity, asthma, silicosis, and tuberculosis.<sup>71</sup> Injury is also a risk, especially for agricultural work as children manipulate dangerous equipment,<sup>72</sup> despite Decree No. 8987 which bans the worst forms of child labour and thus, agricultural work. In Lebanon, 60% of child labour is in agriculture.<sup>73</sup> In the Bekaa region in 2019, 30% of working children reported injuries at work and 42% were insulted at work.<sup>74</sup> Children have also reported physical abuse as 24% of boys and 16% of girls have been threatened or hit in the past year.<sup>75</sup>

52% of all working children surveyed by IRC in 2019 reported being exposed to physical hazards. Among those exposed, 77.7% cited working in extremely high temperatures or low temperatures (62.7%). The study also found that the likelihood of experiencing physical hazards is 7.7 times higher in surveyed children working in agriculture compared to other surveyed working children.

In fact, children engaged in the worst forms of child labour as surveyed by IRC in 2019 expressed that they experienced many negative consequences, citing mainly feeling

tired and less energetic (30%).<sup>76</sup> In agriculture during harvest season particularly, many children stated that they work night shifts between 7PM and 7AM (24.0%). Children as young as 6 years old were found to be involved in hazardous types of work and 52% of all surveyed working children reported being exposed to physical hazards and thus injuries and health hazards.<sup>77</sup> Fifty five percent suffered from wounds due to the use of sharp objects and the collection of crops, mainly in agriculture. The exposure to pesticides and other chemicals provoked asthma and skin rashes in 6.1% and 7.5% of surveyed children, respectively. Additionally, other consequences were cited by 33% of surveyed children such as headache, back pain, broken members, broken teeth, cold, flu, burns, dizziness, eyes allergy, joint pain, and stomach pain. All these consequences damage the children's basic health, and if most of injuries are untreated, this would develop into more serious diseases and in some cases to disabilities that the child would have to carry through his or her adulthood.

Data collected by the LPC captures the same consequences: food insecure working children are affected both psychologically and physically by hard work. Children report suffering from tiredness (24% of the 141 communities), body pain (19%), exposure to verbal and physical abuse (13%), and psychological distress (12%).<sup>78</sup> All the Syrian mothers surveyed by ACF in Arsal were concerned about the physical condition of the working children and their wellbeing.<sup>79</sup> This situation is exacerbated by the hostile attitudes of the Lebanese against Syrian refugees in the country.<sup>80</sup> As a consequence, the well-being and mental health of children is dramatically impacted; only 2% of the surveyed working children linked emotions with a positive feeling.

“ Working children are not attending schools; they are being exposed to fatigue, stress and depression, which is negatively affecting their childhood.’

A Syrian head of household, Akkar, Sammaqiye Arsal





## Quick summary of section 2.1



**60%**

of child labour in Lebanon is in the agricultural sector.



**5%**

suffered from wounds due to the use of sharp objects.



### Effects on health

Child labour, especially in its worst forms, has dire effects on growth in height and weight, risks of stunting, wasting and anaemia and thus increases malnutrition.



### Micronutrients deficiencies

A malnourished child with micronutrient deficiencies can be weaker and would experience major physical issues such as fatigue, dizziness, and loss of muscle mass amongst other effects, therefore putting the child in increased danger when engaging in hazardous work environments.



**30%**

of working children reported injuries at work and 42% were insulted at work in the Bekaa in 2019.

## 2.2 EFFECTS ON EDUCATION

Food insecurity and child labour emerge as major concerns affecting children's access to education and ability to learn, which directly impacts children's well-being now and in the future.

It is not enough to guarantee access to education if food insecurity is not tackled. Children's mental development is affected by food insecurity and malnutrition: Impaired brain development limits their ability to focus and learn, and this will impact future opportunities, perpetuating intergenerational transmission of poverty and malnutrition.<sup>81,82</sup> Due to the absence of necessary nutritional consumption, children may lack the energy and the brain development to learn and excel in school. Malnutrition also makes children more vulnerable to diseases, negatively affecting school attendance and academic success.



As highlighted in the previous section, food insecurity is among the main drivers of child labour as children reported their engagement in work primarily to cover their families' food needs. Food insecurity affects children's capacities in school and it leads to them dropping out of school or not enrolling at all as they need to work, and sometimes they even become the main breadwinners of the household. 80% of all working children, including 73.3% of working girls surveyed by IRC in 2019, reported being out of school in Lebanon and out of learning. Children of unemployed caregivers are clearly less likely to enrol in schools. The children were surveyed at the workplace, and most of them worked for very long hours, which might be a reason for not attending formal or non-formal schooling. The education system is not tailored to tend to the specific needs of working children which further negatively affects their access to education.

The financial barriers to education are now exacerbated as a result of COVID-19 and the economic crisis. Furthermore, the opportunity cost of sending children to school in terms of income is now higher than before. NRC research on obstacles to education for Syrian refugee children,<sup>83</sup> showed that despite the clear wish to learn (score of 3.9/5) and support from parents (77%), 78% of all children surveyed who are currently out of learning (i.e., not in formal or non-formal education) cannot go to school because of financial challenges. Sixty percent of surveyed children out of learning have worked at some point since they arrived in Lebanon. Children who are currently out of learning but learnt at some point in Lebanon include 62% stating that they dropped out for financial reasons.

A recent CAMEALEON and ODI research (June 2020),<sup>84</sup> indicated that MPC recipients with school-aged children consistently reported that MPC facilitates school attendance by supporting them in meeting associated costs and tackling barriers to attendance including travel costs, school supplies and clothing. In contrast, households discontinued from MPC assistance report having to withdraw children from school as they can no longer meet the direct and opportunity costs. It was also found that among some MPC recipient households, children still work to supplement income, commonly in combination with attending school, to supplement income.



## 2.3 EFFECTS ON PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, AND CHILD MARRIAGE

In a survey from 2019, many working children reported working up to 15 hours a day with only 0.5 to 1 day off per week and 66% percent of all surveyed working children and 76.8% of surveyed working girls indicated that they worked in conditions that are psychosocially hazardous conditions.<sup>85</sup> Thirty-eight percent of all working children surveyed in 2019 said that they experienced at least one incident of violence at work or on their way to work, whereas 41.9% of working girls said the same, indicating that girls are at higher risk.<sup>86</sup>

The primary type of violence faced at work is physical abuse (58.3%) followed by verbal abuse (28.0%). Most working children (74.4%) indicated that they were exposed to physical and verbal abuse during their work. Children who work on the street often faced abuse from unknown passers-by.

The most extreme case of physical abuse in the workplace was using a stick or hose as a weapon (29.2%). Also, girls were significantly more likely to report psychosocial hazards than boys. Numerous cases of sexual abuse faced by working girls and working boys were reported to IRC staff.<sup>87</sup> Parents are aware of the risks: 8 out of 10 mothers surveyed by ACF in Aarsal in 2020 replied that it was not safe to allow the girls to work due to the risk of sexual harassment.

Some of the children were found to work even for little or no pay, being subjected to serfdom and debt bondage highlighting some of the exploitative practices they are subject to. These practices exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities and further heightens the risk of experiencing protection concerns.

Risks of sexual exploitation and abuse are high, and they are particularly severe amongst women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ persons are severe, amidst pre-existing economic vulnerabilities. A 6% increase in incidents of child marriage was reported between the month of August (4%) and September (10%). Data from focus group discussions indicate that parents are resorting to child marriage as a negative coping mechanism due to the harsh economic conditions and many adolescent girls are being subject to domestic violence incidents at home and are resorting to early marriage as an escape from their reality. Besides, the Covid-19 crisis which resulted in school closures is also expected to negatively affect the rate of child marriage in Lebanon.

“ ‘Refugees are usually in debt with the shops around. To diminish the expenses, they eat two meals only per day without variation of food. For instance, they eat potatoes, groats, or rice for many days. They depend on the availability of vegetables according to the season. When the situation is really bad, they resort to arranging an early marriage for the daughters because they are not able to take care of them.’

An ACF field officer, Baalbek-Hermel

“ ‘Even if I have to starve, I will not send my daughter to work. I will go to work and will take the risk being harassed or raped.’

A mother in Qarvanat ITS - Aarsal

Early marriage was cited as a **negative coping strategy in 17% of the LPC communities** where food insecure working children are present: girls in these communities are more prone to early marriage, as families see it as a coping strategy to relieve some of their economic burden, including food expenditure.<sup>88</sup> Whilst cases of child marriage in Lebanon are under-reported, qualitative data from GBVIMS and NGO programs suggests that it is becoming an increasingly common negative coping mechanism for families whose incomes have been affected by the overlapping COVID and economic crises.<sup>89</sup>

In an FGD conducted in Baalbeck in 2019 among Syrian refugees living in ITSs, teenage mothers engaging in agricultural work stated that having to work alone to join the fields threatened their security and respectability. As a result, their families had decided to marry them off. This marriage arrangement was seen by the families as a way to make the family of the groom responsible for the girls and enhance the respectability of young girls - for whom it is otherwise inappropriate to be unaccompanied. Girls have shared that this early marriage has consequently led them to early pregnancies. These women were enrolled in ACF programs as they had been identified as having inadequate child feeding practices and their children were at higher risk of malnutrition.



## Quick summary of section 2.2 & 2.3



**80%**

of all working children, including 73.3% of working girls surveyed by IRC in 2019, reported being out of school in Lebanon and out of learning. Children of unemployed caregivers are clearly less likely to enrol in schools.



**66%**

of all surveyed working children and 76.8% of surveyed working girls indicated that they worked in conditions that are psychosocially hazardous.



**17%**

Early marriage was cited as a negative coping strategy in 17% of the LPC communities where food insecure working children are present

# 3

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence presented in this paper allows us to conclude that both food insecurity and child labour have increased in 2020, and both are correlated in vulnerable communities. The inability to buy food is the main reason why households report deciding to send children to work. The income of working children goes mostly to buy food for themselves and their household. However, as an emergency coping strategy, child labour is not achieving its objective where working children and their households are not food secure, and they consistently resort to negative food-based coping mechanisms. Consequences of child labour include various health risks - including diseases such as asthma, silicosis, depression, wounds, and injuries. Child labour increases the risk that children suffer from one or more forms of malnutrition. It increases the risk that children drop out of education and suffer abuse, exploitation, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy.

Regarding the effectiveness of cash intervention modalities to address child labour and food insecurity:

Some recommendations further outlined in this paper are guided by recent research on cash assistance. Indeed, the CAMEALEON impact evaluation of multi-purpose cash (MPC) assistance in Lebanon noticed the impact of cash assistance on the incident of child labour for children in the 5-14 age group. The studied group receiving MPC showed lower rates of child labour in the long-term (over 12 months of assistance) for the 5-14 age group. However, with low baseline rates for the control group, the impact cannot be considered statistically significant and more research is needed in this regard.

Long-term MPC was found to have a significant positive impact on the food security of households.<sup>90</sup> In addition to the cash assistance which is specifically provided to meet food needs, long-term MPC recipients had a significant improvement in the adapted Food Consumption Score (FCS) along with an increase in the consumption of cereals, vegetables, fish, eggs, and oil indicating a slight improvement in the food consumption and diet quality of households. Long-term MPC also led to a \$32.70 increase in recipient households' monthly food expenditures.

### **TO JOINTLY ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY AND CHILD LABOUR, MULTISECTORAL INTERVENTIONS ARE NEEDED, OVER THE SHORT, MEDIUM, AND LONG TERMS.**

#### **1. TO UN AGENCIES, NGOS, AND SECTORAL WORKING GROUPS:**

- Implement emergency basic assistance and food security activities specifically targeting households with working children and severe food insecurity.
- Scale up basic assistance programmes to families with a working child, a street-connected child and/or a child at risk of working; targeting child labour with 'Cash plus' interventions

where supplementary assistance and programming targets cash assistance recipients with working children in order to make sure compounded root causes are addressed; focus on coupling cash assistance with case management and a nutrition awareness component to ensure that the money spent by families is partly used to access nutritious foods.

- Scale up child protection programmes towards street-connected and working children, especially case management activities, to ensure proper support for working children financially, emotionally, and psychologically.
- Child protection sectors programmes to include a food security and nutrition component, aiming to facilitate access to the right amount of nutritious food for working children and of their families (through cash assistance, fresh food vouchers, cash for education etc).
- Mainstream child labour awareness and prevention throughout the Food Security, Livelihoods, Health, and Nutrition sectors in order to ensure that programmes can properly address the needs and rights of working children.
- Support non-child protection actors and local authorities through capacity building and guidance in order to improve safe identification and referral of street connected and working children to adequate services as well as to increase their knowledge in dealing with working children
- Agriculture programmes need to systematically include targeted results:
  - ◆ on child labour, to prevent and/or mitigate physical, emotional, and mental risks of working children, and
  - ◆ on nutrition, to ensure that the harvested food is diverse enough and effectively used by vulnerable households to expand their diet diversity.
- The protection, basic assistance, food security and nutrition sectors to work jointly on a plan to mainstream child labour in their workplans and to encourage multi-sectoral programming to prevent and address child labour and its consequences.
- Support, promote and improve access to TVET and innovative skill-building programs for working youth and children above 15 years old, drop out children and youth to improve professional readiness and employability.
- The nutrition sector, OCHA and UNHCR to conduct nutrition surveys and include nutrition indicators in relevant surveys to establish a baseline on nutrition needs across the population.
- The Education actors need to work on tailoring their NFE and TVET programs to the needs of working children especially in terms of transportation, timing and nutrition needs in order to increase the children's access to learning. This should include support for children to access tailored learning (Ex. literacy and numeracy and life skills), as well as an individual follow-up to encourage learning and provide motivational support.
- The sexual and reproductive health working group (SRHWG) and actors should generate evidence on the health status of working youth and children (including reproductive health) and guide working methods to other sectors.
- NGOs and sectors to propose new programmes which address the emerging food security and nutrition needs, including by providing nutrition sensitisation sessions, a community health component, and a cash component.
- Support data-gathering efforts in the nutrition sector to establish a baseline on nutrition needs across the population.

- The SRHWG should encourage and implement joint programming to bring together early marriage and teenage pregnancy prevention, family planning, nutrition awareness and case management for working children, particularly for children working in agriculture.
- The approach to Child labour in the UN food agencies' econometric targeting should be re-examined on including children's income in expenditure data considerations to ensure that families with working children are not considered as having higher incomes (being less vulnerable). More information is needed on how the income of a working child affects the overall expenditure of the HH, and therefore eligibility for assistance.

## 2. TO DONORS:

- Scale-up funding for programmes and interventions addressing food insecurity, malnutrition, and child labour, in an integrated approach, for all nationalities.
- Demand and support increased evidence production and inter-sectoral coordination on food security, nutrition, and child labour interrelated issues.

## 3. TO OCHA, HCT AND INTER-SECTOR COORDINATION TEAMS:

- Ensure that child labour is included in the terms of reference of the upcoming Multisectoral needs assessment, in order to establish a large-scale baseline and understand further the drivers and possible solutions.
- Support the inter-sector coordination effort to prioritise and mainstream specific child protection considerations, which include access to services for working children, their younger siblings, and their caregivers, into other key sectors such as livelihoods, basic assistance, protection, education, health, and shelter.

## 4. THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON:

- GoL to work on amending Labour Law stipulations relating to child labour to be in line with Lebanon's commitments under the Child Rights Convention as well as to increase its efforts on monitoring and enforcing its application.
- The GoL to Improve intra-governmental efforts to address child labour and scale up the capacity of the MoL child Labour unit.
- MoSA to undertake mainstreaming of child labour in social safety net and social protection policies through including it as a vulnerability marker; in addition, ensure the nutritionally vulnerable are prioritised by these interventions.
- MoL to invest in scaling up the evidence base on child labour in Lebanon by leading on research and surveys to verify numbers, conditions of work and needs of all working children in Lebanon.
- MEHE to look into adapting national curriculums to the needs of working children who are unable to attend school on a daily basis focusing on flexibility in content and frequency of sessions provided to working children, in addition to the provision of psychosocial support for this cohort of children during class. The adaptation of the curriculum should be inclusive

of working children and their families and should provide certification to facilitate working children's gradual integration into learning opportunities.

- MoPH, in partnership with the World Health Organisation and the Health sector in Lebanon should urgently conduct an assessment on the detrimental impact of food insecurity combined with child labour on youth and working children's mental health and reproductive health to understand the scale of the impact on children amidst the current crises and the future implications. Findings should be reflected in future response programming.



## ANNEX 1: LIST OF SURVEYS SUPPORTING THIS STUDY

Agency	Type of survey	Methods	Location	Population groups	Number of interviewees	Date
ACF	Baseline survey for a cash-for-work project	Specific questions added in quantitative programme survey	South Lebanon (Tyre / Nabatiyeh/ Hasbaya / Saida) and Bekaa (West Bekaa, Zahle and Baalbeck -Hermel)	Vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee households	144 (55 in the Bekaa: 19 in Baalbek, and 16 in Zahle, 15 in West Bekaa and 5 in Hermel  88 in the South: 39 in Tyre and 34 in Nabatiyeh, 12 in Hasbaya and 3 in Saida)	August - September 2020
ACF	End-line survey for a food security and nutrition project	Specific questions added in quantitative programme survey	Bekaa (Baalbeck-Hermel)	Syrian refugee households	174	July 2020
ACF	Individual phone interviews	Full qualitative survey, phone-based	Bekaa (Arsal)	Vulnerable Syrian mothers	10	July 2020
ACF	Assessment for an agricultural project	Specific questions added in quantitative programme survey	Bekaa (Baalbeck -Hermel)	Vulnerable Lebanese agricultural landowners	23	August 2020
IRC	Key-informant interviews	Assessment in a form of a questionnaire involving close-ended questions that gather quantitative and qualitative data	North (Tripoli), Arsal, Akkar	Working children and adolescent girls <sup>91</sup>	209 (118 in the North-Tripoli, 86 in Arsal and 5 in Akkar)	August -October 2020
LPC	Community Protection Approach	Narrated Community Perspective (Transect Walks, FGDs and Individual Interviews)	North, Akkar, Baalbeck-Hermel, Bekaa Governorates	Syrian refugee households	141 communities and 47,224 people	Two phases: one is set from January to June 2019, and another from December 2019 to March 2020



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