



# A study on “CHILD LABOR IN LEBANON”

January 2025



Prepared by Justicia Foundation for Development and Human Rights in collaboration with Initiate – The Community Forum for Empowerment and Development, with the support of the Regional Development and Protection Programme for Lebanon and Jordan (RDPP III) funded by the European Union.

*This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Regional Development and Protection Program (RDPP III) for Jordan and Lebanon which is supported by Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Union, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of INITIATE and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the RDPP or its donors.*

Contents

**1.PREFACE..... 3**

**2.INTRODUCTION ..... 3**

**3.THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING CHILD LABOR IN LEBANON..... 7**

**4. CAUSES THAT LEAD TO THE WORSENING OF CHILD LABOR IN LEBANON.....20**

**5.RECOMMENDATIONS .....28**

## 1.PREFACE

INITIATE is a Lebanon-based non-governmental, non-profit organization that seeks to empower and strengthen the community through the creation of comprehensive and inclusive programs meant to empowering the youth and expanding their areas of impact.

In this regard, the said association collaborated with Justicia to prepare the current study on the topic "Child Labour in Lebanon" within the project "Community Mobilization for Positive change in Child Labor and GBV".

In the same context, we would like to pinpoint that Justicia has been selected for having the required and the needed expertise as it provides legal support to a number of governmental and non-governmental bodies concerned with human rights and children and to parliamentary committees, including the Women and Children Commission and the Human Rights Commission. Justicia prepared several laws proposals, which were signed and submitted by the deputies through discussion in the parliamentary committees to the General Assembly of the House of Representatives, where they were ratified and published in the Official Newspaper and became a reality. Among these laws relating to the rights and protection of children in relation to the current study, we mention the Law No. 236 of 16/7/2021 (amending an article in the Law on the Protection of Juveniles in conflict with the Law or at risk), which aims to prevent the handcuffing of a minor during his transfer from or to the place of detention.

## 2.INTRODUCTION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis, the growing number of Syrian refugees, and the events of the September 2024 war, child labor has become more prevalent in Lebanon in recent years.

A significant number of children, particularly among Syrian refugees, are thought to be working in various occupations, including construction, agriculture, handicrafts, domestic work, street vending, and begging. One of the industry's most dependent on child labor is agriculture, especially in remote regions such as the Bekaa Valley where children are subjected to hazardous working conditions like chemical exposure and extended workdays<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, children also partake in manual laborintensive jobs like mechanics, carpentry, and metalwork, as well as in the construction industry. These jobs require physical strength that children lack<sup>2</sup>. As for urban areas, children most likely work on the streets, begging or selling items, leaving them vulnerable to human trafficking or forced labor.

As for gender differences in child labor, boys are often involved in hazardous and strenuous work such as agriculture, construction, and other dangerous manual jobs, exposing them to serious health risks, physical injuries, and psychological harm. Meanwhile, girls typically engage in domestic work, which may appear less

---

<sup>1</sup> **Al-Akhbar**, "Children Supporting Their Families... and the NGOs", November 26, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> **Al-Akhbar**, "More than 100,000 children in the labor market: The profits from child exploitation outweigh the law," June 24, 2023.

dangerous on the surface but still involves serious exploitation in terms of long, continuous working hours, unhealthy conditions, and a lack of adequate protection.

One of the main causes of the increase of child labor in Lebanon is the country's economic crisis, which has forced many families to depend on their children's income. This Dependency on children's income is mostly prevalent among Syrian refugee families, who depend on their children's earnings to cover their essential expenses.

Additionally, the high cost of living prevents many working children from accessing their right to education. Often, the physical and mental exhaustion from labor hinders their ability to attend school or perform well academically, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty and hardship and pushing them further away from pursuing an education.

The UNICEF report titled “Trapped in a Downward Spiral” highlights the impact of Lebanon’s compounded crises on children, many of whom are forced into labor to support their families. The report provides an in-depth analysis of the root causes of child labor, identifies the most affected sectors, and outlines the long-term consequences on children's health and development<sup>3</sup>.

Another report by UNICEF and the FAO, titled “ Child Labour in Agriculture: The

---

<sup>3</sup> **Trapped in a downward spiral**, The unrelenting toll of Lebanon’s crisis on children, December 2023  
<https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/10866/file/UNICEF%20CFRA%202023%20EN.pdf>.

Demand Side”, investigates working conditions in the agricultural sector through

---

interviews with farmers, children, and community leaders. It offers insights into the social and economic factors that drive children to engage in agricultural labor.”<sup>4</sup>

A 2019 study by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) revealed alarming data on the risks faced by working children. It found that 52% of working children are subjected to physical hazards, with 77.7% working in extremely high temperatures and 62.7% in extremely cold conditions. Children working in agriculture are 7.7 times more likely to get exposed to physical risks compared to those in other sectors. Moreover, 75% of children reported injuries such as cuts from sharp tools. Exposure to chemical pesticides resulted in asthma (6.1%) and skin rashes (7.5%). Additionally, 33% of children reported other symptoms, including headaches, back pain, broken teeth, and fractured bones. The same report also noted a 44% increase in child abuse cases between October 2020 and October 2021, rising from 3,913 to 5,621 cases.<sup>5</sup>

In another study conducted in 2019, many children reported working up to 15 hours per day, with only one day off per week. The study showed that working girls face worse conditions than boys, with 76.8% of girls exposed to psychological and social risks compared to 66% of working children overall. Most working children (74.4%) experienced physical and verbal abuse, with physical violence being the most

---

<sup>4</sup> **Child Labour in Agriculture:** The Demand Side, A survey to better understand farmers practices and the drivers and reasons behind employing children, February 2019.

[https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/1656/file/ChildLabour\\_FAO&UNICEF\\_2019.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/media/1656/file/ChildLabour_FAO&UNICEF_2019.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> **BBC News** – "Alarming and Shocking Figures on the World Day Against Child Labour", June 12, 2024.

common (58.3%), followed by verbal violence (28%). Additionally, 29.2% of children reported being beaten with objects such as sticks or hoses. Girls were also more likely

---

to report psychological and social risks, with many girls—and some boys—exposed to harassment and sexual abuse.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING CHILD LABOR IN LEBANON

#### 3.1 At the international level:

Although Lebanon is a signatory of a number of international agreements and treaties that protect children from being exploited at work, it still faces a number of challenges to fully implement them. Some of the most significant treaties:

**-The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, ratified by Lebanon in 1972:** Article 10 of the Covenant instructs that children must be protected from work that is considered harmful to their health or education.

**-Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, ratified by Lebanon by Law No. 20 of 30/10/1990:** According to Article 32 of this Convention, Member States shall protect children from economic exploitation and ensure the establishment of a minimum age for employment and suitable working conditions.

---

<sup>6</sup> Alhurra – "Working for Children", December 23, 2021.

**-Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Lebanon by Law No. 572 of 24/7/1996:** This Convention indirectly stipulates the protection of young girls from exploitation, including forced or harmful labor.

---

**-Arab Labour Convention No. 18, ratified by Lebanon pursuant to Law No. 183 of 24/5/2000,** regarding "Juvenile work".

According to Article 1 of the Arab Convention No. 18: *"It is prohibited to work if one has not reached the age of thirteen."*

**-International Labour Organization (ILO):** Lebanon is a member of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and has ratified several conventions aimed at regulating child labor, **such as Convention No. 182 of 1999** <sup>7</sup>**under Law No. 335/2001,** which focuses on the worst forms of child labor and obliges Member States to take immediate action to eliminate such phenomena as slavery and forced labor.

**Article 1:** *"Each State Party ratifying this Convention shall take immediate and effective measures promptly and without delay to ensure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor."*

**Article 2:** *" the term "child" in the meaning of this Convention shall apply to all persons under the age of eighteen."*

---

<sup>7</sup> "Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour," 1999 (No. 182), Law No. 335/2001.

Lebanon has also ratified **Convention No. 138 of 1973 under Law No. 400 of 5/6/2002**,<sup>8</sup> which obliges Member States to set the minimum age for employment and prohibits the employment of children under 15 years of age in most cases.

**Article 1:** *"Each State Party for which this Convention is in force undertakes to pursue a national policy aimed at the effective elimination of child labor and at gradually raising the minimum age for employment or work to a level consistent with the physical and mental development of juveniles."*

**-Arab Labour Convention No. 19, ratified by Lebanon under Law No. 586 of 20/11/2004**,<sup>9</sup> on "Labour Inspection".

**Article 6:** *"When appointing a labor inspector, it must be ensured that they possess the appropriate academic qualifications necessary to perform their duties."*

**Article 7:** *"When selecting a labor inspector, impartiality and objectivity must be among the required traits."*

**Article 9:** *"Each state must provide both theoretical and practical training for labor inspectors to qualify them for performing their duties."*

**Article 10:** *"Each state must ensure the appointment of a sufficient number of inspectors appropriate to the size and nature of the tasks, and coordinate with*

---

<sup>8</sup> **"Minimum Age Convention"** (No. 138), Law No. 400 dated 5/6/2002.

<sup>9</sup> **"Arab Convention No. 19 of 1998 concerning Labor Inspection"**, ratified in Lebanon under Law No. 586/2004.

*relevant departments and agencies in the state to seek assistance from specialists in carrying out inspection duties."*

### 3.2 At the local level:

#### **-Legislative Decree No. 340 issued on 1/3/1943 (Lebanese Penal Code):**

---

**Article 498:** "*Whoever abandons or leaves a child under the age of seven or any other person who does not have the protection of himself because of a physical or psychological condition shall be punished by imprisonment from three months to one year.*

*If the child or the incapacitated person is abandoned or left in a deserted place, the punishment shall be from one to three years of imprisonment.*

**Article 499:** "*if the offense causes illness or injury to the victim or leads to death, the offender shall be punished in accordance with the provisions of article 191 in the case of subtraction and discharge in a non-desolate place, if he has not anticipated or believes that he can avoid it, and in accordance with the provisions of article 189 in the case of subtraction or being thrown into a desolate place whenever the outcome is predicted and the risks accepted."*

**Article 500:** "*If the offender is a parent/caretaker of a child, the incapacitated person or one of the persons responsible for his or her custody, supervision, treatment or upbringing, the penalty shall be increased as provided for in article 257.*

*-This provision does not apply to a mother who incites, acts or intervenes to propose or liquidate her child in the interest of her honor.*

*-Article 500 bis, added pursuant to Law No. 224 dated 13/5/1993: Whoever abandons or attempts to abandon a minor under the age of eighteen, whether temporarily or permanently, even for the purpose of giving the child up for adoption in exchange for financial compensation or any other benefit, shall be punished by imprisonment from one to three years and a fine ranging from five million to twenty million Lebanese pounds.*

**The same penalty is imposed on the partner and the interviewee. The same penalty shall be imposed:**

- 1. Anyone who forces or attempts to force a minor's father or mother, or one of them, or the father or mother of an illegitimate child recognized by one or both parents, or anyone having guardianship or custody authority, to abandon the minor in exchange for money or any other benefit.*
- 2. Anyone who forces or attempts to force, by any direct or indirect means, the parents of a child born or to be born to commit to abandoning the child or to contract for abandoning the child, and anyone who possesses, uses, or attempts to use such commitment.*
- 3. Anyone who forces or attempts to force any other person to bear a child, whether legally or not, with the intent to sell the newborn.*
- 4. Anyone who offers or attempts to offer mediation for a fee or any other benefit, with the purpose of obtaining or adopting a child.*

*The penalty for incitement shall be applied in all the above-mentioned cases independently of the result to which it is intended.*

*"The penalty shall be increased in accordance with Article 257 of the Penal Code in case of repetition."*

**Article 501:** *The father and mother who leave their legitimate or illegitimate child, or a child they have adopted, in a state of need—either by refusing to fulfill their obligation of support or by neglecting to obtain the means necessary to provide it—shall be punished by imprisonment with labor for up to three months and a fine not exceeding two hundred thousand Lebanese pounds.*

Article 503 bis 1 was added by Law No. 204 - issued on 30/12/2020:

*"Anyone who engages in violence within the family that causes moral or economic harm to a member of the family, or that causes deprivation of basic needs, shall be punished by imprisonment from three months to three years and a fine ranging from the minimum wage to three times or one of these penalties."*

**Article 614:** *"he shall be considered a homeless person and shall be punished by imprisonment with employment from one to six months. Any person who has no home or means of subsistence does not engage in work for at least one month and has not been shown to have sought adequate employment. The homeless may also be placed in an employment house and placed in a duty station when repeated."*

**Article 617:** *"The father of a minor who has not reached the age of fifteen years or his parents who are responsible for his maintenance and upbringing shall be punished by imprisonment from one to six months and a fine of twenty*

thousand to one hundred thousand pounds if they do not support him despite their ability and leave him homeless."

**Article 618:** "Anyone who induces a minor under the age of eighteen to beg shall be punished by imprisonment from six months to two years and by a fine ranging from the minimum wage to three times the minimum wage."

**-The Lebanese Labor Law issued on 23/9/1946** (Chapter II: The Employment of Children and Women) - Article 21 and the following:

Article 22 of the Labour Law provides as follows:

**"The employment of juveniles before they have reached the age of thirteen is strictly prohibited** and a juvenile must not be employed before a medical examination to ensure that he is fit to perform the work for which he is used.

Medical certificates are given free of charge from the Ministry of Public Health and are renewed annually until the completion of the juvenile at the age of eighteen. It can be canceled at any time if the event is subsequently found unfit to carry out the work for which it was used."

Article 23 of the same law provides as follows:

**" It is also prohibited to employ juveniles in industrial enterprises and in jobs that are burdensome or harmful to health and which are set out in tables (1) and (2) annexed to this Law before they have reached the age of fifteen.**

**In addition to the above, it is prohibited to employ juveniles before they have reached the age of sixteen in work which is inherently dangerous or which poses**

**a danger to life, health or morals because of the circumstances in which they are performed.**

**Such acts shall be determined by a decree of the Council of Ministers upon the proposal of the Minister of Labour.**

**It is prohibited to employ juveniles under the age of eighteen for more than six hours a day, with at least one hour of rest if the daily working hours exceed four consecutive hours, and to employ them between seven at night and seven in the morning.**

*The juvenile must be granted a period of rest of not less than 13 consecutive hours between each two working periods, and it is absolutely forbidden to assign him or her to work overtime during daily and weekly rest periods, or during holidays and occasions which the institution may interrupt.*

*Every juvenile shall be entitled to twenty-one days annual leave with full pay provided that he has been employed by the institution for at least one year. The juvenile must benefit at least two-thirds of the duration of the leave at one time, with the remainder of the period during the same year."*

**-Juvenile Protection Law - Law No. 422 issued on 6/6/2002:** Under this law, a child at risk is defined as any person under the age of eighteen, whether they have committed a punishable offense or are otherwise exposed to danger as specified. According to Article 25 of this law, a child is considered at risk if found begging or homeless.

**-Law on Punishing the Crime of Human Trafficking-Law No. 164 issued on 24/8/2011:** Organized begging is classified as a human trafficking crime under the framework of exploitation.

**-Law on Protection of Women and Other Family Members from Domestic Violence-Law No. 293 issued on 7/5/2014:** This law strengthens the protection of children from violence and exploitation.<sup>10</sup>

**-Decree No. 3273 of 2000:** Concerning labor inspection, article 2 of which provides as follows:

*"The Labor Inspection and Occupational Safety Department within the Ministry of Labor is entrusted with supervising the implementation of all laws, decrees, and regulations related to working conditions and terms, as well as protecting workers during the performance of their work, including the provisions of ratified international labor conventions..."*

**Also, Article 3 from the same Decree states:**

*"Labor inspectors must collect information about establishments in all matters related to labor affairs and coordination, and notify the competent department within the Ministry of Labor of any deficiencies or gaps not specifically covered by the effective provisions, or any improper application of these laws.*

---

<sup>10</sup> **The Legal Status of Begging in Lebanon and the Protection of Children**", published on May 25, 2024

*Labor inspectors are required to submit annual reports on the results of their work and special reports whenever needed. These reports shall be prepared on topics and in a manner determined by the Director General of the Ministry of Labor."*

---

**-Decree No. 5137 of 1/10/2010 (formation of a national committee to combat child labor):** This decree repealed the provisions of Decree No. 15959 of 2005 on the same subject. It established a National Committee to Combat Child Labor within the Ministry of Labor. The committee's task is to prepare and follow up on the implementation of programs, plans, and projects aimed at combating child labor, in coordination with the International Labour Organization, the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour, APEC, and other relevant international and Arab organizations, as well as national non-governmental bodies, committees, ministries, and relevant governmental departments, in accordance with Article 2 of Decree No. 5137.

According to Article 3 of the same decree, the committee is to be composed of the Minister of Labor as Chairperson, the Director-General of the Ministry of Labor as ViceChairperson, and representatives from the following entities: the National Employment Office, the National Social Security Fund, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities – General Directorate of Internal Security Forces, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, and the Association of Lebanese

Industrialists. In addition, three members from non-governmental organizations working on children’s issues are to be appointed by the Minister of Labor, along with two representatives from the Ministry of Labor, one of whom shall serve as the committee’s Rapporteur. Under Article 8 of the same decree, the committee is required to issue an annual report summarizing the outcomes of its work and its recommendations, to be submitted by the end of May each year to the Council of Ministers through the Minister of Labor for the necessary decisions to be taken.

In 2023, the National Committee for the Elimination of Child Labor participated in a national conference on “Legal Protection for Street Children, Especially Girls,” organized by the Legal Forum for Family Issues, supported by the Malala Fund, and held under the patronage of the Beirut Bar Association. The conference produced several recommendations, including strengthening compulsory education, protecting street children, combating exploitation, supporting protection centers, coordinating national efforts, and raising media awareness.<sup>11</sup>

**-Decree No. 8987, issued in 2012,** prohibited the employment of children in hazardous work and reduced the minimum age for such work from 18 to 16 years. The decree also banned the employment of children in agricultural activities that involve the use of machinery or exposure to chemical substances.

Despite the existence and enforcement of these legal frameworks, child labor remains widely prevalent in Lebanese society and often begins at a very early age —

---

<sup>11</sup> **National News Agency**, "Conclusion of the Conference on 'Legal Protection for Street Children, Especially Girls' and Recommendations to Activate the Child Labor Combat Unit and Support Social Protection Centers", November 3, 2023.

sometimes before children reach the age of ten. A series of assessments conducted over the past decade has shown a continuous increase in the prevalence of child labor in Lebanon. A UNICEF study conducted in June 2023 found that 15% of Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian households in Lebanon rely on the income of working children.

---

Furthermore, a 2015 study conducted by the Central Administration of Statistics and the International Labour Organization (ILO) revealed that 33,474 children were engaged in labor across Lebanon, accounting for 3.6% of the total population of children aged 5 to 17. The study indicated that the age group 15 to 17 represented the highest percentage of working children, with 79% of them employed in hazardous conditions. The rate of child labor in Lebanon doubled between 2009 and 2016 and continued to rise due to the ongoing economic crisis — increasing from 9% in 2020 to 15% in 2023.<sup>12</sup>

*In the same context, in 2023, the Head of the Child Labor Unit at the Ministry of Labor, Nazha Shallita, estimated the number of working children to be more than 200,000, of various nationalities and across different sectors in Lebanon.*<sup>13</sup>

In an interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Michel Moussa, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, he explained that Lebanon's unstable conditions—from the financial and economic

---

<sup>12</sup> **Ara Research and Consultancy**, “*Child Labor in Lebanon... Mechanisms for the Reproduction of Poverty*”, December 12, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> **Al-Akhbar**, “*Child Labor Among Lebanese Children on the Rise, While 90% of International Aid Goes to Syrians*”, June 15, 2023.

crisis that began in 2019, through ongoing political and security turmoil, and up to the recent Israeli aggression in September 2024—have hindered proper legislative activity. He also noted that the absence of a president and political conflicts within Parliament negatively impact the effective implementation of laws, particularly those related to child labor.<sup>14</sup>

---

Regarding the evaluation of existing legislation aimed at combating child labor, MP Dr. Inaya Ezzeddine, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Women and Children, stated that while the current legal texts are generally decent and sufficient, they require stronger enforcement to meet their objectives. She emphasized that Lebanon has ratified several key international agreements concerning child labor. Accordingly, the current legal framework aligns with international standards, such as the minimum age for hazardous work (18 years) and the prohibition of forced labor and child exploitation in illegal activities. However, **certain aspects still require amendments—for instance, raising the general minimum working age from 14 to 15 years.** The International Labour Organization has proposed draft legislation to that effect, and the committee has worked on identifying various child-related laws, including those on child labor. In addition, the committee, under Ezzeddine’s leadership, launched a working group to combat child labor in South Lebanon and has already developed a preliminary draft of a national action plan.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Michel Moussa**, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, dated August 30, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Inaya Ezzeddine**, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Women and Children, dated August 30, 2024.

Based on all the above, it can be concluded that the enforcement of these laws remains weak, including the labor inspections carried out by labor inspectors in Lebanon, which are clearly insufficient. Therefore, it is essential to examine the root causes contributing to the worsening of child labor in Lebanon.

#### 4. CAUSES THAT LEAD TO THE WORSENING OF CHILD LABOR IN LEBANON

The causes that lead to the increase of child labor in Lebanon manifest in several main areas, the most important of which are:

- 
- 1) **Weak enforcement of existing laws and monitoring:** There is a lack of proper enforcement of the legally binding laws that prohibit child labor, such as setting a minimum working age. Although these laws exist, their enforcement is uneven, especially in informal sectors like agriculture and manual trades, where most cases of child labor occur, in addition to illegal street work and begging. Notably, due to the absence of a regular monitoring system and the shortage of labor inspectors, penalties for violations are rarely imposed, leading to the exacerbation of the problem.

According to the statement by the Minister of Labor, Mustafa Bayram, the number of labor inspectors in Lebanon in 2024 is only 15 inspectors.<sup>16</sup> Also, according to a 2021 study titled <sup>17</sup>"Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Lebanon," issued by the U.S. Department of Labor, the current number of labor

---

<sup>16</sup> Al-Akhbar, "Workers' Safety in Lebanon Hanging in the Balance", June 29, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> **Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor:** Lebanon. (2021), U.S. Department of Labor., [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labor\\_reports/tda2021/lebanon.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2021/lebanon.pdf)

inspectors is less than half of the 34 inspectors in 2021. In the same context, MP Dr. Moussa, head of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee, confirmed that "the phenomenon of child labor remains widespread, especially in hazardous and physically and mentally exhausting sectors," pointing to significant violations of laws. He attributed this to the state's limited financial capabilities, the absence of effective field monitoring, and lax enforcement of laws, which requires clear plans to address this phenomenon.<sup>18</sup>

---

2) **Deprivation of the right to education:** Many working children do not attend school due to economic barriers, lack of transportation and livelihood means, and the need to work to financially support their families. Refugee children face additional obstacles such as language barriers and discrimination, which further impede their access to education. Even when they attend school, the quality of education is often low, with overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, and insufficiently qualified teachers, reducing children's and families' motivation to prioritize education over work. In this regard, lawyer Mona Afesh Shweiry, former Minister of State and child specialist, stated in a special interview with JUSTICIA:

"One of the main causes of child labor is school dropout due to several factors:

-Regarding school:

---

<sup>18</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Michel Moussa**, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, dated August 30, 2024.

- *Lack of suitable educational opportunities and absence of specialized social workers and psychological counselors.*
- *Repeated school failure and promotion of failing students without achieving passing marks.*
- *Presence of illiterate families that do not value education.*
- *The child's unwillingness to attend school and preference for work that yields quick and substantial money (e.g., delivery services and valet parking).*
- *Employers' preference for hiring children due to low wages, absence of social benefits, and longer working hours.*
- *Lack of training for teachers and school administrators in public schools.*
- *Lack of support from national school funds and parent councils to cover operating costs.*
- *Resolving teachers' issues in public education to ensure regular education, not just online learning.*<sup>19</sup>

**3) Economic factors:** Economic factors play a major role in encouraging child labor. The economic crisis that hit Lebanon pushed many families below the poverty line, making child labor one of the main survival strategies for most poor families. For many, the income of working children is essential for survival. In the absence of social safety nets and economic support for poor families, the

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with former Minister of State and child rights specialist, lawyer Mona Afesh Choueiri, dated December 27, 2024.

situation worsens, and sending children to work becomes the only available option.

A 2022 report titled "Working Children in Lebanon: Exploring Links Between Food Insecurity and Child Labor" reveals that the contribution of working children to their families' income rose from 40% before the 2019 crisis to 61% afterward, reaching 67% in 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic. The main reason for child labor in Lebanon, especially among Syrians and in impoverished Lebanese areas, is parents' inability to meet their families' basic needs, especially food.<sup>20</sup>

---

4) **Lack of accurate data:** Insufficient data, statistics, and scientific figures hinder the ability to design effective interventions and limit the capacity to monitor, study, and organize necessary strategies and plans. Thus, comprehensive studies to fully understand the consequences and guide policy decisions are difficult without sufficient and accurate data. There are very limited studies on the long-term effects of child labor on health, education, and overall development in Lebanon.

In this regard, Minister and lawyer Mona Afesh Shweiry notes:

"- Scarcity of national statistical data despite the work done by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, which remains weak with no recent population census.

---

<sup>20</sup> **Ara Research and Consultancy**, "*Child Labor in Lebanon... Mechanisms for the Reproduction of Poverty*", December 12, 2023.

-Scarcity of qualitative studies on female labor and internationally classified worst forms (prostitution, harassment, sex, drug trafficking and promotion, exploitation of children in armed work and kidnapping, use of social media and its harms...)—harmful practices that represent the worst forms of child labor.

-Exclusion of certain age groups under ten years old, especially street children, and lack of rehabilitation for juvenile offenders with support to find alternative families."<sup>21</sup>

#### 5) Lack of psychological and social support for working children and their families:

Many children work in unsuitable and hazardous environments that directly affect their mental and emotional health, where they suffer high levels of psychological stress that can lead to long-term disorders. The bigger problem lies in

---

the lack of mental health and social services, which are difficult to access due to limited availability and high cost. Additionally, social stigma against those seeking psychological support hinders children's progress in this area. This stigma is exacerbated by a severe shortage of trained specialists, making long-term problem management even more difficult.

#### 6) Deprivation of social development:

Denying children opportunities for natural interaction with peers through school or other recreational and educational activities leads to serious consequences for their emotional and social growth. Children

---

<sup>21</sup> Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

working long hours lose the chance to form social relationships and learn social skills necessary for healthy development. This gap often leads to isolation and difficulty integrating into society later, worsening the child labor problem in Lebanon.

**7) Lack of coordination among concerned parties:** Many governmental and nongovernmental organizations strive to address child labor in Lebanon, but these efforts are often independent and uncoordinated, causing duplication in some areas while others lack necessary interventions. This fragmentation results from poor information and data sharing, as important child labor-related information—if available—is rarely shared among actors, hindering their work.

In this context, MP Dr. Michel Moussa, head of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee, emphasized in an interview that "addressing this phenomenon requires joint efforts from several ministries, and this issue must be prioritized on the Cabinet's agenda. The solution lies in implementing existing executive decrees, issuing new ones when necessary, and unifying efforts through a single plan to avoid fragmentation between ministries."<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the Parliamentary Committee on Women and Children, chaired by MP Dr. Inaya Ezzedine, works collaboratively to stimulate coordination among ministries and institutions concerned with child rights. The committee invited all stakeholders to the launch ceremony of the anti-child labor working group in the South in August

---

<sup>22</sup> Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Michel Moussa, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, dated August 30, 2024.

2023 and follows up on files, especially continuity of education for displaced children to prevent school dropout and engagement in inappropriate labor conditions. The committee chair closely monitors relevant studies and issues hindering child labor reduction and coordinates with relevant parties within their jurisdiction.<sup>23</sup>

8) **Cultural and social challenges:** In many rural communities and among refugees, child labor is considered part of culture and custom, viewed as a way to increase family income or teach children responsibility and self-reliance. This societal view makes enforcing protective laws difficult and impedes efforts to change behaviors and attitudes toward the issue.

---

9) **Shortage of human resources:** The number of inspectors in relevant ministries, especially the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Social Affairs, is extremely limited, making it difficult to cover all sectors and regions in Lebanon.

10) **Lack of funding:** There is a significant shortage in funding allocated to implementing the national plan to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, as well as insufficient funding for concerned ministries such as Social Affairs and Justice. MP Dr. Moussa emphasized in an interview with JUSTICIA that "providing

---

<sup>23</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Inaya Ezzeddine**, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Women and Children, dated August 30, 2024.

financial and human resources is essential to enhance field monitoring and organize awareness programs on the dangers of child labor in Lebanon."<sup>24</sup>

11) **Absence of child labor combating centers:** Centers established in areas like Bekaa, Tripoli, and Nabatieh were closed due to lack of funding from donors and international organizations.

12) **Governmental performance shortcomings:** The National Committee to Combat Child Labor has not held meetings since 2019 due to lack of sufficient attention from previous ministers.

---

In this regard, MP Dr. Moussa called on the Cabinet to "prioritize this issue and support inter-ministerial coordination to ensure seriousness and continuous followup on this sensitive file."<sup>25</sup>

13) **Lack of effective comprehensive strategies:** International interventions often focus on issuing reports and holding workshops rather than providing practical and sustainable solutions. Interventions based solely on cash assistance do not address

---

<sup>24</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Michel Moussa**, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, dated August 30, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Michel Moussa**, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, dated August 30, 2024.

the root causes of child labor, such as poverty and food insecurity, leaving the problem ongoing and sometimes worsening it.

MP Dr. Moussa stressed the importance of adopting a comprehensive national strategy that includes local and international legal frameworks, including international conventions and treaties related to child labor. He also pointed out the need to clearly define the roles of ministries, associations, and concerned institutions, with clear coordination mechanisms and short- and long-term goals to achieve them.<sup>26</sup>

## 5.RECOMMENDATIONS

1) **Adoption of a Comprehensive National Strategy to Combat Child Labor:** This strategy should aim to unify efforts at all levels by ministries, official institutions, and

---

non-governmental entities, including international and local organizations. It must clearly define the main objectives to be achieved, establish practical implementation priorities to address them, and specify the roles and responsibilities of all concerned parties to ensure effective coordination among stakeholders, while committing to the principle of accountability and transparency. This includes relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Education, as well as the roles of judicial and security authorities, NGOs, and civil society. Accordingly, the strategy should be based on a holistic approach centered on

---

<sup>26</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Dr. Michel Moussa**, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, dated August 30, 2024.

protecting children's rights and striking a balance between enforcing laws, coordinating among concerned parties, and providing sustainable social and economic solutions.

In this context, Minister and Lawyer Mona Afesh Choueiry, former Minister of State and a specialist in child affairs, states the following:

“It is imperative for every ministry to collect all data and information obtained and incorporate it into the development of their systems. Continuous communication must be maintained with all ministries, with the participation and support of international organizations that technically, scientifically, and financially support the fight against child labor. This should take place within a national strategy that clearly outlines urgent needs, financial support, and the proper implementation of this plan under the supervision of international monitoring institutions—especially regarding funding—and to address any obstacles that may hinder the success of this strategy. Moreover, civil society and business owners must be involved in implementing parts of this strategy.”<sup>27</sup>

**Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive national strategy to combat child labor based on an integrated vision that takes into account all legal, social, and economic aspects of this phenomenon. The strategy must build on the existing national legal framework while also drawing on relevant international**

---

<sup>27</sup> Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

**conventions and charters, as well as national strategies adopted in other countries.**

## 2) Strengthening the Legal Framework and Law Enforcement:

This can be achieved by improving monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, increasing the number of inspectors, and enhancing inspection operations, especially in workplaces and informal sectors. Additionally, providing sufficient training for inspectors, as well as adequate resources and support in all forms—including employing specialists to assist in inspection tasks—is essential to ensure effective law enforcement. In this context, Minister and Lawyer Mona Afesh Choueiry points out the following:

“Although legal texts regulating children’s rights exist—based on the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and other legal charters that call for the prohibition of child abuse, violence, and exposure to the most severe

---

and unjust professional crimes—these texts remain ineffective and unenforced despite some legal amendments. What is important is that these laws be implemented through the issuance of executive decrees accompanying each law. Strengthening the fight against cybercrimes by the Internal Security Forces or any unit affiliated with the Ministry of Interior is also necessary to protect children (from networks leading to the worst forms of labor, especially recreational clubs that attract children via social media without any supervision), as well as addressing the

significant harm caused by addiction to social media platforms and imposing the severest penalties on operators of TikTok in particular.”<sup>28</sup>

**It is worth noting the absence of legal provisions that require a minimum number of labor inspectors in the Ministry of Labor for each district or governorate. Therefore, it is preferable to amend Decree No. /3273/ of the year 2000 to include a clear and specific mechanism for appointing labor inspectors at the Ministry of Labor, based on their academic qualifications and practical experience, as well as imposing a minimum number of inspectors required to be present in each district or governorate and distributing them evenly across regions to enable them to perform their duties properly.**

**3) Expanding the Scope of Legal Protection:** By amending the existing enforceable laws to cover all forms of child labor, including domestic work and

---

family businesses, while ensuring these laws align with international standards.

Additionally, penalties related to child labor should be tightened to serve as a deterrent. **In this context, it is possible to propose amending existing laws to include domestic work and family businesses, alongside increasing penalties related to child labor as stipulated in enforceable laws through a legislative proposal or bill.**

---

<sup>28</sup> Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

4) **Enhancing the Right to Education:** By developing and implementing targeted educational programs for children at risk of dropping out or already engaged in work. These programs could include financial incentives, free transportation, after-school tutoring programs, and other support services. Furthermore, the infrastructure of schools should be improved by investing in the quality of education in public schools, training teachers, and providing minimum suitable educational materials, making education a more attractive alternative to child labor.

According to Minister and Lawyer Mona Afesh Choueiri, *“New measures must be taken alongside the activation, reinforcement, and strict implementation of old laws:*

- *Compulsory and free education until the age of 15.*
- *Ongoing studies on school dropout phenomena, their causes, and recommendations based on urgent and current developments and their impact on education in particular.*
- *Subjecting children to an educational system that helps them overcome the gaps and deficiencies they suffer from, including establishing non-formal education programs.*
- *Encouragement of vocational education, especially as Lebanon is now in the process of reconstruction requiring labor.*

- *Establishing vocational and technical education programs to enable children who dropped out of formal education to return under specific conditions.*
- *Free textbooks and school supplies until age 15.*
- *Education for those with mental, physical, or health disabilities in a way that enables future employment according to their condition.*
- *Obligating all companies and commercial and industrial institutions to comply with laws regarding the employment of persons with disabilities.*
- *Providing dedicated school buildings for children with health disabilities.”<sup>29</sup>*

5) **Providing Economic Support to Families:** This includes providing economic assistance through targeted support programs for poor families, such as cash transfers or food aid, to reduce their reliance on child labor. These programs should be designed to reach the most vulnerable groups, including refugees and low-income families. In this regard, Minister Mona Afesh Choueiry proposes developing the Ministry of Social Affairs’ plan as follows:

---

<sup>29</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri**, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

- *“Empowering the Ministry of Social Affairs to combat poverty and support it in providing consistent financial aid to poor and poorest families.*
- *Securing school financial grants and other support for large families and children up to age 15.*
- *Developing the areas that are heavily affected by child labor.”*<sup>30</sup>

6) **Expanding Social Protection Programs:** Community support is a fundamental pillar in addressing child labor through creating community programs for psychological and social support, enabling families and community leaders to help provide a safe environment for children. These programs also help establish safe spaces where children can engage in ageappropriate activities, offering opportunities for healthy growth and learning through interaction with trained professionals capable of providing necessary guidance. Therefore, Minister Mona Afesh Choueiry points to the necessity of creating a plan to support civil society and NGOs, taking into account the following:

- *“Focusing on supporting every educational institution, especially free ones, with strict monitoring of these institutions.*
- *Enhancing and developing the supervisors of these institutions with an increased number of social workers and psychologists to address all factors*

---

**Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri**, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

*pushing children toward labor, while providing valid technical consultations.”<sup>31</sup>*

**7) Enhancing Health Services and Psychological Support:** Child labor is often accompanied by health risks and psychological pressures affecting children’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Therefore, investment is needed to improve access to health services, especially mental health support for working children. This includes increasing the number of specialized counselors, training social workers and teachers to recognize signs of psychological disorders among working children, and providing appropriate support. These efforts should be integrated into child protection programs to address their health and psychological needs comprehensively, thereby improving their overall well-being and facilitating their reintegration into normal life and society. According to former State Minister and child expert Lawyer Mona Afish Shweiri, the Ministry of Public Health’s plan

should include:

- *“Providing primary health services covering a number of public schools.*
- *Ensuring vaccination and routine immunization services.*
- *Providing solar-powered electricity to service centers of all ministries.*

**Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri**, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

- 
- *Offering free hospitalization for children enrolled in school regardless of age; for non-enrolled or working children without ministry approval, a reduced fee should apply.”<sup>32</sup>*

## 8) Developing Coordination Mechanisms, Data Collection, and Research:

Periodic surveys and a system for regular data collection on child labor across sectors and regions are essential to monitor progress, identify emerging trends, and guide political and non-political interventions. It is also critical to invest in research studies on the long-term impacts of child labor on health, economy, and society to guide national policies and international advocacy.

**9) Establishing a National Database to Combat Child Labor:** One of the biggest challenges in combating child labor is the lack of accurate and reliable data. A centralized national database is needed to track child labor cases and monitor interventions to better understand the problem's scale and evaluate solution effectiveness. This database is key to monitoring the phenomenon, analyzing causes, and directing interventions to the most affected areas and sectors. It will also enhance coordination among ministries, NGOs, and other stakeholders to avoid duplicated efforts. The system should include electronic reporting for child labor cases with strict data confidentiality.

**Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri**, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

**Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri**, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

A specialized body, such as the National Committee for Combating Child Labor at the Ministry of Labor, would manage, update, and publish analytical reports to support policy and legislation. The project should be funded through government and international partnerships to ensure sustainability.

Technology plays a crucial role by facilitating case reporting and providing flexible educational solutions. Electronic reporting systems and centralized platforms can be developed, and artificial intelligence could analyze data to target the hardest-hit areas and optimize resource allocation.

#### 10) Revitalizing the work of the National Committee to Combat Child Labor:

There has been a noticeable inactivity of the National Committee under the Ministry of Labor, creating coordination gaps and limiting effectiveness. Given the committee's importance, efforts must be intensified to activate and sustain its work effectively.

Challenges like difficulty in holding physical meetings and ensuring member participation highlight the need for an innovative digital communication system for the committee. This system would facilitate rapid and organized information exchange and enable direct reporting of cases and complaints, enhancing collaboration and supporting the committee's goals. Minister Mona Afish Shweiri proposes developing the Ministry of Labor's plan to include:

- *“Strengthening the National Employment Institution to provide training for school dropouts, especially those disinterested in formal education.*

- *Finding employment for unemployed parents or caregivers, those involved in harmful substances, or imprisoned individuals, thus supporting children left without guardians.*
- *Providing jobs for children who desire to work, prioritizing them to ensure decent livelihoods for them and their families.*
- *Ensuring employment opportunities for any family member, including those with disabilities, to enable children wishing to continue education to do so without dropping out.*
- *Securing sufficient labor inspectors with broad procedural authority to monitor child labor.”*
- *Enhancing and developing the Child Labor Combat Unit’s website (established in 2002) and other existing but unimplemented initiatives.*
- *Preparing a guide for inspectors to provide to employers, outlining the worst forms of child labor, contract conditions regarding age, work type, wages, social benefits, and working hours.”<sup>30</sup>*

---

<sup>30</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri**, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

**A draft law or decree should be prepared to organize this information system and define its mechanisms and authorities, including the central national database, for committee discussion and approval. Such a system would**

---

**increase the committee's effectiveness, transparency, and support national efforts against child labor in Lebanon.**

11) **Intensifying Community Awareness Campaigns:** Awareness campaigns help overcome social norms that support or tolerate child labor. These campaigns must highlight the harmful effects of child labor on children's physical, psychological, and mental development and emphasize education as the key to improving children's futures. The goal is to change prevailing societal attitudes by presenting positive role models and stressing investment in children's education and protection from all forms of exploitation. Minister Mona Afish Shweiri stresses the need to develop a media plan related to child labor that includes:

- *“Engagement by the Ministry of Information and broadcasting institutions (radio and/or television).*
- *Educational programs targeting children and parents about the importance of education and discouraging sending children to work, even during severe economic hardships.*

- *Acceptance of children who have exceeded typical school ages into special education programs aligned with future labor market requirements.*<sup>31</sup>

---

12) **Addressing the Different Needs of Both Genders:** Addressing child labor requires special attention to the differing needs of girls and boys, who face different challenges. Programs should be designed to meet these distinct needs. For example, girls working in domestic labor are often more vulnerable to exploitation, necessitating legal protections and safe reporting mechanisms to help them exit harmful situations with minimal damage. Alternative income opportunities should be provided to families of girls to reduce dependency on their labor income. The programs aim to create a safe and sustainable environment allowing children to live in healthy, stable conditions.

## CONCLUSION

Child labor in Lebanon is not a temporary issue but a deeply rooted challenge requiring a comprehensive national response aligned with the worsening economic, social, and political crises. The phenomenon is exacerbated by ongoing economic hardship, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Syrian refugee crisis, security

---

<sup>31</sup> **Interview conducted by JUSTICIA with Mona Afesh Choueiri**, former Minister of State and child rights specialist lawyer, dated December 27, 2024.

instability, and wars, pushing many families to rely on child income, depriving children of basic rights, foremost among them education and a safe, healthy environment.

Solving this issue demands a multi-dimensional approach addressing all contributing factors: strengthening the legal framework prohibiting child labor, enhancing government commitment, and providing necessary resources for effective law enforcement in all sectors, including informal ones.

Efforts should focus on expanding access to education as a primary deterrent, improving school infrastructure, transportation, and financial support to poor families to keep children in school and improve educational outcomes.

Health, psychological, and social support are essential and must be scaled to include working children, with trained social workers and teachers identifying early psychological issues and providing support.

Broad community support is critical, with awareness campaigns aimed at shifting social attitudes that encourage or tolerate child labor, emphasizing education investment and protection from exploitation, targeting parents and community leaders to create safe, supportive environments.

Lastly, accurate and reliable data collection on child labor is crucial for effective policy design. A centralized database linked to all stakeholders is necessary for coordination and avoiding ineffective duplicated efforts. Research into long-term effects on children's health, education, and social development should guide national and international advocacy.

In summary, child labor in Lebanon requires integrated reforms across legal, economic, social, and educational domains, adopting a comprehensive national strategy developed collaboratively with all concerned parties.

Lebanon can take effective steps to protect children from early work and exploitation, ensuring a better future where children enjoy full rights and grow in a safe environment conducive to holistic development, benefiting all.