

Sounding the Alarm: Multidimensional Deprivation and Children's Rights in Lebanon

Call for Action

Over the past three years, Lebanon has suffered from three extreme shocks—the financial and economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Port of Beirut blast—that have cemented an inter-generational poverty trap. The value of the lira and purchasing power have plummeted to historic lows, while inflation is now the second highest in the world. Adding to the pressures on those living through these compounded crises is the breakdown of key public services and infrastructures, leading to the scarcity of fundamental services like electricity and water. To shed light on the existing research related to the resulting state of poverty, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have published [a primer on poverty](#) and [a policy brief on the state of childhood poverty in Lebanon](#). To build on these, this call for action highlights the key problems brought on by these crises and proposes recommendations to alleviate multidimensional poverty impacting children and their rights.

Stating the Problem:

Poverty is multidimensional.

Poverty and deprivation are not limited to the deprivation of income. While income remains an important measurement of poverty, it does not capture the full extent of deprivation (such as access to housing, education, healthcare, legal protection, clean water, and electricity). Children, in particular, are experiencing a deterioration of their overall wellbeing, an undue mental load, less trust in their parents, a sense of hopelessness and pessimism, and a restricted right to play.

Poverty is systemic and deep-seated.

While the economic crisis has exacerbated the intensity and level of multidimensional poverty, existing data from the 2018-2019 Labor Force and Household Living Conditions survey indicates that a slight majority (53%) was already living in multidimensional poverty prior to the crisis. The same study shows that around two-thirds of children (under 5 years old) are multidimensionally poor.

Poverty is exacerbating inequality.

Serious gaps in public infrastructures and services that obstruct access to clean water, education, food, healthcare, and shelter are leading to collective deprivation of these basic rights. Households with the necessary resources are pressed to fill these gaps by depending on remittances or external private services like private generators, solar panels, water suppliers, and makeshift shelters. Those hardest hit by the crisis are generally unable to procure such external private services, further amplifying the degree of their deprivation and leaving them with no choice but to sell household furniture and items to meet pressing basic needs tied to livelihood and healthcare, or desperately seek asylum elsewhere.

Persons with lifecycle vulnerabilities, such as persons with disabilities (PwDs), older people, women, children, and youth, as well as stateless persons, are disproportionately affected by multidimensional poverty. Not only do they face additional burdens in such an adverse context, but they are largely left unprotected due to the missing social protection schemes needed to support them.

Poverty is a human rights issue.

Poverty is the consequence of the deprivation of human rights like the right to education, the right to adequate housing, the right to clean water, the right to healthcare, and children's right to play. The inability of caregivers living in extreme multidimensional poverty to offer basic needs to their families and dependents is resulting in a rise in child deprivation, child labor, and child marriage, among other serious violations of children's rights and other vulnerable groups.

Poverty is undermining the social contract.

The systemic violation of core rights due to the entrenched state of multidimensional poverty is tearing at the country's social fabric. Households unable to meet the basic needs of all their members are being forced into extreme compromises on fundamental rights, leading to a breakdown in trust and confidence, even on the intimate familial levels.

Recommendations:

- 1) Move ahead with implementing the plan of the National Social Protection Strategy approved by the Cabinet of Ministers during its last session before becoming a caretaker government.
- 2) Scale-up of social assistance along with the establishment of social grants that address lifecycle vulnerabilities, in line with the National Social Protection Strategy.
- 3) Urge donors engaging with households affected by poverty and vulnerability to incorporate the shifting dynamics of poverty and the corresponding needs of affected and disadvantaged groups in their assistance programs and engagement to complement existing anti-poverty programs.
- 4) Target social and economic assistance to households with children to ensure immediate alleviation of multidimensional poverty and vulnerability and the protection of children's rights.
- 5) Strengthen social capacities and provide emotional and psychological support for caregivers and children affected by multidimensional poverty, especially in instances of breakdown of relations, child labor, and other forms child exploitation.
- 6) Invest in schools and teachers to open and remain open for children and youth, bearing in mind schools' role as key entry points for the provision of other services such as healthcare, mental care, nutritious meals, and academic support and after school programs.
- 7) Engage with donors and research centers to generate gender desegregated data which is essential to monitor multidimensional poverty and inform evidence-based responses to address its immediate and long-term implications.
- 8) Establish a unified, coherent, and inclusive Multidimensional Poverty Index that includes child poverty to monitor the escalating state of deprivation.

Signatories:

Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

Economic Development Solutions (EDS)

Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN)

Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)

Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD)

Save the Children International, Lebanon

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