

# Key Drivers Contributing to Child-Parents Separation and Placement in Alternative Care

## LEBANON



November 2023

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

### Key Drivers Contributing to Child-Parent Separation

This report was commissioned by SOS Children's Villages International.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form by any means, without the prior permission in writing of SOS Children's Villages International, or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics rights organization. Enquiries in the first instance concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to SOS Children's Villages International at the address below.

SOS Children's Villages International,  
Brigittenauer Lände 50,  
1200 Vienna,  
Austria

Principal Author: Dr Chrissie Gale

Consultant Researcher and contributing author: Dr Joumana Stephan Yeretzian

Suggested referencing: Gale & Yeretzian (2023) Key drivers of child-parents separation Lebanon. SOS Children's Villages International and the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth.

All reasonable precautions have been taken by the authors to verify the information contained in this publication. However, the published material is being distributed without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. The responsibility for the interpretation and use of the material lies with the reader.

## Contents

List of Tables.....	5
List of Figures .....	5
Acknowledgements.....	8
Definitions .....	9
Glossary of terms .....	11
1. Background to the study.....	12
2. Aim and Scope of the Study .....	14
3. Executive summary.....	17
3.1. Research framework and process .....	17
3.2. Background.....	22
3.3. The context of Lebanon.....	23
3.4. Summary of findings .....	25
3.5. Recommendations.....	32
Participation.....	38
4. Context.....	39
4.1. Population.....	40
4.2. Gender Parity .....	41
4.3. Governance.....	42
4.4. Religion .....	42
4.5. Economy and social protection.....	42
4.6. Employment .....	45
4.7. Health .....	47
4.8. Education .....	50
4.9. Shelter .....	51
5. A research framework and methodology.....	51
5.1. Research framework .....	52
5.2. Research methodology .....	54
5.2.1. Research participants.....	54
5.2.2. Desk review .....	54
5.2.3. Development of participatory research methodology .....	55

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

5.2.4. Research process and ethics .....	60
6. Research findings .....	62
6.1. An overview of findings: reasons children are placed in alternative care .....	62
6.2. Drivers contributing to placement in alternative care .....	65
6.2.1. Violence in the home .....	65
6.2.2. Physical violence .....	71
6.2.3. Sexual violence.....	72
6.2.4. Emotional and psychological violence and neglect .....	74
6.2.5. Physical Neglect .....	77
7. Further factors that lead to children's placement in alternative care .....	78
7.1. Abandonment.....	78
7.2. Orphanhood .....	79
7.3. Disability .....	80
7.4. Access to education and the use of 'boarding schools' .....	82
7.5. Sexual orientation and gender identity .....	85
7.6 Exposure to drugs and alcohol.....	85
8. Additional child protection concerns related to risk of placement in alternative care .....	86
8.1. Street connected children .....	86
8.2. Child labour.....	87
8.3. Participation in armed forces .....	89
9. Factors that contribute to violence against children .....	89
9.1. The impact of war and conflict.....	89
9.2. Violence in schools.....	91
9.3. Living in a patriarchal society and gender based violence .....	92
10. The inter-generational aspect of family breakdown and violence .....	95
11. The multiple dimensions of poverty .....	99
12. The correlation between poverty, family breakdown, and placement in alternative care .....	107
12.1. Divorce/separation and re-marriage/new partnerships .....	111
13. Decision makers .....	113
13.1. A normative framework for child protection .....	115
13.2. Structures for child protection system delivery, co-ordination, and oversight.....	121
13.3. Capacity of decision makers and use of child protection case management .....	124

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

13.4. Training for decision makers .....	138
13.5. Data collection and management information systems .....	139
14. Solutions to challenges provided by research participants.....	140
15. Conclusions and recommendations .....	148
Bibliography.....	165

### List of Tables

Table 1. Main labour force and labour underutilization indicators, Lebanon 2022 (percentage) .....	46
Table 2. Top ten causes of deaths in Lebanon 2009 - 2019 .....	47
Table 3. International Conventions ratified by the Lebanese Republic .....	116
Table 4. National legislation relevant to child protection and alternative care in Lebanon .....	116

### List of Figures

Figure 1. A home in the community drawn by young people and a solution tree provided by adult family members .....	20
Figure 2. Results of workshops with children: What makes children feel unhappy and worried when at home? .....	27
Figure 3. Results of workshops with young people: What makes young people feel unhappy and worried when at home? .....	27
Figure 4. What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home as answered by adult family members .....	28
Figure 5. Map of Lebanon .....	39
Figure 6. Age breakdown in Lebanon 2020 .....	40
Figure 7. Timeline of Lebanon Crisis 2012 to 2021 .....	43
Figure 8. Trends in under-5 mortality and neonatal mortality rates 1990-2016 .....	47
Figure 9. Distribution of health care expenditure by financing agent for years that accounts are available, 1998 to 2017 .....	48
Figure 10. A graphic illustration of Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological systems theory .....	52
Figure 11. Components of a national child protection system.....	53
Figure 12. Examples of drawings from workshops with children and young people .....	56
Figure 13. Examples of children's superhero drawings.....	57
Figure 14. Example of a problem and solution tree .....	57
Figure 15. Example of a problem and solution tree .....	59
Figure 16. Drivers associated with placement of children in alternative care .....	63
Figure 17. Results of workshops with children: What makes children feel unhappy and worried when at home? .....	65

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 18. Results of workshops with young people: What makes young people feel unhappy and worried when at home? .....	66
Figure 19. What makes children and young people worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people) .....	66
Figure 20. What makes adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people) .....	68
Figure 21. What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by adult family members) .....	69
Figure 22. What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by adult family members) .....	69
Figure 23. Main protection risks as mentioned by girls and boys (sample size:521) (2019).....	74
Figure 24. What makes children and young people worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people) .....	75
Figure 25. Reasons children being placed in alternative care because of issues related to education .....	84
Figure 26. Managed child protection cases by risk by number 2020 – 2022 .....	88
Figure 27. How much support is available to families .....	94
Figure 28. What makes children and young people feel worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people) .....	99
Figure 29. What makes adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people) .....	100
Figure 30. What makes families worried or happy when they are at home (as answered by adult family members) .....	101
Figure 31. What makes children, young people and adult family members unhappy or worried when they are at home .....	103
Figure 32. Reasons children are separated from parents and placed in alternative care because of living conditions and unemployment.....	104
Figure 33. Results of a UNICEF child focussed rapid assessment in Lebanon June 2022.....	105
Figure 34. How much support is available to all families.....	106
Figure 35. Reasons children being placed in alternative care because of health issues .....	109
Figure 36. Reasons children are separated from parents and placed in alternative care because of family relationships.....	110
Figure 37. Flow chart of protection measures under Law 422 .....	119
Figure 38. Number of children in MOSA-funded overnight social welfare care in 2016, by governorate .....	123
Figure 39. Judicial and non-judicial pathways into care (Government of Lebanon SOPs 2015) .....	127
Figure 40. Challenges faced by the social services workforce in Lebanon (published 2019) .....	131
Figure 41. Share of Government to NGO child protection service delivery by region (published 2012) .....	132

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

Figure 43. Ranking of solutions by young people .....	140
Figure 44. Solutions to the challenges being faced by families as answered by adult family members .....	142
Figure 45. Is there enough support for families? .....	146
Figure 46. Is there enough support for families .....	147

## Acknowledgements

A crucial element of our research has been the partnership with the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth. The university and SOS Children's Villages Lebanon entered into an agreement that allowed for the full participation of a national researcher, Dr Joumana Stephan Yeretdzian. She was accompanied by two research students, Julia Bou Dib and Ranim Sahily. Dr Yeretdzian with the assistance of Ms Bou Dib and Ms Sahily were instrumental in the facilitation of the participatory research workshops with children and young people as well assessment of the proposed research methodology so as to be appropriate for the setting of Lebanon. SOS Children's Villages International and SOS Children's Villages Lebanon would like to thank the University for all the support it has offered in making this research possible.

Our research was made possible due to the considerable efforts of the SOS Children's Villages team in Lebanon. In particular we would also like to thank Joelle Abi Saab (National Programme Director), Sarah Kerbaj, (National YouthCan! Advisor), Carla Choueifaty, (Family Strengthening Programme Coordinator), Jean-Paul Salameh, (Village Director, Bheraf), Ghada Hachem, (YouthCan! Coordinator), Roula Mhawej, (Social Worker) and Mariam Jabbour, (Social Worker). A very special thanks goes to Lina Bitar, the Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor at SOS Children's Villages Lebanon for all the coordination, planning, and support he offered. Without her dedication to ensuring all elements of the research could be fulfilled, the work of the researchers would not have been possible.

Thanks are given to the professional stakeholders who kindly gave their time to be interviewed as well as the adult family members who gave their time to attend our research workshops and most importantly, share with us their knowledge and ideas.

Most particularly, we want to offer our thanks to the children and young people who shared with us their ideas about, and understanding of, family life that has made our research findings so rich and informative. Their voices and their recommendations for change that will positively impact the lives of other children, young people and their families, have been a primary contribution to the conclusions in this report. We would especially like to thank the group of children and young people who gave us valuable help during the research co-design workshops. Their support has allowed us to develop a set of research questions and participatory research methodology that can now be used all over the world.



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

### Definitions

<b>Abandonment</b>	A situation in which children are anonymously left in a 'public' place by persons unknown e.g., a child is left on the steps of a mosque or in front of a hospital. or on the street.
<b>Adoption</b>	A child who is officially placed in the legal custody of the person adopting them 'pursuant to a final adoption order, as of which moment, for the purposes of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, the child is considered to be in parental care'. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Alternative care</b>	Care provided for children who are not living with parents. According to the UN Guidelines, this is care that is formally arranged including foster care, kinship care and placement in small scale residential settings or, informal care. All care in residential institutions even if not formally arranged, is alternative care.
<b>Care Leavers</b>	Children and young people who have left alternative care
<b>Child</b>	A child is any person under the age of 18 years unless the law of a particular country sets the legal age for adulthood younger, as provided for under Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Child. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Children without parental care</b>	For the purposes of this report, this is children not in the care of both parents. The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children note this to be 'All children not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances.' <sup>3</sup>
<b>Family based alternative care</b>	Refers to care arrangement whereby a child is placed in the domestic environment of a family, as opposed to institutional or residential care. <sup>4</sup>
<b>Formal care</b>	'All care provided in a family environment that has been ordered by a competent administrative body or judicial authority, and all care provided in a residential environment, including in private facilities, whether or not the result of administrative or judicial measures'. <sup>5</sup>
<b>Foster care</b>	'Situations whereby children are placed by a competent authority for the purposes of alternative care in the domestic environment of a family, other than children's own family, that has been selected, qualified, approved, and supervised for providing such care.' <sup>6</sup> This also applies to a formally arranged placement with family members i.e. formal kinship foster care..
<b>Gatekeeping</b>	A process by which the situation of a child is carefully assessed and decisions made about protection and care that is in their best interests. This requires adherence to the 'necessity' principle; no child should be separated from parental care and placed in alternative care unless necessary for their protection. Children should be placed in the most suitable alternative care, which should not include residential institutions, that meets their needs. This is a temporary measure and all efforts made to reunite a child with their parents, or other primary caregiver, as quickly as possible.
<b>Informal care</b>	Any private arrangement provided in a family environment, whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives or friends also known as informal kinship care, or by others in their individual capacity. The arrangement is at the initiative of the child, his/her parents, or other person without this arrangement having been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or a duly accredited body. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2009

<sup>2</sup> based on Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

<sup>3</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2009

<sup>4</sup> European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care 2012

<sup>5</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2009

<sup>6</sup> ibid.

<sup>7</sup> ibid.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

<b>Institutional care</b>	'Large residential care facilities,' <sup>18</sup> where children are looked after in any public or private facility, staffed by salaried carers or volunteers working predetermined hours/shifts, and based on collective living arrangements, with a large capacity. <sup>9</sup>
<b>Kafala</b>	A means of providing care for children as recognised under Islamic law and in Article 20 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. This may include providing financial and material support to a child in parental or alternative care, or may be an arrangement closer to adoption or fostering where a child is taken to live with another family <sup>10</sup>
<b>Kinship care</b>	'Family-based care within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature.' <sup>11</sup> Informal kinship care is 'any private arrangement provided in a family environment, whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives or friends ... at the initiative of the child, his/her parents or other person without this arrangement having been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or a duly accredited body.' <sup>12</sup> Formal kinship care is care in the same settings ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or duly accredited body. <sup>13</sup>
<b>Orphan</b>	For purposes of this report the term orphan refers to a child whose both parents have died
<b>Other primary caregiver</b>	Legal or customary primary caregiver of a child who is not their parent.
<b>Reintegration</b>	The process of a separated child making the transition back into his or her family <sup>14</sup>
<b>Relinquishment</b>	A process by which a parent/s or others with or without parental authority decide not to raise a child and hand them over to another 'carer' e.g., a child voluntarily taken to a residential facility. Relinquishment unlike abandonment is when the identity of the mother or father, or other caregivers are known.
<b>Residential care</b>	'Care provided in any non-family based group setting, such as places of safety for emergency care, transit centres in emergency situations, and all other short- and long-term residential care facilities, including group homes.' <sup>15</sup> A distinction is often made between residential institutions (described above) and small group homes. Small group homes are settings in which children cared for in small groups, usually of up to four to six children at most <sup>16</sup> , with consistent caregivers responsible for their care, in a community setting. This form of care is different from foster care in that it takes place outside of the natural 'domestic environment' of the family, usually in facilities that have been especially designed and/or designated for the care of groups of children. <sup>17</sup>
<b>Separated children</b>	Children who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. <sup>18</sup>
<b>Small residential care settings</b>	A 'public or private, registered, non-family-based arrangement, providing temporary care to a group of 4 to 6 children, staffed by highly trained, salaried carers, applying a key-worker system, with a high caregiver-to-child ratio that allows for individualized attention for each child, based on the professionally developed case plan, which takes into account the voice of the child.' <sup>19</sup>
<b>Street connected</b>	Children living and/or working on the streets

<sup>8</sup> ibid.

<sup>9</sup> NGO Working Group on Children Without Parental Care 2013

<sup>10</sup> Cantwell and Jacomy-Vite 2011

<sup>11</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2009

<sup>12</sup> ibid. Article 29b.i.

<sup>13</sup> ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Inter-agency group on Children's Reintegration 2016

<sup>15</sup> ibid. Article III, 29c. iv.

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF 2020a

<sup>17</sup> Koenderink 2019; United Nations General Assembly 2019

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2005

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF 2020a

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

<b>children</b>	
<b>Violence against children</b>	For this report the term 'violence against children' will be used to denote all forms of abuse and exploitation including and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, serious neglect and deprivation. <sup>20</sup>
<b>Young person</b>	There is no legal or internationally agreed definition of 'young person'. The United Nations for statistical purposes, has defined 'youth', as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. <sup>21</sup> In some countries, a young person is someone up to the age of 34 years (as for example, Cote d'Ivoire). For the purposes of this report a young person is defined as persons aged 18 to 25 years.

## Glossary of terms

Ministry of Social Affairs	MOSA
Demographic and Health Surveys	DHS
Gender Based Violence	GBV
Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey	MICS
Ministry of Social Affairs	MOSA
Non-Governmental Organization	NGO
International Non-Governmental Organization	INGO
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	UNCRC
The United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees	UNRWA
Union for the Protection of Children in Lebanon	UPEL
Worst forms of child labour	WFCL

<sup>20</sup> Please see: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/>

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Secretary General 1981

## 1. Background to the study

Clearly enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the right of a child, 'for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality', to 'grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.'<sup>22</sup> This is further endorsed in the 2019 UNGA Resolution, Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children<sup>23</sup> and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (UN Guidelines)<sup>24</sup>. The handbook written to accompany the UN Guidelines, 'Moving Forward',<sup>25</sup> refers to the important principles of 'necessity' and 'suitability'. These principles recognise the primacy of preventing separation, and removal of a child from the care of their parents, is a measure of last resort and the shortest possible duration. A further important premise is no actions should deprive a child of parental care unless it has been rigorously assessed as a necessary safeguarding measure. When such actions are taken, they must always be in a child's best interest. The UN Guidelines echo the UNCRC in highlighting the importance of efforts being primarily 'directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members.'<sup>26</sup> To this end, the 'State should ensure that families have access to forms of support in the caregiving role.'<sup>27</sup>

A recent study<sup>28</sup> estimated the number of children in alternative care in 2015 in a total of 136 countries. The study acknowledged the challenges in obtaining an accurate figure whilst providing a median estimate of 5.37 million. Other studies have offered differing statistics whilst also pointing to the difficulty in obtaining data about children in alternative care.<sup>29</sup> Researchers have also made efforts to gather information regarding children living in 'vulnerable'<sup>30</sup> situations believed to pose possible risks to children being separated from parental care, as well as research on the efficacy of family strengthening.<sup>31</sup> However, these studies often highlight a lack of information, due in part, to inadequate quantitative and qualitative research and data management systems and the failure to gather information as to reasons why children are in care, or at risk of being so.<sup>32</sup> As a result, there are perceived gaps in evidence that would inform the development of effective universal and specialist programmes and services to address the underlying causes of child-parents separation.

---

<sup>22</sup> United Nations General Assembly 1989

<sup>23</sup> United National General Assembly 2022

<sup>24</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2009

<sup>25</sup> Cantwell et al. 2012

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Desmond et al. 2020

<sup>29</sup> Petrowski et al. 2017

<sup>30</sup> Nankervis et al. 2011; OECD 2017

<sup>31</sup> Delap 2013; EveryChild 2009; Laumann 2015; Lodder et al. 2021; Namey & Brown 2018; Ortea et al. 2022; Wilke et al. 2022

<sup>32</sup> Martin & Zulaika 2016; Petrowski et al. 2017; Willi et al. 2020

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Note has been taken of studies examining the detrimental impact of adverse experiences in childhood, including separation of a child from parents, and extended family, as well as the impact of placement in alternative care.<sup>33</sup> Such studies illustrate the way these events can result in harmful life-long consequences. It is the findings of these studies that highlight the urgent action needed to prevent all unnecessary placement of children in alternative care.

Despite efforts to develop child protection systems that encompass the principles of 'gatekeeping'<sup>34</sup> and prevention of child-parents separation, children across the world continue to lose parental care. Furthermore, studies suggest many children experience separation from their parents that could have been prevented.<sup>35</sup> Drivers of separation are thought to be complex and varied with different studies placing emphasis on differing primary antecedents.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, to develop effective and relevant strategies and programmes that help prevent the unnecessary placement of children in alternative care in different parts of the world, it is essential to gather a better informed and a clearer understanding of which drivers are contributing to child-parents separation in differing contexts. And it is particularly important to draw such evidence by listening to the views of children, young people, and adult family members.

This study has been prompted therefore, by previous recognition that 'more research is needed to understand the effective approaches to antecedents to placement'<sup>37</sup> in alternative care. And with the understanding that the most detailed information that does exist, overwhelmingly originates in high income countries thus leaving further gaps in knowledge and understanding,<sup>38</sup> the need for further primary evidence of risk factors as relevant to different countries, contexts, and socio-ecological systems to help inform future developments in policy and service delivery for prevention of child-parents separation.

---

<sup>33</sup> Bruskas & Tessin 2013; De Swart et al. 2012; Gale 2018; Howard et al. 2023; Simkiss 2019; Stein 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Casky, and Gale 2015

<sup>35</sup> Chaitkin et al. 2017

<sup>36</sup> Bryson et al. 2017; Family for Every Child 2014; Laumann 2015

<sup>37</sup> Wilke et al. 2022

<sup>38</sup> Gale 2018; Martin & Zulaika 2016; Petrowski et al. 2017

## 2. Aim and Scope of the Study

The primary aim of the research is to address gaps in evidence relating to the key drivers that contribute to the separation of children from their parents and placement in alternative care.

To collate this evidence, the following questions were considered:

- What are the key challenges facing families that create conditions in which child-parents separation and placement in alternative care is more likely to occur?
- Who are the children already in alternative care?
- What are some of the gaps in multi-level and multi-sectoral approaches and service delivery that could help prevent child-parents separation?
- What are the ideas of children, young people, family members, and other key stakeholders, about the current support to families and how it could be improved?

Alternative care is recognised in the UN Guidelines,<sup>39</sup> as both informal and formal care. The difference being the former is a private arrangement that has not been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or other accredited body. Traditionally, alternative care includes a variety of settings including kinship care, foster care, other forms of family-based placements, as well as residential care, either in a small group setting or in large institutions, and supervised independent living arrangements.

We realise that around the world, interchangeable definitions are being used in relation to a child in alternative care. Some literature refers to separation of a child from parents or another primary caregiver or legal guardian. Some refer to children who have been separated from their parents as 'child-family' separation. Indeed references to both separation from parents and from family are used in the UNCRC. The UN Guidelines<sup>40</sup> most definitely recognise the important 'role played by the extended family and the community and the obligations of States for all children not in the care of their parents or legal and customary caregivers, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child'. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the cultural construct and concept of 'family' can denote different household arrangements including the norm of different members of the extended family being considered a child's primary caregiver through informal or formal arrangements. As Kendrick highlighted, over 'recent years, there have been significant developments in sociological and anthropological thinking in terms of the nature of family and intimate relationships'<sup>41</sup> with growing acceptance of differing concepts of what form a 'family' takes in different geographical and cultural contexts.

---

<sup>39</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2009

<sup>40</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2009

<sup>41</sup> Kendrick 2012



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

However, the UN Guidelines clearly defines children in alternative care as those being no longer in the care of a parent/s.<sup>42</sup> Article 9 of the UNCRC also notes how 'States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child'.<sup>43</sup> Article 18 of the UNCRC requires 'States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child'.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, Article 3 of the UN Guidelines require efforts to be primarily directed toward 'enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents'. They also clearly state that 'preventing the need for alternative care' should first and foremost be through 'promoting parental care' (Article 32). This includes policies to 'promote the right to have a relationship with both parents', and to, 'strengthen parents' ability to care for their children' (Article 33). In this respect, Article 44 calls on States to implement measures that include, 'family strengthening services, such as parenting courses and sessions, the promotion of positive parent-child relationships'. Most importantly, we are aware of research that reflects the voices of children and their clearly articulated wish to remain with, or to return to, their 'parents'.<sup>45</sup>

With the differing guidance and terminology being taken into consideration, It has been decided to use the term 'child-parents separation' in this report in reference to situations where children lose parental care i.e., being separated from both parents and are placed in alternative care.

While discourse on the prevention of placing children in alternative care has been explored in previous research and reports,<sup>46</sup> our preliminary desk review found very little evidence that this topic had been directly informed by the voices and perspectives of children, young people, parents, and other primary caregivers themselves. Neither has the available research provided for these voices to be heard in different countries and contexts across the world. It was considered important therefore, to ensure the scope of this study included efforts to address these gaps by collating information from different stakeholders across diverse socio-economic locations, and most especially, from children and young people. To this end, participatory research methodology has been developed with the support of children and young people in El Salvador and Lebanon. This allows further opportunities for children, young people, and adult family members, living in different socio-political and cultural environments in other medium and high income countries to participate in exploring drivers that

---

<sup>42</sup> The UN Guidelines define children without parental care as all children not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances

<sup>43</sup> United Nations General Assembly 1989

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> SOS Children's Villages 2020

<sup>46</sup> Casky & Gale. 2015; Family for Every Child 2014

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

contribute to child-parents separation and placement of children in alternative care. The knowledge of professionals with a responsibility to protect and support children and families was also evidenced.

The research has also been guided by the rights of children as laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the 2019 United Nations General Assembly Resolution: 'Promotion and the protection of the rights of children' (A/RES/74/133)<sup>47</sup>. The UNCRC has been described as 'the most complete statement of children's rights ever produced and is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history.'<sup>48</sup> Every child in the world has rights. These rights, including those of protection and participation, are universal and indivisible, and must be upheld at all times. The UNCRC promotes the principle of 'best interest' and this has been a further important consideration in the undertaking of our research programme. The research has also been underpinned by the UN Guidelines including recognition of the importance of a child growing up in a family environment. The role of the state has also been taken into account when developing our research including responsibility to 'develop and implement comprehensive child welfare and protection policies within the framework of their overall social and human development policy'.<sup>49</sup>

The research was not intended to comment on the situation of children whilst in alternative care. Neither was it expected to provide an evaluation of the services provided by SOS Children's Villages in each country. Other topics not covered by the research include the situation of migrant, asylum seeker, refugee unaccompanied and separated children, or children who are trafficked. We do recognise their plight however and draw attention to existing documentation on the reasons children affected by migration become separated from parental care.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, as the focus of our study has been prevention of separation, issues related to reintegration and adoption have been given very little consideration. The situation of children deprived of liberty through placement in detention was also not included in our research.

---

<sup>47</sup> Please see: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3837858?ln=en>

<sup>48</sup> Please see: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

<sup>49</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2009

<sup>50</sup> International Organization for Migration 2013; International Organization for Migration 2015; International Social Services 2017; Marcus et al. 2020



### 3. Executive summary

This study *Key Drivers Contributing Child-Parents Separation in Lebanon* was conducted by independent international and national researchers and facilitated by SOS Children's Villages Lebanon and SOS Children's Villages International.

Recognising that Lebanon has children who are being separated from parents and placed in alternative care, the study aims to support governmental and non-governmental bodies and organisations in mapping the drivers that contribute to this situation and help inform future policies and programmes of family support.

The research was led by Dr Chrissie Gale, the International Research Lead accompanied by Dr Joumana Stephan Yeretzian from the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth, Lebanon. She was ably assisted by two research assistants, Ms Julia Bou Dib and Ms Ranim Sahily.

#### 3.1. Research framework and process

The overall aim of the research was to explore:

- What are the key challenges facing families that create conditions in which child-parents separation and placement in alternative care is more likely to occur?
- Who are the children already in alternative care?
- What are some of the gaps in multi-level and multi-sectoral approaches and service delivery that could help prevent child-parents separation?
- What are the ideas of children, young people, family members, and other key stakeholders, about the current support to families and how could they be improved?

We recognise the presence of literature on children who have been separated from their parents often uses the term 'child-family' separation. However, the UN Guidelines clearly defines children in alternative care as those being no longer in the care of a parent/s.<sup>51</sup> We chose therefore, to use the term child-parents separation during our research in reference to situations where children lose parental care and as a result, are placed in alternative care.

Our research framework was designed to explore the drivers contributing to children's placement in alternative care. The framework was based on a child rights approach and international standards for the protection and care of children. It has also taken a socio-ecological framework, such as that of

---

<sup>51</sup> The UN Guidelines define children without parental care are all children not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances

Bronfenbrenner,<sup>52</sup> into consideration, as well as the different elements of a national child protection system. Furthermore, our research framework has taken into consideration the elements of the national child protection system in which decisions about the alternative care of children are made. Our study builds on and contributes to global evidence and outlines steps that might be taken to support families and prevent unnecessary placement of children in alternative care. To achieve this, we asked research participants about different factors impacting family life. We also sought research participants ideas and opinions as to possible solutions that could help families overcome any challenges they may be facing.

This assignment received ethical approval from the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth. Detailed quality assurance measures and ethical principles that guided informed consent and other research protocols formed an important component of the ethical approval process.

The following methods were used to gather qualitative and quantitative data:

- **Desk review.** A desk review was conducted by means of a systematic exploration of academic and other web-based databases and search engines<sup>53</sup> as well as additional reports and materials.
- **Participatory research workshops.** In recognition of the importance of children's right to participate in decisions affecting their lives, and indeed allowing for anyone to play an integral role in decisions making, coupled with recognition of children as 'competent social actors'<sup>54</sup> who should be 'actively involved in shaping their own social worlds',<sup>55</sup> we took steps to achieve as high a degree of participation as possible during our research<sup>56</sup>. To this end, in order to highlight the voices, and seek the knowledge and ideas, of children and young people, they were not only invited to join qualitative participatory research workshops, but efforts were made to engage them in the design of the research questions and methodology.

This process included participation of a group of 12 children living with their families in vulnerable<sup>57</sup> circumstances, and a group of 10 care experienced young people, in a series of research co-design workshops. Groups were deliberately kept to around this number to allow for close teamwork. During these workshops children and young people worked alongside

---

<sup>52</sup> Bronfenbrenner 1977; Bronfenbrenner 1986; SOS Children's Villages International 2023

<sup>53</sup> Including Science Direct, Wiley online, Taylor & Francis online, Springerlink, JSTOR and Sage Journals, UNICEF, the Better Care Network and other agency websites, Google, and Google Scholar search engines.

<sup>54</sup> Gilchrist et al. 2013:577. See also Davidson 2017

<sup>55</sup> Gilchrist et al. 2013:577. See also Davidson 2017

<sup>56</sup> Arnstein 1959

<sup>57</sup> For the purposes of the research, a definition of 'vulnerable' was extracted from: Bauer & Wiezorek (2016) Vulnerable Families: Reflections on a Difficult Category. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, Vol 4, pp.11-28.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

researchers to develop a set of research questions and qualitative participatory research methods. The resultant research questions for children/young people were:

Question 1: What makes children/young people in this family happy when they are at home? (children and young people had drawn a home with a family in it)

Question 2: What makes children/young in this family worried or unhappy when they are at home?

Question 3: What makes the adults in the family feel happy, strong and united when they are at home?

Question 4: What makes the adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home?

Question 5: What is needed to help families be happy, strong and united

The questions and methods developed in the research co-design workshops were then piloted in a series of research workshops. In total 45 children (21 girls and 24 boys) and 40 young people (15 girls and 25 boys). Participants were invited through the engagement of NGOs, including SOS Children's Villages. Efforts were made to invite equal numbers of girls and boys from different backgrounds. These workshops were led by Dr Joumana Stephan Yeretzian with the support of two research assistants, Julia Bou Dib and Ranim Sahil. The results informed the development of qualitative research participatory workshops that have now been successfully implemented in other countries to date.

We also wanted to elevate the voices and ideas of adult family members. To this end, a total of 36 adult family members living in vulnerable situations participated in 4 qualitative research workshops. This included recipients of SOS family strengthening programmes as well as support services offered by other organisations. Members of these workshops were predominantly female. These workshops were led by the International Lead Researcher.

Below are examples of the results of different participatory research exercises completed during workshops (Figure 1). The picture on the left depicts a drawing produced by young people when asked to draw a typical house in their neighbourhood with a family in it. It is noted that all the pictures of families drawn by children and young people consisted of figures symbolising a mother, a father and children. The sticky notes show their written answers (pink for happy and green for unhappy and worried). The second picture is a solution tree completed by adult family members.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 1. A home in the community drawn by young people and a solution tree provided by adult family members



A total of 23 professional stakeholders completed an online survey seeking their knowledge and understanding of reasons children are placed in alternative care in Lebanon. They were also asked questions about access to services and the adequacy of any support that currently available.

To allow for comparative research, a series of participatory research workshops was conducted in two different locations in Lebanon, one urban and one semi-rural. The first location was Beirut and the second was Bheressaf, approximately 25 kms from Beirut.

Care was taken to balance the available time researchers had to complete the field work with efforts not to disrupt the lives of participants. This included consideration of the times and length of workshops, and not impinging on time at school or at work etc.

- **Semi-structured interviews.** An interview guide was developed containing a set of guiding questions with the aim of exploring reasons children are entering alternative care in Lebanon.
- A respondent selection guide was developed and purposive sampling was used to identify key informants. This included professionals who work in the child protection system and have a responsibility for taking decisions regarding a child's placement in alternative care, and alternative care providers. A total of 14 of semi-structured interviews were completed.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

- **Online survey.** An online survey for professionals working to support, care and protect children was designed utilising the Qualtrics<sup>58</sup> data software programme. The questions were designed to elicit information as to why children are being separated from their family and placed in alternative care, different types of services and support available to families, and the degree to which they are available. A total of 23 professionals completed the survey.

### Research ethics and protocols.

All elements of the research process were designed and conducted in a manner guided by professional standards and ethical principles.<sup>59</sup> Ethical clearance to conduct the research was granted by the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth.

Age and respondent appropriate Information Sheets and consent forms were produced in Arabic. Information Sheets were distributed at the point of invitation to participate. At the start of each workshop, children, young people, and adult family members were provided the opportunity to re-visit the Information Sheets before being requested to sign a consent form. At the start of each semi-structured interview, interviewees were also provided with additional copies of Information Sheets and a consent form.

Research participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity, unless a risk of harm to a child was revealed. All data used in reporting has been anonymised, and care taken not to reveal the identity of participants. National researchers and the translator accompanying the international researcher each signed a third-party confidentiality agreement and asked to adhere to the SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Protocol.

Recordings were made using an encrypted recording device and uploaded to secure password protected folders held only by the International Lead Researcher. All data is stored in an electronic format and also held securely in password protected computer files. Any personal data will be destroyed within three years of the termination of the research programme.

The issue of child safeguarding was taken with the utmost seriousness and informed the design of an ethical research process. All steps were taken to ensure the rights and dignity of participants. An SOS Children's Villages social worker, or equivalent, (a 'responsible adult') was present in a separate room at the same location as the research workshops with children and young people. It was agreed if any safeguarding concerns arose during the research they would be reported to the 'responsible adult' and, in the event of such disclosure, SOS child safeguarding procedures were to be activated.

---

<sup>58</sup> Please see: <https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/>

<sup>59</sup> See for example, Social Research Association 2020



All research findings have been triangulated and the use of NVIVO<sup>60</sup> and Qualtrics software assisted analysis that highlighted key issues raised by participants.

### 3.2. Background

Clearly enshrined in the UNCRC is the right of a child, 'for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality', to 'grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.'<sup>61</sup> This is further endorsed in the 2019 UNGA Resolution, Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children and the UN Guidelines. The handbook written to accompany the UN Guidelines, 'Moving Forward',<sup>62</sup> refers to the important principles of 'necessity' and 'suitability'. These principles recognise the primacy of preventing separation and that removal of a child from the care of their parents is a measure of last resort as well as being for the shortest possible duration. A further important premise is no actions should deprive a child of parental care unless it has been rigorously assessed as a necessary safeguarding measure. When such actions are taken, they must always be in a child's best interest. The UN Guidelines echo the UNCRC in highlighting the importance of efforts being primarily 'directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members.'<sup>63</sup> To this end, the 'State should ensure that families have access to forms of support in the caregiving role.'<sup>64</sup>

Previous research has made efforts to gather information regarding children living in 'vulnerable'<sup>65</sup> situations that pose possible risks to children being separated from parental care, and on the efficacy of family strengthening.<sup>66</sup> Some of these studies highlight the lack of information regarding the reasons children are in alternative care, or at risk of being so.<sup>67</sup> As a result, there are perceived gaps in evidence that would inform the development of effective universal and specialist programmes and services to address the underlying to prevent any unnecessary placement in alternative care. Further studies have illustrated the detrimental effects of adverse experiences in childhood, including separation of a child from parents, and extended family, and impact of placement in alternative care.<sup>68</sup> This research also illustrates the way such events can result in detrimental life-long consequences and therefore, highlights the urgent action needed to prevent all future unnecessary placement of children in alternative care.

---

<sup>60</sup> Please see: <https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>

<sup>61</sup> United Nations General Assembly 1989

<sup>62</sup> Cantwell et al. 2012

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Nankervis et al. 2011; OECD 2017

<sup>66</sup> Delap 2013; EveryChild 2009; Laumann 2015; Lodder et al. 2021; Namey & Brown 2018; Ortea et al. 2022; Wilke et al. 2022

<sup>67</sup> Martin & Zulaika 2016; Petrowski et al. 2017; Willi et al. 2020

<sup>68</sup> Bruskas & Tessin 2013; De Swart et al. 2012; Gale 2018; Howard et al. 2023; Simkiss 2019; Stein 2005.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Despite efforts to develop child protection systems that encompass the principles of 'gatekeeping'<sup>69</sup> and prevention of child-parents separation, children across the world continue to lose parental care. Furthermore, studies suggest many children experience separation from their parents that could have been prevented.<sup>70</sup> Drivers of this separation are thought to be complex and varied with different studies placing emphasis on differing primary antecedents of separation.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, to develop effective and relevant strategies and programmes that help prevent the unnecessary placement of children in alternative care in different parts of the world, it is essential we gain a better understanding of which drivers are contributing to child-parents separation in differing contexts, to which degree, and how. And it is particularly important to draw such evidence by listening to the views of children, young people, and adult family members. Most particularly, we need to gather evidence on these aforementioned topics in recognition that 'more research is needed to understand the effective approaches to antecedents to placement'<sup>72</sup> in residential and other forms of, alternative care. And, to address the concern that the information that does exist, overwhelmingly originates in high income countries thus leaving further gaps in knowledge and understanding<sup>73</sup>.

Clearly, to accurately inform future developments in policy and service delivery that contribute to prevention of child-parents separation, further documented primary evidence of risk factors is needed as relevant to different countries, contexts, and ecological systems.

### 3.3. The context of Lebanon

Violence is impacting the lives of children in Lebanon. A 2018 study, said 10,825 cases of violence, neglect, abuse and exploitation had been received in the previous year by child protection case management services in Lebanon, 'of which approximately 90% were assessed as medium and high risk.'<sup>74</sup> The report went on to say children of Lebanese descent had reported at least one incident of psychological abuse (65%), physical abuse (54%), sexual abuse (15%), or of witnessing violence (30%).<sup>75</sup> Violence as a means of disciplining children was also a common occurrence.<sup>76</sup> A study<sup>77</sup> published in 2018 gathered information from 521 Lebanese and refugee children and young people who revealed high levels of concern about their protection including risks of physical and sexual violence and emotional abuse. Fear of sexual abuse was lower than from other forms of violence.

Following years of political change and instability, Lebanon is now without a fully functioning government. Lebanon's President and Prime Minister failed to agree on a new government after the

---

<sup>69</sup> Casky, and Gale 2015

<sup>70</sup> Chaitkin et al. 2017

<sup>71</sup> Bryson et al. 2017; Family for Every Child 2014; Laumann 2015

<sup>72</sup> Wilke et al. 2022

<sup>73</sup> Gale 2018; Martin & Zulaika 2016; Petrowski et al. 2017

<sup>74</sup> El Jardali et al. 2018:6

<sup>75</sup> ibid.

<sup>76</sup> El Jardali et al, 2018

<sup>77</sup> Plan International and War Child 2018

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

outgoing cabinet's mandate expired after the elections in May 2022. Reports<sup>78</sup> speak of the general lack of trust people had in the functioning of government especially concerning issues of inequality, mismanagement, corruption, inability to ensure safety and security, and a sectarianized judicial and administrative systems. This lack of trust has been compounded by accusations of corruption following the Beirut Port blast in August 2020 which killed 220 people and injured more than 7,000.

The country is facing an economic and financial crisis reflected in the World Bank's ranking of Lebanon as being 'among the worst economic crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century'.<sup>79</sup> The World Bank has now downgraded the classification of Lebanon to a lower-middle income country.<sup>80</sup> This socio-economic downturn, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic and the August 2020 Beirut Port that caused upwards of \$5 billion in damage, has contributed to the daily challenges now facing much of the population. In addition the global fuel crisis has seriously impacted the country affecting the electricity supply with consequences for health, water, transport, and telecommunication sectors.<sup>81</sup> Unemployment in Lebanon rose from 11.4% in 2018-19 to 29.6% in 2022.<sup>82</sup> UNICEF has noted<sup>83</sup> that child labour is increasing. According to OCHA,<sup>84</sup> the ongoing financial crisis is creating a humanitarian crisis for the Lebanese with the risk of extreme poverty tripling since 2019. The multiple crises facing Lebanon is also placing a strain on vulnerable households including their ability to access and retain adequate and affordable housing.<sup>85</sup>

According to UNHCR, the deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon has negatively impacted access to healthcare and medicines.<sup>86</sup> Lack of reliable electricity supply, fuel and water are affecting hospitals and other health facilities whilst the unstable economy contributes to declining stocks of medicines.<sup>87</sup> A household study<sup>88</sup> conducted in Lebanon in 2021 found between 50% and 70% of surveyed households lacking access to health services with costs of medical services and transportation to reach facilities cited as reasons. A report published by UNICEF in 2015,<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> European Institute of the Mediterranean 2022; see also: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/12/the-guardian-view-on-lebanons-crisis-a-people-betrayed>

<sup>79</sup> Please see:

[https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#:~:text=The%20Spring%202021%20Lebanon%20Economic,U\\$%2423.1%20billion%20in%202021.](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#:~:text=The%20Spring%202021%20Lebanon%20Economic,U$%2423.1%20billion%20in%202021.)

<sup>80</sup> Please see:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#:~:text=GDP%20per%20capita%20dropped%20by,associated%20with%20conflicts%20or%20wars.>

<sup>81</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023; REACH 2022

<sup>82</sup> Please see: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>

<sup>83</sup> UNICEF 2021b

<sup>84</sup> Please see: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-revised-emergency-response-plan-august-2021-december-2022>

<sup>85</sup> Please see: <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/shelter>

<sup>86</sup> Please see: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/lebanon-factsheet-5270>

<sup>87</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>88</sup> REACH 2022

<sup>89</sup> UNICEF 2015



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

highlighted the severe consequences of inadequate assistance for children with disabilities, the challenges in accessing services, and the isolation and stigma they experiences.

The economic crisis in Lebanon is also seriously impacting education. According to Education International,<sup>90</sup> teachers are reported to be in 'survival mode' with salaries averaging only \$40 a month. Since December 2020, an estimated 60,000 teachers have participated in ongoing strikes leaving many schools barely functioning or completely closed.<sup>91</sup> As a result, an estimated 350,000 Lebanese and 170,000 Syrian students are without access to education.<sup>92</sup>

Lebanon continues to host one of the largest refugee populations per capita in the world. There are an estimated 450,000 Palestinian refugees, of whom approximately 209,000 live in 12 refugee camps designated only for Palestinians and managed by UNRWA.<sup>93</sup> It is almost twelve years since the onset of the Syrian crisis and this has contributed to Lebanon hosting an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees.<sup>94</sup> The country also hosts refugees from Iraq, Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt<sup>95</sup> along with an estimated 250,000 migrant workers, mostly women from South and South East Asian and African countries.<sup>96</sup> The protracted refugees crisis has had an impact on political and public discourse in Lebanon, with references regularly being made to the effect on the economy, unemployment, access to basic services and the absence of social safety nets.<sup>97</sup> UNWRA specifically aid the Palestinian refugee population whilst UNHCR provides support to refugees from other nations and providing some support to vulnerable communities impacted by the arrival of refugees.

UNDP<sup>98</sup> regularly reports on gender parity across the world. In 2023, Lebanon was marked as a 'low' ranking country in terms of achieving gender parity.

### 3.4. Summary of findings

Our research had the primary aim of determining the reasons children are placed in alternative care in Lebanon. We believe the decision to place a child in alternative care is particularly influenced by two factors: the circumstances they are living in, and the decision making of those with responsibility for child safeguarding judgements. Therefore, our research framework, included a focus on issues that directly impact households as well as the role of decision makers, and factors that influence their determination whether or not to place a child in alternative care.

---

<sup>90</sup> Please see: <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/27295:education-in-lebanon-a-crisis-with-no-end-in-sight>

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Please see: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/30/lebanon-blow-migrant-domestic-worker-rights#:~:text=An%20estimated%20250%2C000%20migrant%20domestic,%2C%20Bangladesh%2C%20and%20Sri%20Lanka.>

<sup>97</sup> UNHCR 2019

<sup>98</sup> UNDP 2023

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the drivers associated with placement of children in alternative care in Lebanon. They reveal the multi-faceted and inter-related circumstances that bring children to the attention of the child protection authorities and decision making that can result in placement in alternative care for reasons of safeguarding. They also highlight the system of 'social care' i.e. residential facilities that offer boarding, food, clothes, health care and education etc. in Lebanon which is resulting in thousands of children being placed in residential facilities and 'boarding schools' due to issues related to poverty. Access to education is a further pull factor.

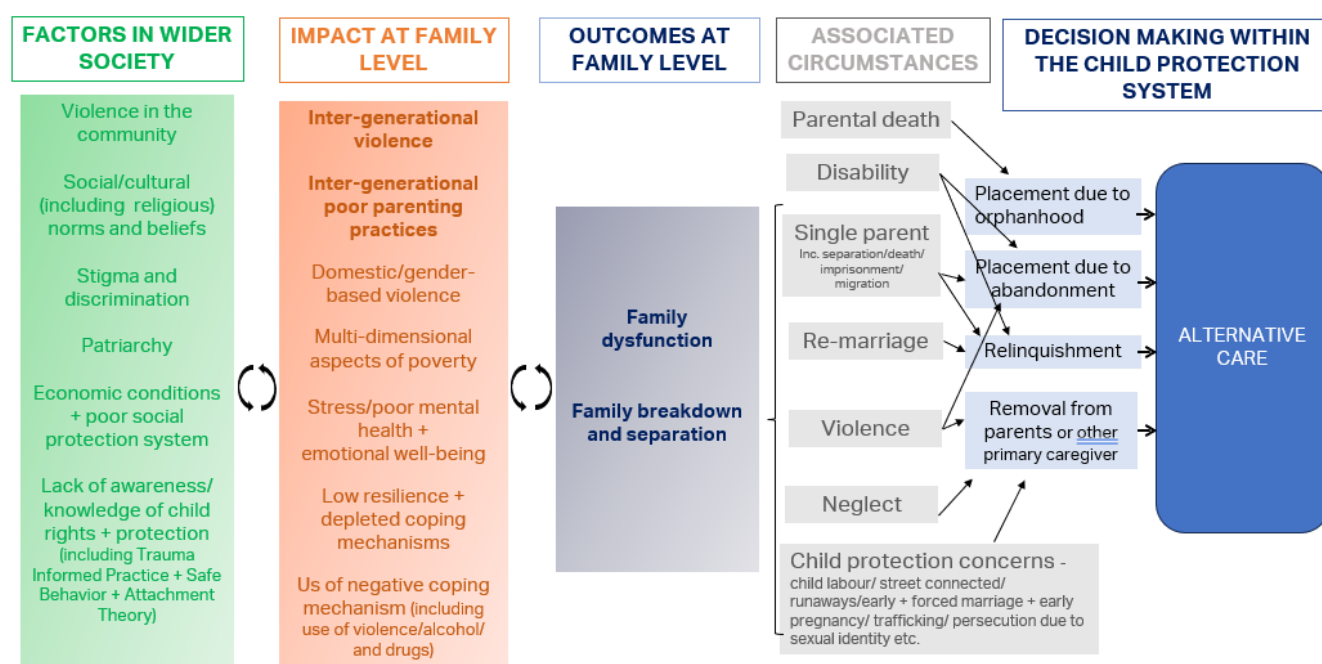


Figure 2: Factors leading to the placement of children in alternative care

(Authors own illustration)

Our findings were very much informed by the information children, young people and adult family members provided during the research workshops. Below the words found in Figures, 3, 4, and 5 depict a compilation of all the answers they provided.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Figure 3. Results of workshops with children: What makes children feel unhappy and worried when at home?

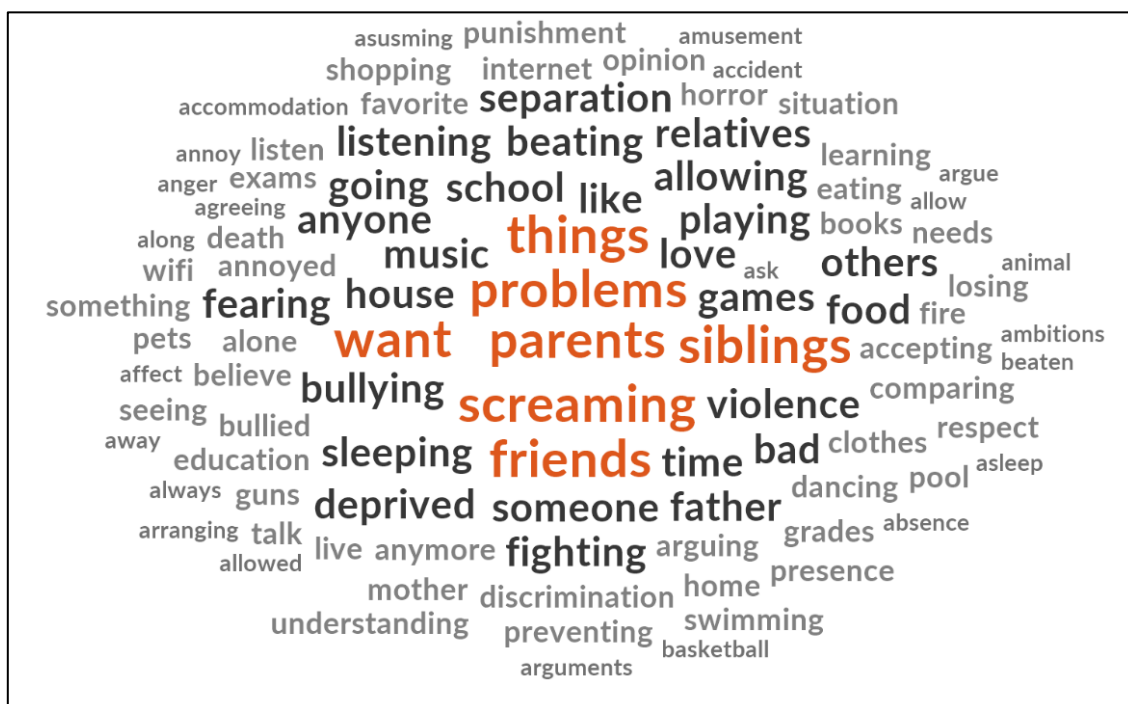
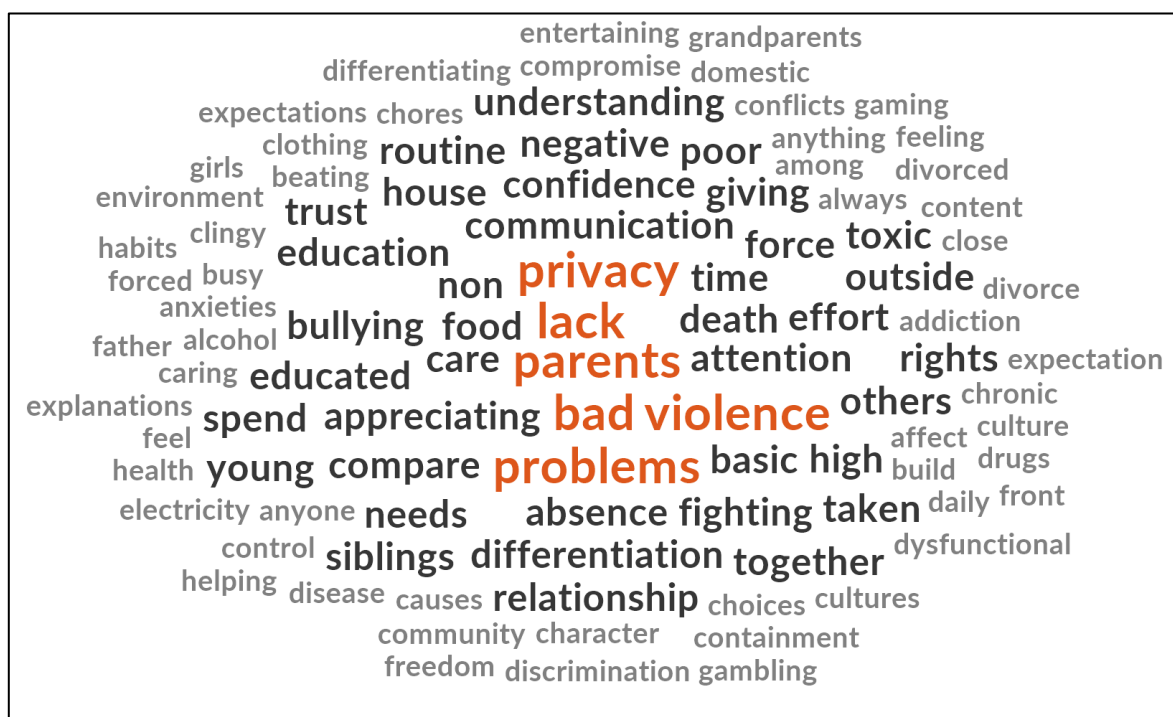


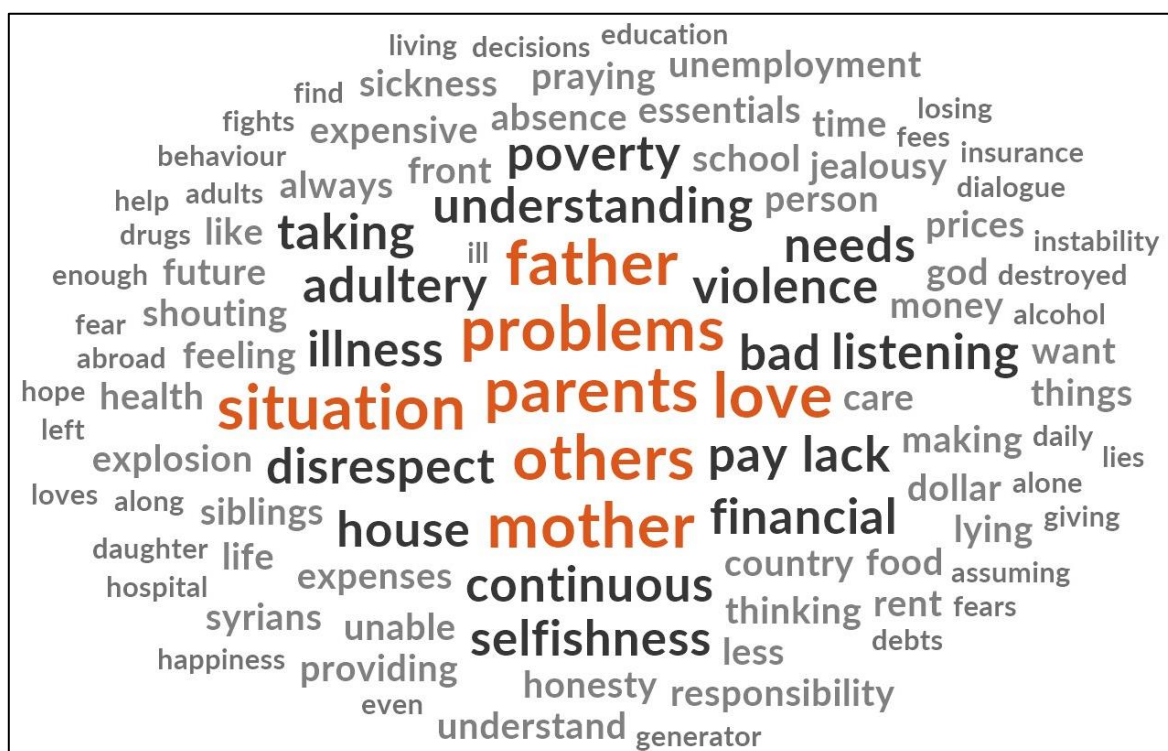
Figure 4. Results of workshops with young people: What makes young people feel unhappy and worried when at home?



## Lebanon

When children and young people answered the question, what makes children or young people unhappy or worried at home they used words such as 'violence', 'beating', 'fighting', 'screaming' and 'fearing', and 'punishment'. The word 'bad' frequently referred to 'relationships' and 'living arrangements'. Issues of 'disrespect', lack of 'honesty', feeling 'alone' and 'discrimination' featured in their answers. They also referred to issues related to 'poverty' and wrote words such as 'deprived', and lack of 'food', 'clothes', 'electricity' and, 'education'.

Figure 5. What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home as answered by adult family members



When asked the question, what makes families unhappy or worried when they are at home, adult family members also wrote about issues of violence and poverty. Their answers also prompted some heart-felt discussion about domestic violence, child protection, and the impact of the financial hardship households are currently facing.

Following an analysis of the research data, we found a strong correlation between the information provided by children, young people, adult family members, and professional key informants.

- **Violence**

Articles of the CRC that afford children the right to protection includes, protection from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19 and Article 37(a)), from sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34) and, from sale, trafficking and abduction (Article 11, Article 35, Article 36, Article 39). Violence against

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

children is described by UNICEF as taking many forms, 'including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation.'<sup>99</sup>

Analysis of the information provided by children, young people, adult family members, and interviewees, complimented by findings of a desk review, suggests the presence of violence in the home, and the manner in which this can contribute to family breakdown and a factor leading to placement in alternative care in Lebanon. Our research shows children are being subject to physical, sexual, and emotional violence. They are also witnessing and being impacted by violence between adults. Furthermore, households are impacted by violence that has been experienced across Lebanon due to years of civil war as well as conflict with Israel and other countries.

During our research interviewees also spoke about the impact of living in a patriarchal society and the correlation between domestic violence and abuse of girls and women. They think many women remain in abusive situations that also place their children at risk. Reasons they remain inside violent relationships include being fearful of social ostracization and lacking opportunities to be financially independent. If domestic violence does lead to separation, women can be left struggling to raise their children alone thus putting them at risk of losing them and their placement in alternative care, especially into what is known as 'social care'.<sup>100</sup>

Participants in our research noted the absence of paternal love and/or lack of attachment and bonding between parents and children in some households. They realise this situation can also contribute to breakdown of family relationships that may even escalate into the use of violence. Interviewees said parents who themselves lacked a happy, secure, protected, and loving childhood, struggle to care for their own children. Of further concern, are findings that reveal a perpetuation of inter-generational violence, violence as a learned behaviour within the home, and a need to help break this cycle.

Although not always related to violence, children are also living in alternative care because they have been abandoned or they are orphans. Children with disabilities are being placed in care when parents are unable, or do not want to, provide the care they need. We were unable to find recent disaggregated data about children in alternative care but interviewees suggest that numbers of placements for children with disabilities are small. In part due to lack of settings that will accept children with disabilities. Children are also being sent towards, or are placing themselves in, risky situations which then brings them to the attention of police and child protection services. For example, children who run away from home due to violence or family breakdown, and become street connected, as well as those involved in child labour.

---

<sup>99</sup> Please see: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/>

<sup>100</sup> Child Frontiers 2017



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

In conclusion, we note a concern regarding the inter-generational aspect of violence and family separation. We believe that with each generation in which families in Lebanon repeatedly experience and witness violence, and/or lack strong attachment and positive parenting skills, issues related to family dysfunction, breakdown and separation, will be an ongoing concern. This in turn means the ongoing risk of placement of children in alternative care.

### ■ **The correlation between the multiple dimensions of poverty, family breakdown and placement in alternative care**

Article 27 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to recognise the right of every child to a 'standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.' The Article also calls on State Parties to take appropriate measures to support and assist parents with their responsibility toward children and 'shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.' Other articles within the UNCRC also include a right to health (Article 24), education (Article 28 & 29) and survival and development (6). It is recognised that poverty is also an inter-generational as well as a multi-dimensional issue with measurements taking into account not only financial means, but other factors that contribute to well-being.<sup>101</sup>

We have observed how issues related to poverty are a significant factor particularly contributing to children being placed in 'social care' institutions. Institutions providing 'social care' include 'boarding schools' which are not only being used by parents to access education for their children, but also because they offer food, clothing, medical care etc. Although lacking official data, previous research indicates there are far more children in care for this reason than for protection. It has also been noted that there may be children in social care for whom there are unidentified protection concerns.

Research findings also suggest a correlation between the ability to face such daily challenge as providing food, adequate shelter, paying utility bills, keeping children in school, being able to access and afford health care, and failure to find adequately remunerated employment etc., with stress and tension within households. As a result, ongoing challenges exacerbate feelings of distress, anger, and for some, an inability to cope. Interviewees particularly noted difficulties within female-headed households where women felt they could no longer cope in looking after and caring for their children adequately. For some, they truly believe the best place for their children is in a residential institution where they will be fed and kept warm.

Although we have seen how issues related to poverty contribute to family breakdown and the presence of violence, nevertheless, it is recognised that there are families living in very difficult

---

<sup>101</sup> Please see: [https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure#:~:text=The%20Multidimensional%20Poverty%20Measure%20\(MPM,the%20%242.15%20international%20poverty%20line;https://ophi.org.uk/video-poverty-in-el-salvador-from-the-perspective-of-the-protagonists/](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure#:~:text=The%20Multidimensional%20Poverty%20Measure%20(MPM,the%20%242.15%20international%20poverty%20line;https://ophi.org.uk/video-poverty-in-el-salvador-from-the-perspective-of-the-protagonists/)

circumstances who are supportive and caring of one another and create a safe environment for children. This illustrates how strong loving relationships are an important factor in helping families stand up to the impact of poverty and other shocks experienced by households. This in turn can contribute to a violence free household. Adult family workshop members for example, spoke about their upset and despair in not being able to provide for their children in the way they would like.

Education is a specific pull factor in terms of children residing in residential facilities, many of which, are known as boarding schools. These facilities not only offer education but often receive government subsidies that go towards children's 'social care'.

- **Decision making**

We believe the decision to place a child in alternative care is not only influenced the circumstances they are living in, but also the critical decision making of those professionals with responsibility for child safeguarding judgements. In this respect, our research included a focus on decision makers, and factors influencing their decisions whether or not to place a child in alternative care. We particularly considered decision making within the context of a national child protection system including the normative framework, sufficient data, functioning and resources of child protection services, training and capacity of professionals, and use of child and family assessments.

It is our understanding that Lebanese legislation and policy for child protection, family strengthening, and gatekeeping is insufficient. For example, there is no one child rights/child protection law that includes a clear mandate for preventing all forms of violence against children and an effective national child protections that mandates the use of gatekeeping and child protection case management. Although Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs) for case management were developed in 2015,<sup>102</sup> it is unclear how well they are being implemented and by whom. It is also believed that there is insufficient, and sometimes no, use of the SOPs before a placement is made, especially by government employed social workers, meaning the placement of children in care is based on insufficient evidence and understanding. This in turn suggests there may be children for whom care was not necessary. Furthermore, the SOPs allow for some children to be placed in care, especially in 'social care' without any checks and balances through a judicial process if parents or another primary caregiver gives consent for the placement

Interviewees highlighted a number of factors contributing to this situation including insufficient numbers of staff and lack of resources necessary to effectively undertake child protection roles and responsibilities. High case numbers are resulting in what some believe the necessary time to complete assessments of children and family situations, and time to follow up on cases. As a result, we suggest there may be many children being placed in care unnecessarily.

---

<sup>102</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF, University of Saint Joseph- Lebanese School for Social Work, Beirut 2015

Lack of Government disaggregated data that would provide information related to children in alternative care in Lebanon, including numbers and reasons children for placement, means policy makers and programme and service providers are unable to develop appropriate support to children and families based on evidence.

### 3.5. Recommendations

#### Protection

- There is an urgent need for investment in violence prevention programmes for adults and for children to help break the inter-generational cycle of violent behaviour. These programmes should be systematically applied in a repeated and sustainable manner. To this end, provision of violence prevention programmes that reach children at an early age could be built into the school curriculum and comprise not just one-off 'civic' lessons, but continuous learning that promote positive messages and behaviour throughout school life. Violence prevention could also be built into family strengthening programmes that work with all members of the family together.
- Article 2 of the UNCRC guarantees children protection from discrimination. Violence prevention programmes should include efforts to combat factors that contribute to the presence of abuse and exploitation including discrimination, stigmatisation, and lack of equality. They should incorporate clear messages that promote tolerance and understanding. Issues of gender equity, discrimination against persons with disabilities or from different religious, ethnic, or other specific backgrounds, acceptance of those identifying as LGBTQI+ are examples of topics such programmes should include.
- To help inform policies and programmes that promote safe and united families, professionals would benefit from a better understanding of the factors that are contributing to violence in the home in Lebanon.
- In order to help break the cycle of inter-generational aspect of poor parenting ability, professionals would benefit from a better understanding of such topics as attachment theory – including the impact of separation from loved ones that children face when placed in alternative care - the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),<sup>103</sup> and trauma-informed practice. These topics should also be incorporated into programmes for parents and other caregivers as prevention of violence also requires sustained actions working

---

<sup>103</sup> Please see: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next>. See also: SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

closely with families to bring about an understanding of the harm being created when they use violence and finding ways to address such abusive situations.

- Those living in situations of domestic violence and gender-based violence, most especially girls and women, need someone to turn as for example, access to counselling and psychosocial services provided within a caring and safe environment. When rejected by extended family and the wider community, and with no-where else to go, crisis shelter centres, and other support services, for women and their children could offer immediate protection and help prevent situations from deteriorating to the stage where children may be separated and placed in alternative care. Access to child day care and after school clubs would also provide some respite for women.
- Men should be actively involved in family strengthening and other programmes that help them understand the importance of, and how to maintain, strong and caring family relationships. This should include awareness on issues of gender parity and prevention of domestic violence.
- Article 42 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to make the principles and provisions in the Convention 'widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.' Efforts to increase the awareness of child rights amongst the general public as well as the harm to children when they lack love, affection and are victims of violence - including impact of separation from parental care - can help strengthen the protective environment in the home and community. Messages might also include information about risk of violence and exploitation children face as for example, if spending time on the streets, engaged in child labour, and being exposed to drugs and alcohol.
- Efforts to ensure prohibition of corporal punishment into law would not only lead to less violence against children but also send a significant message that children should not be harmed.

### Adequate standard of living and well-being

- Addressing issues related to poverty is a structural issue that needs a strong and stable government. It is beyond the remit of this report to provide detailed recommendations as to government efforts to strengthen the country economically, politically and socially. However, different actors can instigate advocacy for change and information sharing that would help government policy makers, and others, gain a clearer understanding of efforts needed to prevent placement of children in alternative care. Especially information that takes into account the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and the impact on families. This requires

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

awareness raising that informs the establishment of an evidence based multi-sectoral and family-centred approach to the design, development and delivery of support to families with the understanding it is often more than one pathway or issue that contributes to family breakdown. One specific focus of such advocacy should include the development and availability of fully functioning of social protection systems that reach all those in need of social safety nets.

- Helping families address the many challenges they are facing requires closer multi-sectoral cooperation and improved coordination between Government and non-governmental bodies and agencies, UN entities, academics, faith-based leaders, the private sector, and donors, including those responsible for education, health, security, social protection and social welfare, justice, and child protection. There should be a concerted effort together, and within each organisation, body or department, to assesses and recognise where each can most effectively contribute: whether it be direct service provision, advocacy to effect change, signposting so that families know how and where to receive the support they need, fundraising, or even leading/supporting such coordinated response. Organisations should also look at the breadth of their outreach to ensure they are reaching vulnerable families including those residing in rural areas.
- Families need informed and coordinated access to service provision in a way that will address all the inter-related challenges they face. This should be available universally to address the concern that support often comes too late and so that vulnerability of families might be prevented. To this end consideration should be given to providing families with signposting to basic and specialist services as well as ensuring joined-up provision in a way that overcomes barriers of access e.g. access to all support coordinated in one location rather than family members having to move from agency to agency to agency to resolve their problems. In some countries for example, this is sometimes called a 'one-stop shop'.<sup>104</sup>
- Helping families undertake the responsibility they seek to provide for their families might include increasing access to income generation schemes and help with obtaining stable, well remunerated employment. This should be linked with the need for more easily available and free capacity building and training, as well as adult education programmes, especially those related to improved literacy for women. This should be undertaken by organisations that have the specialism to implement such programmes.

---

<sup>104</sup> Please see: <https://www.undp.org/botswana/news/undp-supports-establishment-one-stop-shop-public-services-botswana> And: <https://www.undp.org/kazakhstan/stories/one-stop-shop-window-problem-solver-people-difficult-life-situations>

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

- The need for additional support for women in particular, whose lack of education, training, and literacy is not only precluding them from the job market, but also impacting their confidence. Confidence that is needed when facing everyday challenges in the home and community as well as standing up to such concerns as gender discrimination, domestic violence, preventing violence against their children and other circumstances that might lead to separation from them.
- Article 18 of the UNCRC requires States to 'take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.' Affordable or free day care for children would help women in particular, find their way into the work force. It could also provide respite for those struggling with household responsibilities, being overwhelmed by challenges of everyday life, and requiring help alleviating pressure building up within families. This includes day care for infants as well as after-school provision.
- Children should not be placed in alternative care solely for the reason of poverty. Alternative care should only be used when absolutely necessary for children who need protection. Efforts should be made to stop the placement of children in government-sponsored (in terms of legal and statutory guidance and funding) and NGO-run residential institutions including those offering 'social care' and 'boarding schools'. Deinstitutionalisation requires legislation, policies and strategies that refocuses the efforts and funds currently used to run residential institutions toward services and programmes that allow children to remain safely in their own homes.
- Increased efforts are needed to ensure access to free health care services and/or national health insurance. This includes a particular need for psychosocial and mental health services and counselling. The latter should also be a consideration in the delivery of family strengthening programmes.

### Support in parenting

- As with previous recommendations, actions are needed that will break any cycle of inter-generational concerns including those related to parenting skills. This requires consideration of parenting programmes that take a holistic and family-centred approach and incorporate such topics as attachment theory, the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),<sup>105</sup> and trauma-informed practice.

---

<sup>105</sup> Please see: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next>. See also: SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

- It is important that professionals working with families do not dismiss parents as 'bad parents' but gain a deeper understanding of the different factors of parents they work with and any factors that might impact their parenting abilities. This includes recognising family dynamics, individual concerns, and existing resilience and coping mechanisms.

### Disability

- Family support programmes should ensure the inclusion of families that have members with disabilities. And whilst interviewees believe in inclusion, they also see a need for a range of specialist services tailored to individual family needs and priorities.
- Violence prevention programmes, as previously mentioned, should inherently incorporate protection of children with disabilities.
- Advocacy and awareness raising programmes should promote an understanding and acceptance of disability, both within families and amongst the general public. Public information campaigns should speak about fair and respectful treatment of people with disabilities, the harm of stigmatisation, and topics that would help prevent violence and exclusion against persons with disabilities. Advocacy programmes by and with people with disabilities are important and help bring a specific focus to improving services, opportunities, and support.
- Inclusion in schools should not just offer children with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive an education, but they should also be a place of security.
- Children with disabilities, as with other children, should not be placed in residential institutions. Consideration should be given to the specialist support necessary to prevent the placement of children with disabilities in alternative care.

### Education

- Investment in high quality and provision of free public education, including without costs of fees, materials and uniforms etc. should be made in all local communities.
- There is a need for increased awareness raising and efforts that will prevent placement of children in alternative care, for purposes of education, including into boarding schools. This includes raising awareness that boarding schools are residential institutions. Most particularly it requires governments and other organisations to refocus expenditure on residential education facilities, including those that also promote the provision of 'social care', into all necessary aspects of prevention of child-parent separation programming.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

### Play and leisure

- Time spent together is seen as being particularly important in the way it contributes to family unity and provides respite from the stresses they may be facing. Activities that address this important aspect of unity and spending time together would add value to parenting and family strengthening programmes. This would also include raising awareness amongst parents and professionals as to the important benefits of time spent as a family and how this can help forge closer bonds.

### Capacity of professional decision makers and the efficacy of the national child protection system and gatekeeping

- We suggest an in-depth review of Lebanese legislation and policies to inform future developments in line with international conventions, standards, and guidance. This should include a focus on protection of children whilst applying gatekeeping principles that prevent unnecessary placement in alternative care. Consideration should be given to incorporating mandated provision of services and programmes that support families in difficult circumstances, ensuring financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely ascribed, to such poverty, are never the only justification for the removal of a child from the care of parents, primary caregivers, or legal guardians, and the gradual elimination of all forms of residential institutions.
- To inform the development of future training and capacity building, it is recommended that an assessment of the quality of social work training in higher education institutions is undertaken along with a review of provision and standards of in-service capacity building. This should be coupled with a study of current skills, knowledge and capacities of all those responsible for making decisions about protection and care of children including social workers, police, judiciary, health and education workers etc. This might consider understanding of risk thresholds in relation to protection and how to apply the principle of the best interest of the child.
- A review of the use of 2015 SOPs would inform any further developments in line with international standards and help evaluate their current use including any gaps in the way they are understood and applied. This would also help inform further training on implementation of multi-sectoral child and family assessments.
- Training of those working in residential institutions may not only help alleviate some of the opposition to those working in such settings, but also contribute to re-skilling. If sufficiently trained, they could be offered new roles in family strengthening programmes and, if family based care settings are developed, they might become providers. In addition, training on how to re-focus the use of funds towards helping improve families access better quality public

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

education rather than perpetuate it would be helpful e.g. the undertaking and application of cost benefit analyses.

- Steps should be taken to address such issues as professional burn out of social workers and making sure they are fully supported in their work, i.e., caring for the carers.

### Data management systems

- Investment is needed in the development of systematic and rigorous qualitative and quantitative national child protection data collection and analysis. Such data would provide policy makers and programme and service providers with the evidence necessary to provide more effective support to children and families and focus investment in the prevention of unnecessary placement in alternative care. Such data collection should be a government responsibility but the building of effective data management systems should be encouraged and supported by NGOs. Such data would call additional attention to the issues mentioned in this study and provide evidence to on which to advocate for change.

### Participation

- Children should be supported in a way that allows their full and meaningful participation in any decision making processes that will affect them, including their placement in alternative care.
- All children should be acknowledged as active citizens and afforded equal opportunity to contribute to their society. In this respect, policy makers and programme designers and implementers may need help understanding that children are experts in their own lives. This will require challenging any negative assumptions regarding children's capacities to engage and participate and providing them with opportunities that allow them to build and demonstrate such capability.



## 4. Context

Understanding the socio-economic context in which children and families live in Lebanon was especially important to our study as these circumstances have a significant impact on the well-being and stability of life within a household.

Figure 6. Map of Lebanon



(Source: Maps of the World<sup>106</sup>)

Lebanon, officially known as the Lebanese Republic, is located on land bordering the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The total **land** area is 10,230 Km<sup>2</sup> (3,950 sq. miles) and the capital city is Beirut. The majority of the population live on or near the Mediterranean coast, and of these, most live in and around the capital, Beirut.<sup>107</sup> An estimated 90% of total population live in urban areas.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Please see: <http://www.maps-of-the-world.net/maps-of-asia/maps-of-lebanon/>

<sup>107</sup> Please see: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/lebanon/>

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

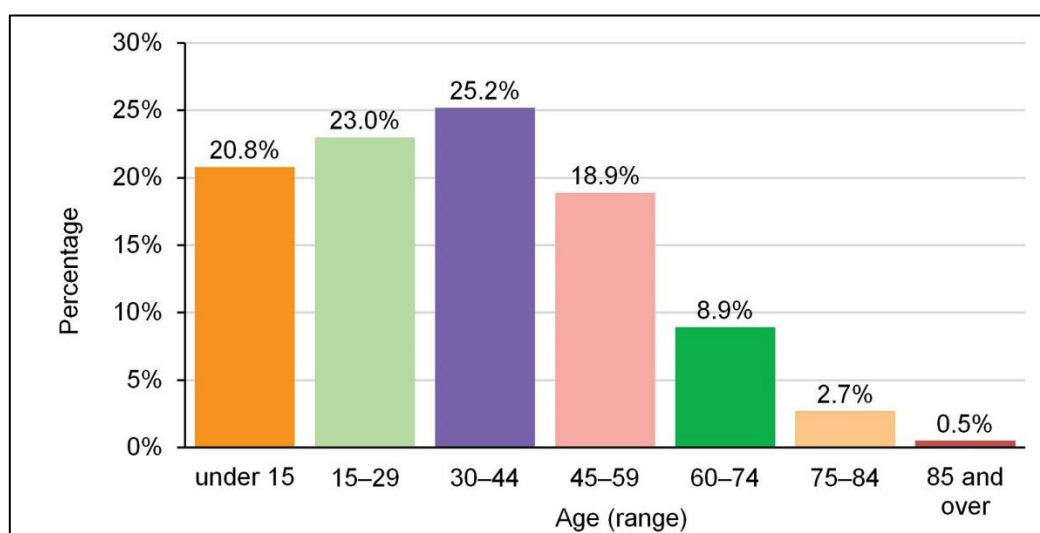
## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

### 4.1. Population

In 2022, the population of Lebanon was estimated to be 5,489,739.<sup>109</sup> In 2020, the population was identified as being 95% Arab, 4% Armenian, and 1% other with most common spoken languages comprising Arabic (official), French, English, and Armenian.<sup>110</sup>

Figure 7 depicts the population age breakdown as of 2020.<sup>111</sup>

Figure 7. Age breakdown in Lebanon 2020



(Source: Britannica online)

As seen in Figure 7, Lebanon has a young population with 69% below the age of 45 years old. In 2018-19 the average household size in Lebanon was 3.8 people, a decline from 4.3 in 2004.<sup>112</sup> An estimated 18% of all households were female headed. <sup>113</sup> Lebanon has reportedly experienced 'uneven'<sup>114</sup> population growth over the past 50 years but there is an expectation that it will grow by approximately 1% in 2023. The urban population is growing at a faster rate than the rural one.<sup>115</sup>

Lebanon continues to host one of the largest refugee populations per capita in the world. There are an estimated 450,000 Palestinian refugees, of whom approximately 209,000 live in 12 refugee camps designated only for Palestinians and managed by UNRWA.<sup>116</sup> It is almost twelve years since the onset of the Syrian crisis and this has contributed to Lebanon hosting an estimated 1.5 million Syrian

<sup>109</sup> Please see: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=LB>

<sup>110</sup> Please see: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/lebanon/>

<sup>111</sup> Please see: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lebanon/Climate>

<sup>112</sup> Central Administration of Statistics undated

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Please see: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/lebanon-population>

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

refugees.<sup>117</sup> The country also hosts an estimated 33,040 refugees from other countries, including Iraq, Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt.<sup>118</sup> In addition, there are an estimated 250,000 migrant workers, mostly women from South and South East Asian and African countries, such as Bangladesh, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Ethiopia.<sup>119</sup>

The protracted refugee presence has remained a primary issue impacting political and public discourse in Lebanon, with references regularly being made to the effect on the economy, unemployment, access to basic services and the absence of social safety nets.<sup>120</sup>

Refugees are regarded as foreigners and effectively excluded from most civil and socio-economic rights.<sup>121</sup> Tensions continue to rise as a recent economic crisis is also badly impacting the Lebanese thus creating some resentment toward refugees who are using national services and/or receiving specific help the Lebanese population do not receive from UN and other international and national agencies.<sup>122</sup> UNWRA specifically aid the Palestinian refugee population whilst UNHCR focusses on refugees from other countries whilst also providing some support to vulnerable communities impacted by the arrival of refugees.

In January 2015, the Government of Lebanon introduced new residency policies for refugees to try and reduce the burden on state services.<sup>123</sup> This led to an estimated 70% of Syrians losing their legal status which restricted their movements, ability to work, access to healthcare, and children from entering school. A 2019 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees<sup>124</sup> confirmed that poverty among the refugee population continued to increase, with 73% of the Syrians found to be living below the poverty line, and 55% living in extreme poverty.

### 4.2. Gender Parity

UNDP<sup>125</sup> regularly reports on gender parity across the world. In 2023, Lebanon was marked as a 'low' ranking country in terms of achieving gender parity taking in to consideration such measurements as fraction of life expectancy at birth spent in good health; population with completed secondary education or higher; youth not in education; employment or training; labour force participation; holding an account in a financial institution (e.g. a bank); share of women holding managerial positions and seats held (e.g. parliamentary seats).

---

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Please see: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/30/lebanon-blow-migrant-domestic-worker-rights#:~:text=An%20estimated%20250%2C000%20migrant%20domestic,%2C%20Bangladesh%2C%20and%20Sri%20Lanka.>

<sup>120</sup> UNHCR 2019

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Please see: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2132631/middle-east>; <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-bread-shortages-fuelling-tensions-syrian-refugees>

<sup>123</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> UNDP 2023

### 4.3. Governance

Following years of political change and instability, Lebanon has now been without a fully functioning government for more than a year. Lebanon's President and Prime Minister failed to agree on a new government after the outgoing cabinet's mandate expired after the elections in May 2022. Michel Aoun's presidential term also came to an end on October 31st, 2022, but at the time of writing this report, parliamentarians had yet to elect a new president.<sup>126</sup> Reports<sup>127</sup> speak of a general lack of trust in government institutions especially in relation to issues of inequality, mismanagement, corruption, inability to ensure safety and security, and a sectarianized judicial and administrative systems. Lack of trust and accusations of corruption were particularly heightened after the Beirut Port blast in August 2020 which killed 220 people and injured more than 7,000. No-one has yet been held accountable for the blast with obstructions and delays to the investigation. The continuous downward trajectory of the economy and failure to address increasing poverty is fuelling even more anger in the failure of State apparatus, and heightening desperation and discontent in the country.<sup>128</sup>

### 4.4. Religion

According to the 2023 World Fact Book<sup>129</sup>, religious denominations include Muslim (67.8%) (31.9% Sunni, 31.2% Shia, smaller percentages of Alawites and Ismailis), Christians (32.4%), Druze (4.5%), and a very small numbers of Jews, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Hindus.<sup>130</sup>

### 4.5. Economy and social protection

The country is facing an economic and financial crisis reflected in the World Bank's ranking of Lebanon as being 'among the worst economic crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century'.<sup>131</sup> A report issued in 2022,<sup>132</sup> identified Lebanon as facing a multi-layered financial crisis characterized by inter alia, an acute economic downturn as the result of exchange rate collapse, soaring inflation, an impaired banking system, rising public debt, and political turmoil. The impact this chronic situation on families cannot be underestimated. This socio-economic downturn, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic and the August 2020 Beirut Port that caused upwards of \$5 billion in damage to residential,

---

<sup>126</sup> Please see: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/lebanon#:~:text=Lebanon's%20president%20and%20prime%20minister,to%20elect%20a%20new%20president.>

<sup>127</sup> European Institute of the Mediterranean 2022; see also: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/12/the-guardian-view-on-lebanons-crisis-a-people-betrayed>

<sup>128</sup> Please see: [https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#:~:text=The%20Spring%202021%20Lebanon%20Economic,U\\$%2423.1%20billion%20in%202021.](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#:~:text=The%20Spring%202021%20Lebanon%20Economic,U$%2423.1%20billion%20in%202021.)

<sup>129</sup> Please see: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/lebanon/>

<sup>130</sup> The World Fact Book notes the data representing the religious affiliation of the citizen population does not include Lebanon's sizable Syrian and Palestinian refugee populations

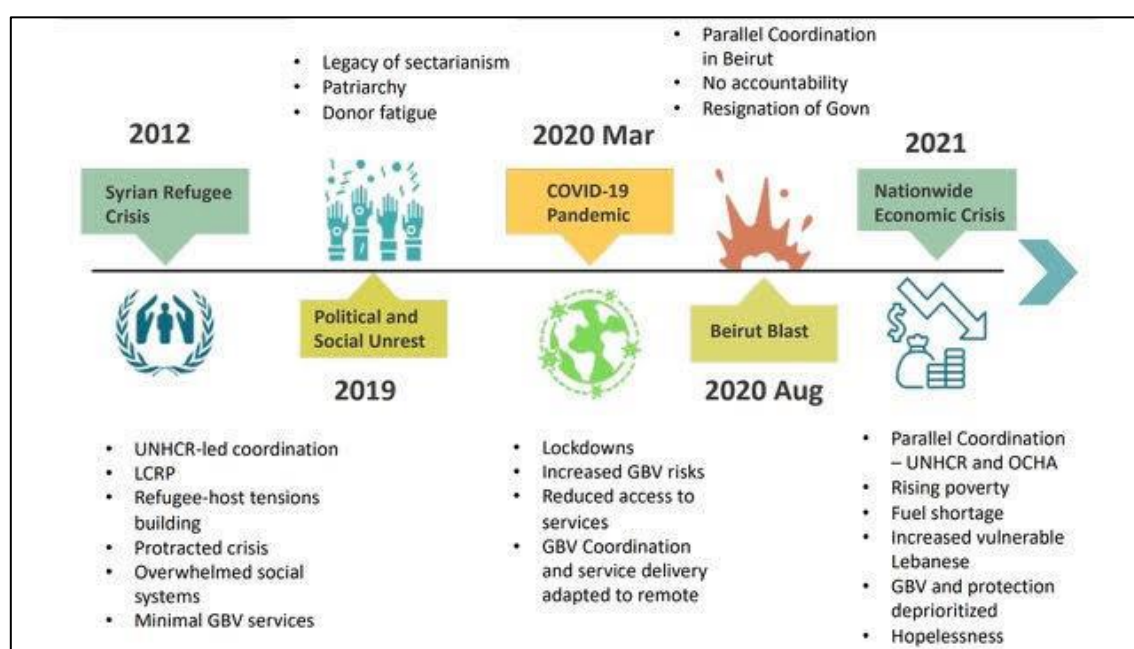
<sup>131</sup> Please see: [https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#:~:text=The%20Spring%202021%20Lebanon%20Economic,U\\$%2423.1%20billion%20in%202021.](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#:~:text=The%20Spring%202021%20Lebanon%20Economic,U$%2423.1%20billion%20in%202021.)

<sup>132</sup> REACH 2022

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

commercial, industrial, and public infrastructure, has contributed to the daily challenges now facing much of the population. A timeline of the significant crises affecting the population of Lebanon has been produced by the Gender Based Working Group in Lebanon in 2023<sup>133</sup> and reproduced below (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Timeline of Lebanon Crisis 2012 to 2021



(Source: Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023:1)

After being ranked by the World Bank as an upper-middle income country for 25 years, Lebanon is now classified as a lower-middle income country.<sup>134</sup> As of April 2023, the International Monetary Fund forecast a further decrease in real GDP growth.<sup>135</sup> GDP per capita more than halved from \$9,225 in 2019 to \$4,136 in 2021.<sup>136</sup> The banking sector has instituted a segmented payment system that distinguishes between older (pre-October 2019) US Dollar bank deposits and minimum new inflows of “fresh dollars.”<sup>137</sup> This means the 2019 savings of people are almost completely devalued and for some families, all savings have been lost. Since 2019, the Lebanese pound has lost more than 90% of its value.<sup>138</sup> Some of the most fortunate employees are those currently being paid a combination

<sup>133</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>134</sup> Please see:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#:~:text=GDP%20per%20capita%20dropped%20by,associated%20with%20conflicts%20or%20wars.>

<sup>135</sup> Please see: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/LBN>

<sup>136</sup> Please see: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=LB>

<sup>137</sup> Please see: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>

<sup>138</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

of Lebanese pounds and what are known as “fresh” US dollars which can then be exchanged for local currency when rates are higher. However, rates are fluctuating on a daily, and sometimes hourly basis.

According to OCHA,<sup>139</sup> in 2022, the ongoing financial crisis was creating a humanitarian crisis for the Lebanese with the risk of extreme poverty tripling since 2019. In addition to the near collapse of the banking system, Lebanon is struggling with electricity blackouts, fuel and water shortages, and a challenged public sector. The fuel crisis, which began during the summer of 2021, has seriously impacted the country’s electricity supply with consequences for health, water, transport, and telecommunication sectors.<sup>140</sup> The national electric grid is experiencing regular blackouts and public electricity supply averages only one to two hours per day.<sup>141</sup>

According to a household survey completed in 2021<sup>142</sup>, the cost of what is termed a ‘Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket’ increased 1,140% and was approximately 10 times higher in January 2022 than October 2019. In terms of food security, the 2021 survey<sup>143</sup> also found 16% of households were categorised as suffering from severe or moderate hunger. Between December 2019 and October 2021, inflation reached 519%, peaking at an extraordinary 1854% for food and non-alcoholic beverages.<sup>144</sup> With a sharp decline of household purchasing power and increasing poverty it is estimated<sup>145</sup> that 3.2 million people, almost 58% of the Lebanese population, are currently in need of humanitarian support. Almost 50% of the population are living below the poverty line and 90% of Syrian households are living in extreme poverty.<sup>146</sup> As with other reports, female-headed households are shown to be particularly vulnerable to such shocks.<sup>147</sup> Reports have also highlighted how women, girls, and female-headed households are more prone to food insecurity due to patriarchal norms and gender roles.<sup>148</sup> In 2017,<sup>149</sup> Lebanon ranked 80th out of 189 countries on the human development index. It now ranks 120.<sup>150</sup>

Overall, it is thought the Lebanese social protection system is struggling to meet the needs of the population and is only providing minimal coverage with much more needing to be done toward the

---

<sup>139</sup> Please see: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-revised-emergency-response-plan-august-2021-december-2022>

<sup>140</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023; REACH 2022

<sup>141</sup> Please see: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>

<sup>142</sup> REACH 2022

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>145</sup> Please see: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-lcrp-2022-2023>

<sup>146</sup> Please see: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-lcrp-2022-2023>

<sup>147</sup> World Food Programme 2020

<sup>148</sup> Please see: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/lebanon/document/lebanon-emergency-response-plan-2021-2022-august-2021-enar>

<sup>149</sup> Please see <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks>

<sup>150</sup> Please see <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks>

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

effective and sufficient provision of social protection benefits.<sup>151</sup> There are two particular social insurance programmes. The first is the government run National Poverty Targeting Programme, to support households in poverty.<sup>152</sup> A report in 2022<sup>153</sup> found the Programme, run by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), was supporting only 10,000 households. This number was, recognised as being insignificant in comparison to the total number of families in need across the country. The second programme is the National Social Security Fund (NSSF).<sup>154</sup> This is funded by contributions of families who meet specific criteria. It provides health insurance, end of service indemnity and family allowance. As of 2016, approximately 60,000 people were registered with this programme.<sup>155</sup> Both programmes have been assessed as weak and inadequate. Social protection is also addressed on an ad-hoc basis with programmes run by UN agencies and national and international NGOs.<sup>156</sup> This includes cash transfers, in-kind benefits and relief and assistance programmes for the poorest and vulnerable groups.

### 4.6. Employment

Unemployment in Lebanon rose from 11.4% in 2018-19 to 29.6% in 2022.<sup>157</sup> As seen in the data in Table 1, reproduced from a 2022 Government household survey,<sup>158</sup> labour force participation was only 43.4% indicating more than half the working-age population were inactive. Youth unemployment rate (15–24 years old) rose from 23.3% in 2018-2019 to 47.8% in January 2022.<sup>159</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> European Institute of the Mediterranean 2022

<sup>152</sup> European Institute of the Mediterranean 2022

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Please see: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>

<sup>158</sup> Central Administration of Statistics and ILO 2022

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Table 1. Main labour force and labour underutilization indicators, Lebanon 2022 (percentage)

	Sex		Youth (15-24 years old)	Adults (25+ years old)
	Total	Male		
<b>Labour force participation rate</b>	43.4	66.2	22.2	34.3
<b>Employment-to-population ratio</b>	30.6	47.4	15.0	17.9
<b>LU1: Unemployment rate</b>	29.6	28.4	32.7	47.8
<b>LU2: Combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment</b>	43.2	42.5	45.0	57.6
<b>LU3: Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force</b>	38.1	34.1	47.5	55.9
<b>LU4: Composite measure of labour underutilization</b>	50.1	47.1	57.1	64.2

(Source: Central Administration of Statistics and ILO 2022:3)

In 2022, the Central Administration of Statistics reported<sup>160</sup> the vast majority of workers (74.5%) were employed by public or private sector employers. However, a report published in 2022 said more than 50% of the population were relying on the informal economy.<sup>161</sup>

UNICEF has noted<sup>162</sup> that child labour is increasing. In a poll<sup>163</sup> of UNICEF partner agencies, 53% said child protection was the primary child protection concern they were dealing with. In October 2021, 12% of families surveyed in a UNICEF study<sup>164</sup> said at least one child was going out to work, an increase of 9% on data gathered 6 months earlier. An assessment of Syrian refugees found working children from these families had risen to 27, 825 children, a 100% increase since 2019.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>160</sup> ibid.

<sup>161</sup> European Institute of the Mediterranean 2022

<sup>162</sup> UNICEF 2021b

<sup>163</sup> ibid.

<sup>164</sup> ibid.

<sup>165</sup> ibid.

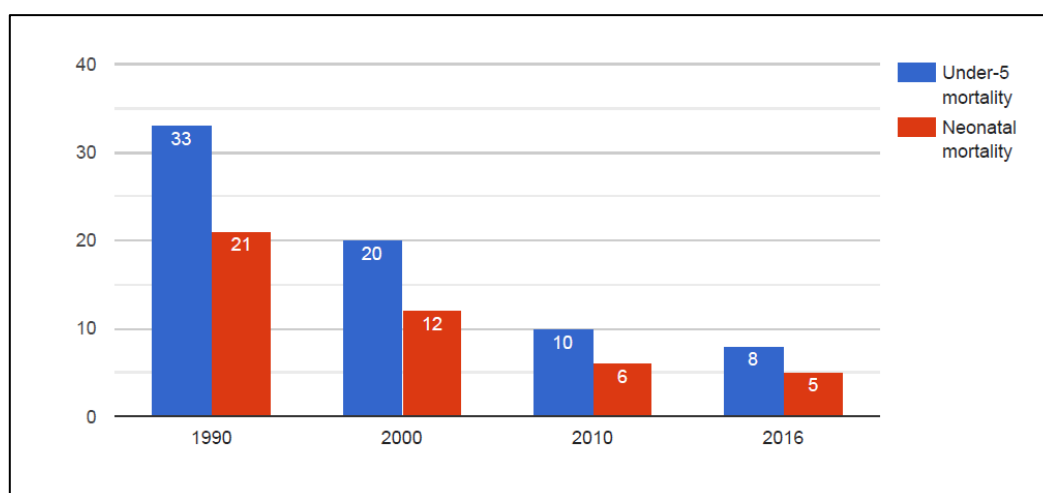


## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

### 4.7. Health

Life expectancy in Lebanon is 79 years.<sup>166</sup> Between 1990–2016 there was a downward trends in the under-5 mortality rates (deaths per 1,000 live births) and neonatal mortality rates (deaths per 1,000 live births) (Figure 9).<sup>167</sup>

Figure 9. Trends in under-5 mortality and neonatal mortality rates 1990-2016



(Source: <https://www.emro.who.int/child-adolescent-health/data-statistics/lebanon.html>)

As seen in Table 2, data taken from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation shows the top ten causes of death in Lebanon in 2009 and 2019.<sup>168</sup>

Table 2. Top ten causes of deaths in Lebanon 2009 - 2019

Top 10 causes of deaths per 100k in 2019 and rate change 2009-2019, all ages combined	2009 rank	2019 rank
Ischemic heart disease	1	1
Stroke	2	2
Lung cancer	3	3
Hypertensive heart disease	4	4
Alzheimer's disease	6	5
Chronic kidney disease	5	6
Breast cancer	8	7
Colorectal cancer	10	8
Lower respiratory infect	7	9
Diabetes	11	10

<sup>166</sup> Please see: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/lebanon/>

<sup>167</sup> Please see: <https://www.emro.who.int/child-adolescent-health/data-statistics/lebanon.html>

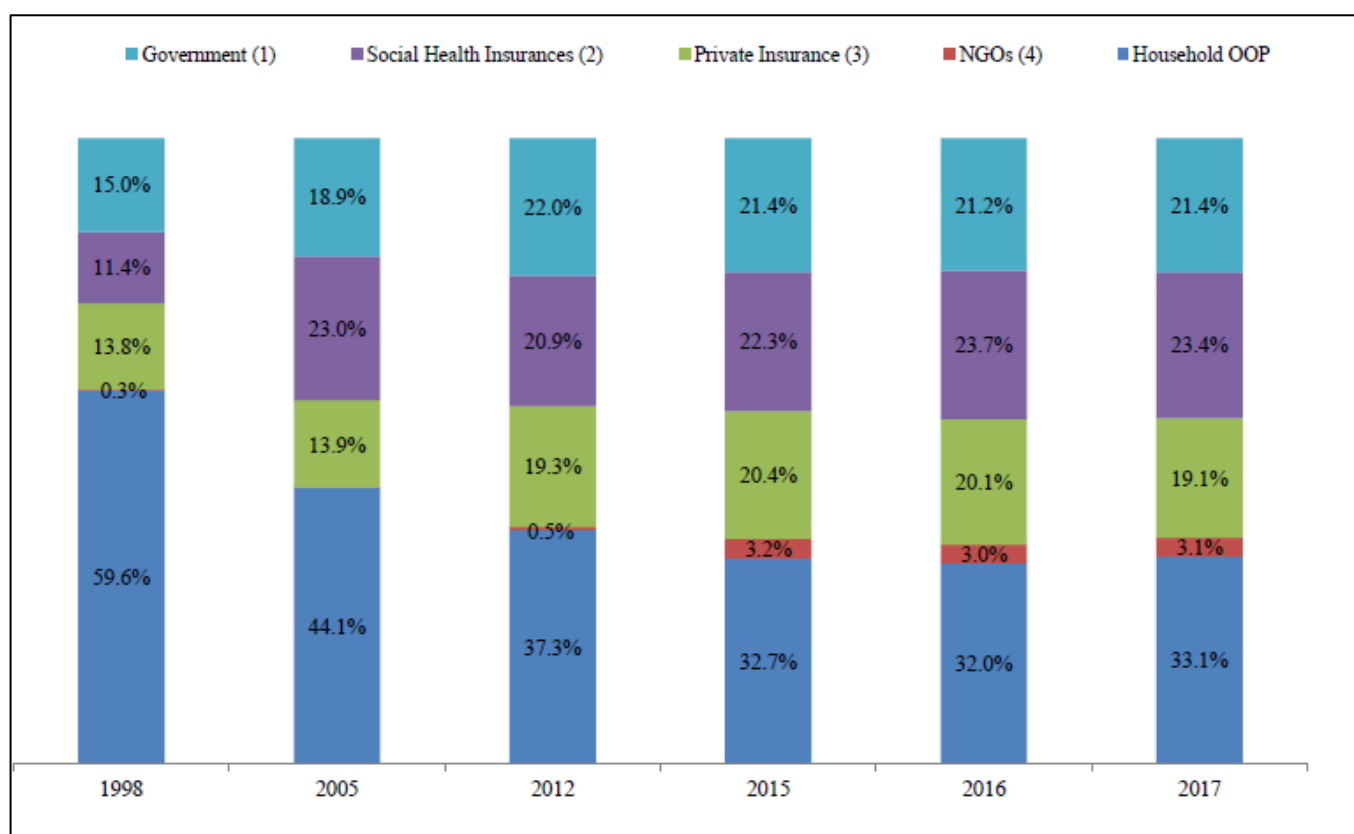
<sup>168</sup> The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation 2023 available at: <https://www.healthdata.org/research-analysis/health-by-location/profiles/lebanon>

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

(Source: The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation 2023)

In Lebanon, 80% of hospitals are privately run.<sup>169</sup> Alongside Government managed hospitals, different religious denominations also offer hospital care, although it is understood they are mostly open to providing services to any denomination. In 2018 there were 149 hospitals, of which 119 were private and 30 run by the Ministry of Health.<sup>170</sup> In 2021, hospitals provided a total of 27.3 beds per 10,000 inhabitants which was considered high in comparison to other countries.<sup>171</sup> This high reliance on private medical care is illustrated in Figure 10, extracted from a 2019 Ministry of Health report.<sup>172</sup> The graph illustrates however, that the share of Government provision of health care is increasing.<sup>173</sup> UNRWA directly provides health care to Palestinian refugees and UNHCR is supporting access to health care for Syrian and other refugees.

Figure 10. Distribution of health care expenditure by financing agent for years that accounts are available, 1998 to 2017



(Source: Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Health 2019)

<sup>169</sup> European Institute of the Mediterranean 2022

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Health 2019

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.* Note: OOP denotes care paid for care out of own pocket.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

According to UNHCR,<sup>174</sup> the deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon has negatively impacted the access to healthcare and medicines for Lebanese and refugee populations. Lack of reliable electricity supply, fuel and water are impacting the operations of hospitals and health facilities and the spiralling and unstable currency exchange rates and cash flow restrictions are resulting in declining stocks of medicines.<sup>175</sup>

In part, the WHO<sup>176</sup> attribute the weakening healthcare system to the emigration of healthcare workers as a result of decreasing salaries: the national minimum wage fell to just \$43 in 2021 and the average nurses wage was \$75 for a 40-hour week. Estimates suggest 20% of nurses and 40% of doctors have now left the country and in 2021, many hospitals reduced their bed capacity by 50% or more.<sup>177</sup>

A household study<sup>178</sup> conducted in 2021 found between 50% and 70% of surveyed households across Lebanon reported not having access to health services with primary reasons being costs of medical services and transportation to reach health facilities. The study<sup>179</sup> also found girls and women facing particular barriers including lack of information on services available and distances to reach health facilities. The study<sup>180</sup> also acknowledged the critical need for mental health and psychosocial support, especially for women.

A report published by UNICEF in 2015,<sup>181</sup> highlighted the severe consequences of inadequate assistance for children with disabilities, the challenges in accessing services, and the isolation and stigma they experienced. The authors also noted the difficulty in sourcing adequate data on specific needs for children with disabilities in Lebanon. A more recent report of 2023<sup>182</sup> also acknowledged difficulty gathering information on people with disabilities. The study<sup>183</sup> noted how disability is generally a taboo subject with people with disabilities often facing discrimination and marginalisation. It further revealed the particular challenges females and children with disabilities face due to lack of accessibility, suitable transportation and appropriately skilled service providers. In addition, women

---

<sup>174</sup> Please see: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/lebanon-factsheet-5270>

<sup>175</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>176</sup> Please see: <https://www.emro.who.int/emhj-volume-29-2023/volume-29-issue-3/weakening-of-the-lebanese-health-sector.html>

<sup>177</sup> GBV Working Group 2023

<sup>178</sup> REACH 2022

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> UNICEF 2015

<sup>182</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

and girls with a disability are reportedly<sup>184</sup> facing greater exposure to violence, including gender-based violence, exploitation, coercion, and abuse.

#### **4.8. Education**

The amended Law 686 (August 2011) increased the age of compulsory education from 12 to 15 years (to grade 9)<sup>185</sup> and it is understood a new law will extend this further to grade 12. However, the economic crisis in Lebanon is seriously impacting education. According to Education International,<sup>186</sup> teachers are reported to be in 'survival mode' with salaries averaging only \$40 a month. Since December 2020, an estimated 60,000 teachers have participated in ongoing strikes leaving many schools barely functioning or completely closed.<sup>187</sup> As a result, an estimated 350,000 Lebanese and 170,000 Syrian students are without access to education.<sup>188</sup>

According to UNICEF,<sup>189</sup> because of COVID-19, in 2020 and 2021 more than 1.2 million school-age children were affected by long periods of school closure. In addition, with numerous schools being destroyed or damaged in the August 2020 Beirut Port explosions, and ongoing teachers' strikes, UNICEF is fearful that an 'estimated 440,000 school-age refugee children and an unprecedented 260,000 of school-age Lebanese children might not get back to school.'<sup>190</sup>

Literacy rates have increased from 89.6% in 2007 to 95.3% in 2019.<sup>191</sup> During our desk review we were unable to find any comparable data for 2022/23. According to a 2023 UNICEF report<sup>192</sup>, families are struggling to meet even the most basic needs and as a coping strategy, a reported 1 in 10 families are sending children out to work. This is impacting children's education with a total of 15% of households having stopped their children from going to school, an increase of 10% since 2022.<sup>193</sup> Fifty-two percent of households have reportedly reduced spending on education in comparison to 38% the previous year.<sup>194</sup> The UNICEF report<sup>195</sup> goes on to say 3 in 10 Syrian households have at least one child who does not attend school due to costs of transportation and educational materials, or schools not accepting them.

---

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> UNICEF 2015

<sup>186</sup> Please see: <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/27295:education-in-lebanon-a-crisis-with-no-end-in-sight>

<sup>187</sup> Please see: <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/27295:education-in-lebanon-a-crisis-with-no-end-in-sight>

<sup>188</sup> Please see: <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/27295:education-in-lebanon-a-crisis-with-no-end-in-sight>

<sup>189</sup> UNICEF 2021d

<sup>190</sup> UNICEF 2021d:7

<sup>191</sup> Please see: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/LBN/lebanon/literacy-rate>

<sup>192</sup> UNICEF 2023

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

#### 4.9. Shelter

The multiple crises facing Lebanon continues to place a strain on vulnerable households in relation to accessing and retaining adequate and affordable housing. This is resulting in overcrowding in poor urban households.<sup>196</sup> There has been a 'significant impact'<sup>197</sup> on the rental market resulting in increased rents for all sectors of the population and particularly affecting the 31% of 'vulnerable'<sup>198</sup> Lebanese families and 90% of Syrian refugees who live in rented accommodation. These households now face the fear of inability to pay rent and possible eviction.<sup>199</sup>

A household survey conducted in 2021,<sup>200</sup> reported many households living in accommodation that was sub-standard and even dangerous. Findings suggest migrants are in particularly vulnerable situations with 10% of assessed households living in garages and 10% in tents.

### 5. A research framework and methodology



<sup>196</sup> Please see: <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/shelter>

<sup>197</sup> GBV Working Group:12

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*

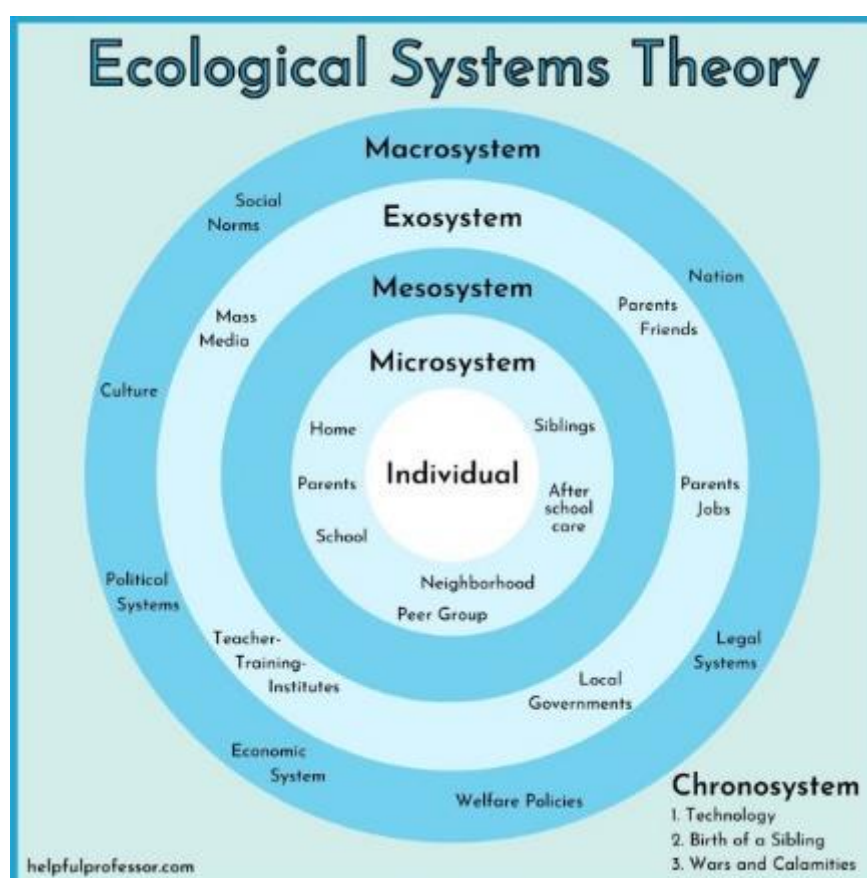
<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> REACH 2022

### 5.1. Research framework

Our research framework was informed by international child rights conventions as well as socio-ecological models such as that of Bronfenbrenner<sup>201</sup> illustrated in the graphic below (Figure 11). This considers the impact of inter-relating factors on children and families at an individual interpersonal level (microsystem), structural level including family and community level (meso and exo systems), and institutional level (macrosystem). We have added an additional consideration to our research which is the influence of international normative frameworks and other influences within the macrosystem.

Figure 11. A graphic illustration of Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological systems theory



(Source: Drew 2023)

Based on this model, research questions used with respondents remained broad in order to extract information from participants about the range of factors positively and negatively influencing and impacting family life. The research framework also considered findings of previously published

<sup>201</sup> Bronfenbrenner 1977; Bronfenbrenner 1986; SOS Children's Villages International 2023

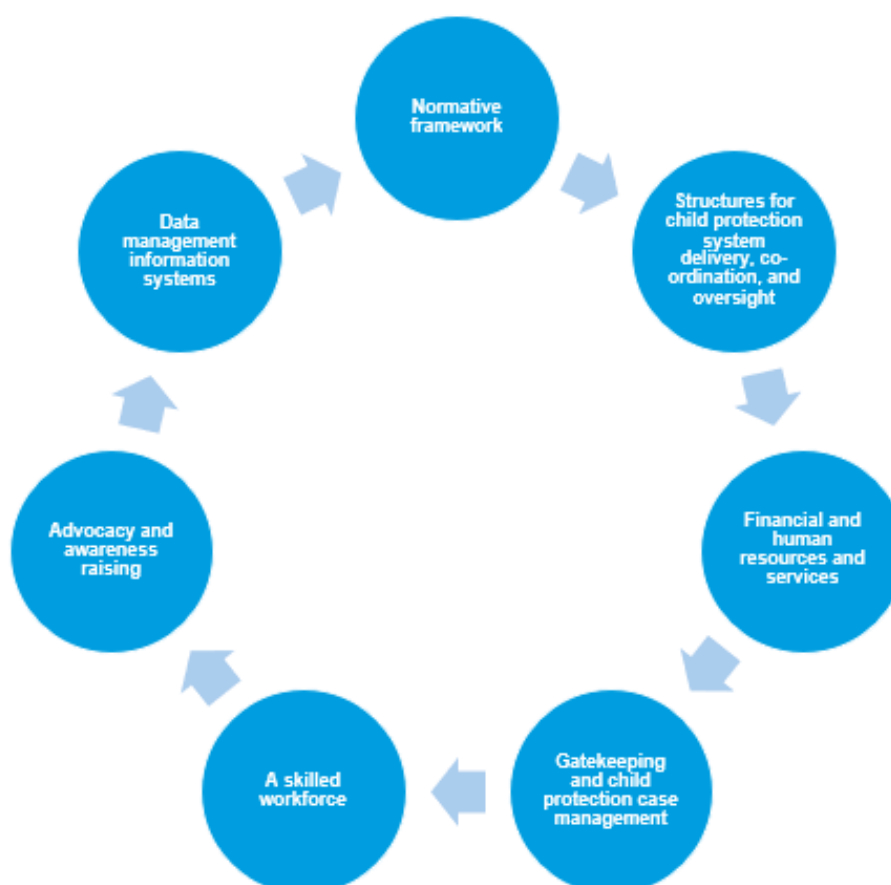


## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

literature documenting factors relevant to child-parents separation as well as contextual information in relation to Lebanon.

Furthermore, the research framework considered the necessary components of a child protection system. A well-functioning child protection system also requires a coordinated and holistic approach to investing in, developing, and sustaining, all the necessary components as illustrated in Figure 12. This includes a suitable normative framework and programmes built on rigorous data collection and analysis, as well as suitable structures for the delivery of services that help mitigate the multi-sectoral factors placing children at risk and families in difficulty. It requires a well-resourced and skilled workforce, and coordinated, inter-sectoral partnership working between the State, families, communities, NGOs, and the private sector, in order to build a protective environment for children.

Figure 12. Components of a national child protection system



Utilising an examination of the national child protection system in Lebanon, we also adopted a research focus that sought evidence and understanding of how 'gatekeeping'<sup>202</sup> works in the country including decision making in the best interest of a child.

## 5.2. Research methodology

### 5.2.1. Research participants

Invitations were issued to potential research participants through the dissemination of age-appropriate Information Sheets. Research participants in Lebanon included:

- 40 children aged 13 – 15 years old living with their own families (in vulnerable<sup>203</sup> circumstances) including 5 children with special needs.
- 25 young people aged 17 to 21 years old who had left alternative care (care leavers).
- 36 adult members of families living in vulnerable situations.
- 14 professional stakeholders including social workers, child protection workers, alternative care providers, lawyers, and family support service providers.
- 23 key stakeholders who responded to an online survey requesting information on reasons children are placed in alternative care and access to support services.

### 5.2.2. Desk review

A series of desk reviews were conducted by means of a systematic exploration of academic and other web-based databases and search engines<sup>204</sup> as well as additional reports and other materials. This included a review of the socio-economic and cultural environment, the functioning of the national child protection system, and provision of alternative care in Lebanon. Further desk reviews sought information on participatory research methodology, prevention of family separation, gatekeeping, and family strengthening.

---

<sup>202</sup> Csaky and Gale 2015

<sup>203</sup> For the purposes of the research, a definition of 'vulnerable' was extracted from: Bauer & Wiezorek (2016) Vulnerable Families: Reflections on a Difficult Category. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, Vol 4, pp.11-28.

<sup>204</sup> Including Science Direct, Wiley online, Taylor & Francis online, Springerlink, JSTOR and Sage Journals, UNICEF, the Better Care Network and other agency websites, Google, and Google Scholar search engines.

### 5.2.3. Development of participatory research methodology

Article 12 (1) of the UNCRC requires,

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

In recognition of the importance of children's right to participate in decisions affecting their lives, and indeed for allowing anyone to play an integral role in decisions that impact their lives, it was deemed important to try and achieve as high a degree of participation as possible during our research<sup>205</sup>. To this end, children and young people were not only invited to join qualitative participatory research workshops, but efforts were made to engage them in the design of the research questions and methodology.

Creating a caring, safe, and trusting atmosphere when conducting participatory research with children and young people is essential.<sup>206</sup> Rather than workshops being conducted by the Lead International Researcher through the services of a translator, a national researcher from the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth, Dr Joumana Stephan Yeretzian, facilitated the workshops with children and young people. She was assisted by two research assistants.

- **Research co-design workshops.**

In recognition of children as 'competent social actors'<sup>207</sup> who should be 'actively involved in shaping their own social worlds',<sup>208</sup> steps were taken to achieve as high a degree of participation as possible during our research<sup>209</sup>. To this end, in order to highlight their voices, and seek their knowledge and ideas, children and young people, were not only invited to join qualitative participatory research workshops, but efforts were made to engage them in the design of the research questions and methodology. This included a series of co-design workshops with one group of children aged 13-15 years old living with their families and one group of care leavers aged 17 to 21 years old in each of two countries, El Salvador and Lebanon.

To ensure the participants involved in the co-design workshops were fully informed about the research and what their participation would mean, they were first invited to an Introduction Meeting (one meeting for each group. During these meetings participants were told about the research aims,

---

<sup>205</sup> Arnstein 1959

<sup>206</sup> Welty and Lundy 2013

<sup>207</sup> Gilchrist et al. 2013:577. See also Davidson 2017

<sup>208</sup> Gilchrist et al. 2013:577. See also Davidson 2017

<sup>209</sup> Arnstein 1959

why it was being undertaken and explained what their participation in the co-design workshops would involve. They were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and gain as much information necessary to help them decide whether or not to participate.

During the co-design workshops children and young people worked alongside the national researchers to develop a set of research questions and qualitative participatory research methods. The result of the input of children and young people in these research co-design workshops was a set of research questions (below) and participatory research methods that could then be used with other children and young people.

Question 1: What makes children/young people in this family happy when they are at home? (children and young people had drawn a home with a family in it)

Question 2: What makes children/young in this family worried or unhappy when they are at home?

Question 3: What makes the adults in the family feel happy, strong and united when they are at home?

Question 4: What makes the adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home?

Question 5: What is needed to help families be happy, strong and united?

It is important to note that the questions do not ask research participants to provide information about their personal experience, but to represent what happens to children, young people, and other adult family members within their communities and country. Furthermore, this process helped inform the research questions that were used in workshops with adult family members.

The results of the co-design workshops also helped form the content of a set of Qualitative Participatory Research Handbooks that guided the implementation of participatory research workshops with children and young people in other countries.

- **Research workshops with children and young people**

Following the development of the research questions and methodology, a series of participatory research workshops involving two further groups of children and two groups of young people were held in two locations, San Vicente, a small town situated approximately 62 kms from San Salvador, and in Santa Tecla, a district of San Salvador.

The workshop methodology employed a series of creative exercises including the drawing of a house containing a family upon which children and young people placing answers on post-its to the questions regarding what makes children, young people and adult family members worried and unhappy or happy, strong and united (Figure 13).

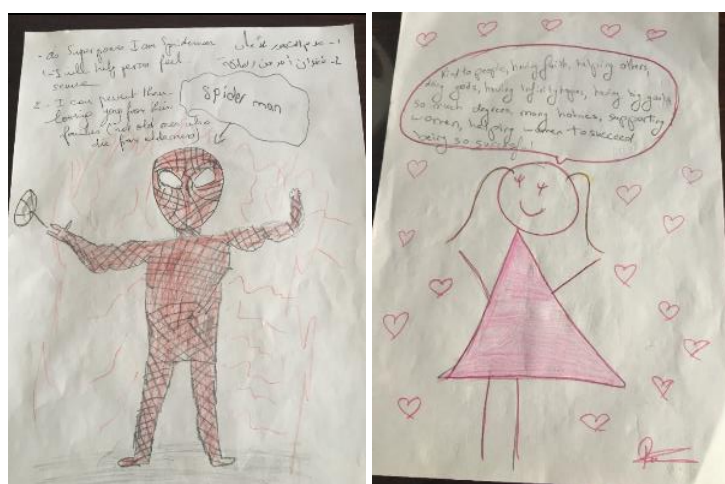
*Figure 13. Examples of drawings from workshops with children and young people*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon



In order to ask children about their ideas for solutions to the challenges families are facing, they were asked to think of themselves as a superhero and to depict this in drawings (Figure 14). They were then asked to write three things they would do with their superpowers to help families.

Figure 14. Examples of children's superhero drawings



A problem and solution tree exercise was used with young people in order to gain and rank their ideas for solutions. Young people placed their post-its containing answers regarding what made young people and adult family members worried or unhappy on the trunk of a tree (Figure 15). Their solutions were written on the 'leaves'.

Figure 15. Example of a problem and solution tree

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon



Young people were asked to group the solutions into different categories e.g., money, health, education and then to rank them in order of importance. Participants presented their 'trees' to the full group and were offered the opportunity to briefly discuss their solutions.

At the end of each workshop, participants were invited to ask questions or asked if they wanted to discuss topics that had arisen during their time together. Workshops always finished with thanks and an energiser.

### • **Adult family workshops**

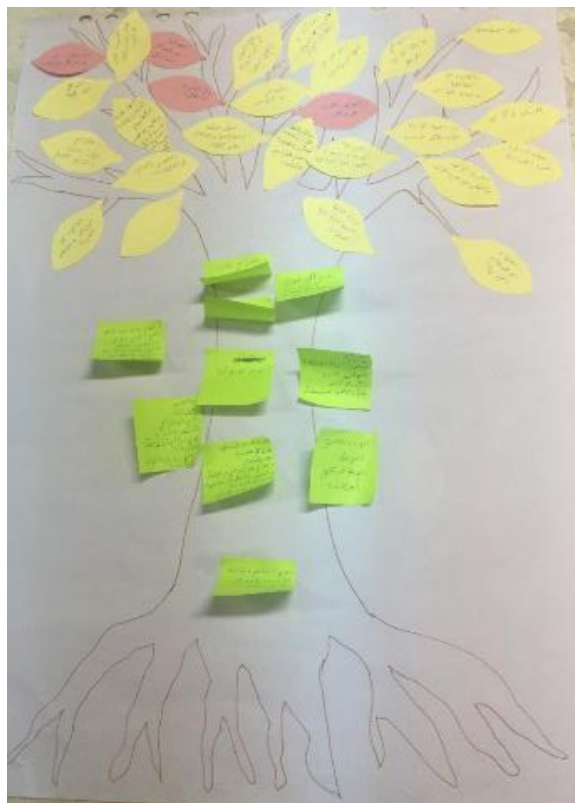
A total of two workshops were held with adult family members in Beirut and two workshops in Bherssaf. Similar participatory research exercises were used to those developed by, and for, children and young people including drawings of homes containing a family and problem and solution trees (Figure 16). The research questions for adult family members included:

- Question 1: What makes families feel happy, strong and united when they are at home?
- Question 2: What makes families feel worried or unhappy when they are at home?
- Question 4. What is needed to help families remain happy, strong and united?



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 16. Example of a problem and solution tree



At the end of each workshop, participants were invited to ask questions or if they wished, to discuss topics that had arisen during their time together.

- **Semi-structured interviews**

A total of 14 semi-structured interviews with professional stakeholders (interviewees) were completed. The principal research questions focussed on the reasons children lose parental care and are placed in alternative care as well as the functioning of the child protection system. Interviewees included social workers, lawyers, and alternative care providers.

- **Online survey**

An online survey for professionals working to support, care and protect children was designed utilising the Qualtrics<sup>210</sup> data software programme. The questions have been designed to elicit information as to why children are being separated from their family and placed in alternative care, different types of services and support available to families, and the degree to which they are available.

<sup>210</sup> Please see: <https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/>

#### 5.2.4. Research process and ethics

##### **Informed participation**

It was important that participation in the research was fully informed and voluntary. All prospective participants were provided with age appropriate Information Sheets when first invited to be part of the research.

##### **Informed consent**

Age and language appropriate consent forms were prepared in Arabic. At the start of each workshop, the content of the Information Sheets were discussed and content explained. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before signing the consent form. A strong emphasis was placed on participants understanding they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. This process was also repeated at the start of each semi-structured interview.

##### **Confidentiality and data protection**

Research participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity, unless information that suggested risk of harm to a child was revealed. All data used in reporting has been anonymised, and care taken not to reveal the identity of participants. Workshop participants were asked not to share personal stories, name anyone in any discussions, or share participant's information outside of the workshops. National researchers and the translator accompanying the international researcher each signed a third party confidentiality agreement and agreed to adhere to SOS Children's Villages International data protection guidelines.

Recordings were made using an encrypted recording device and uploaded to secure password protected folders held only by the international lead researcher. All information received on paper, e.g. consent forms, has been digitalised. All data has been stored in an electronic format and held securely in password protected computer files.. All personal data will be destroyed within three years of the termination of the research programme.

##### **Ethics and child safeguarding**

All elements of the research process were designed and conducted in a manner guided by professional standards and ethical principles.<sup>211</sup> Ethical clearance to conduct the research was sought and granted from universities in all participating countries.

All efforts were made to ensure participation in the research did not lead to harm, stigma, re-victimisation or discrimination. Careful consideration was given to the sensitive nature of the topic under consideration i.e., events that may cause distress in the lives of participants. In this regard, the

---

<sup>211</sup> See for example, Social Research Association (2020)

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

study was designed in a way that did not ask workshop participants about their own experience. Through careful observation, researchers did their best to pick up on cues indicating any distress. Ground rules developed by participants at the start of each workshop also highlighted issues such as respect, trust, the importance of being able to talk freely and being listened to. All efforts were made to make sure the workshops were safe and welcoming. The physical environment was important with efforts to use light, airy and spacious rooms. Food and other refreshments were supplied, and children and young people were given the opportunity to go out and play during breaks. No other adults except the researchers and a translator were present in the workshops.

The issue of child safeguarding was taken with the utmost seriousness and informed the design of an ethical research process that took all steps possible to ensure the rights and dignity of participants. An SOS Children's Villages social worker, or equivalent, (a 'responsible adult') was present at the same location as the research workshops with children and young people. They were available if any participant wanted to speak with them about an issue concerning them. If a researcher become concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person during the workshop or, something was revealed that suggested a child or young person was at risk of harm, the 'responsible adult' was informed. In the event of such disclosure, SOS child safeguarding procedures were to be followed. Children and young people were informed of this process in the Information Sheets as well as it being explained to them at the start of each workshop.

An additional room was made available on the same premises as the workshops and designated a quiet and safe space children and young could use it if they felt they needed time out alone.

### Facilitation of participation and remuneration

Care was taken to balance the available time researchers had to complete the field work with efforts not to disrupt the lives of participants. This included consideration of the times and length of workshops. All out of pocket expenses for participants such as transportation were covered. Children and young people were offered non-monetary remuneration in the form of gift cards. Monetary vouchers were given to adult family members.

### Reliability and rigour

Careful attention has been given to reliability and rigor throughout the process of generating, recording, analysing and presenting data. This included careful research design and implementation with consideration of appropriate sequencing; triangulation of data; use of varied and standardised methods for collating data, careful consideration of respondent selection; careful transcription; and awareness of researcher and respondent bias.

### Research analysis



All interviews were transcribed and collated into a word document of which, in-depth reading was completed. All the information provided on post-it notes by children, young people and adult family members during the research workshops were transposed into digital word documents. These documents were imported into the NVIVO 11 data analysis programme<sup>212</sup> and through a text query process, used to extract and collate 'instances' of similarities (and variances) to inform emerging and core themes. Linkages were identified in highlighted text and illustrated in word clouds and tree maps. The primary research generated complex and nuanced qualitative data.

## 6. Research findings

### 6.1. An overview of findings: reasons children are placed in alternative care

Our research had the primary aim of determining reasons children are placed in alternative care in Lebanon. Following an analysis of the research data, a strong correlation has been identified between all the information provided by the different participants: children, young people, family members, and professional key informants. This chapter provides a summary of the research findings and an understanding of some of the drivers that may lead to child-parents' separation in Lebanon.

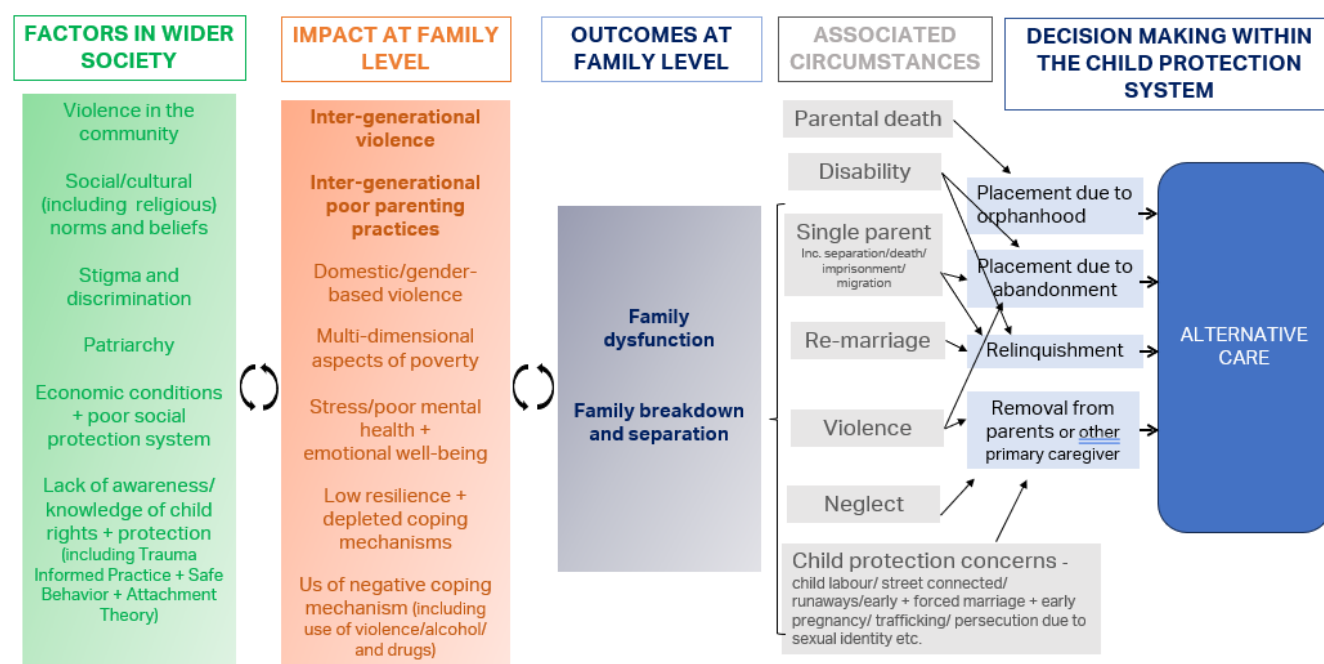
Overall our findings highlight two distinct influences related to placement of children in alternative care. The first is the impact of the wider society families live in that influence outcomes and circumstances within a family and can subsequently lead to children being placed in alternative care (Figure 16). Due to lack of published and reliable data on the reasons children have been placed in alternative care, it is not possible to report on the ratio of the different causes that lead to placements. The second is the functioning of the national child protection system in which gatekeeping decisions are made. In particular, we consider one of the most important findings is the need to urgently address the inter-generational aspect of violence, and of poor parenting ability, that are contributing to the perpetuation of family breakdown and separation (Figure 17).

---

<sup>212</sup> Please see: <https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 17. Drivers associated with placement of children in alternative care



Violence against children is described by UNICEF as taking many forms, 'including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation.'<sup>213</sup> Analysis of information provided by children, young people, adult family members and interviewees, suggests violence, family breakdown and dysfunction are aspects that can lead to placement of children in alternative care in Lebanon. A number of factors are understood to be contributing to this situation. This includes the information we gathered from research participants who noted the absence of paternal love and/or lack of attachment and bonding between parents and children in some households. They realise this situation can also contribute to dysfunction within the family and breakdown of family relationships that may even escalate into the use of violence. Interviewees believe this can be an inter-generational issue and noted how some parents who themselves lacked a happy, secure, protected, and loving childhood, struggle with parenting responsibilities and to care for their own children. Of further concern, are findings that reveal a perpetuation of inter-generational violence. It is believed that violence can become a learned behaviour and resultant adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)<sup>214</sup> may also have a lasting impact including on parenting ability across generations.

<sup>213</sup> Please see: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/>

<sup>214</sup> Please see: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next>; SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

Children are also being sent towards, or are placing themselves in, risky situations which then brings them to the attention of police and child protection services. For example, children who run away from home due to violence or family breakdown, and become street connected, as well as those involved in child labour.

Interviewees also spoke about the impact of living in a patriarchal society and the correlation between domestic violence and abuse of girls and women. They think many women remain in abusive situations that also places their children at risk. If domestic violence does lead to separation, women can be left struggling to raise their children alone thus putting them at risk of losing them, especially due issues related to poverty, and their placement into what is known as 'social care'.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, households are impacted by violence that has been experienced across Lebanon due to years of civil war as well as conflict with Israel.

Children are living in alternative care because they have been abandoned or they are orphans. Children with disabilities are being placed in care when parents are unable, or do not want to, provide the care they need.

Of particular significance are issues related to poverty including lack of access to services and a seriously inadequate social protection system. For example, we have observed how this situation is a major factor contributing to many children being placed in 'social care' institutions. Institutions providing 'social care' include 'boarding schools' which are not only being used by parents to access education for their children, but also because they offer food, clothing, medical care etc. Many families are now struggling particularly as a result of the severe economic and political crisis the country is now experiencing.

Research findings also suggest a correlation between the daily challenges families are facing such as providing food, adequate shelter, health care, paying bills etc. and poor or no access to services and support, with stress, anger, and tension within households. As a result, these ongoing challenges can exacerbate feelings of distress, anger, and for some, an inability to cope. This situation can contribute to family breakdown and escalate into violence. In some case parents truly believe the best place for their children is in a residential institution where they will be fed and kept warm. Participants in adult family workshop members for example, spoke about their despair in not being able to provide for their children in the way they would like.

---

<sup>215</sup> Child Frontiers 2017



## 6.2. Drivers contributing to placement in alternative care

### 6.2.1. Violence in the home

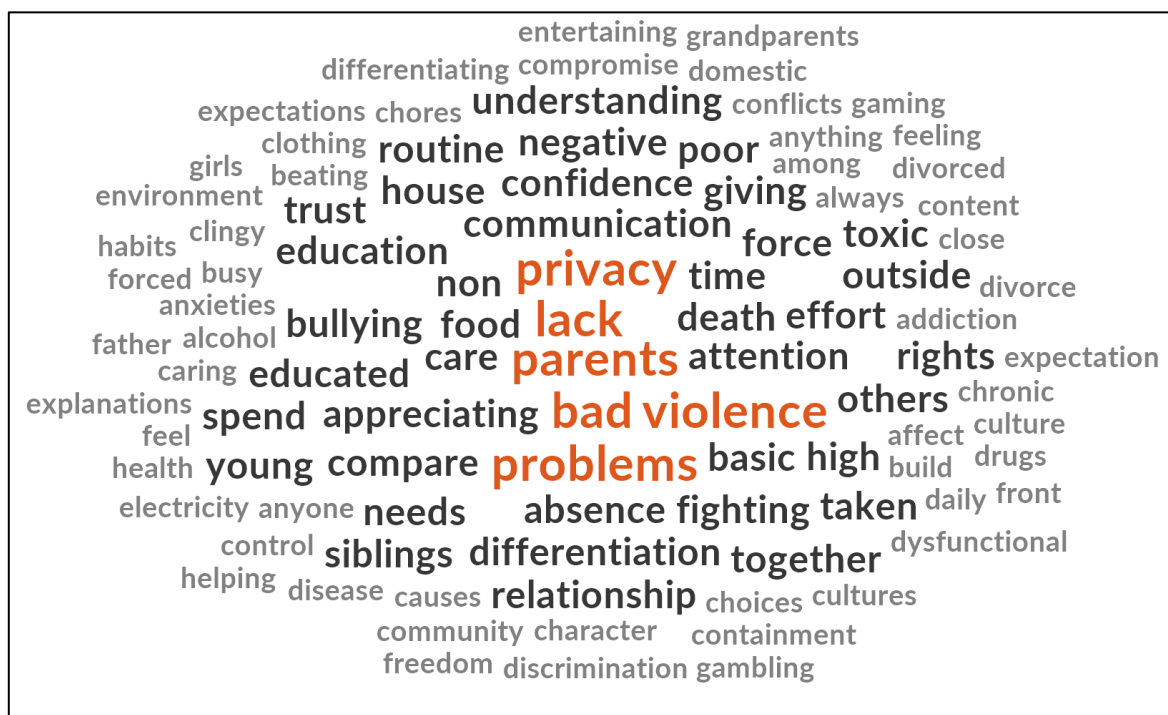
Violence manifests itself in all forms of physical, sexual, and emotional violence inflicted on children as well as between parents and other adults in the family. As seen in Figures 18 and 19, when children and young people answered the question, what makes children or young people unhappy or worried at home, words such as 'violence', 'beating', 'fighting', 'screaming', 'bullying', and 'fearing', 'were used. Other words that related to such behaviour included 'conflicts', and 'punishment'. The word 'bad' frequently referred to 'relationships' and 'living arrangements'. It is noted that all the pictures of families drawn by children and young people consisted of figures symbolising a mother, a father and children.

Figure 18. Results of workshops with children: What makes children feel unhappy and worried when at home?



## Lebanon

Figure 19. Results of workshops with young people: What makes young people feel unhappy and worried when at home?



Children and young people's answers include being recipients and witnesses of violence. The word 'parents' was frequently used and referred to harsh or abusive behaviour experienced or witnessed by children and young people as well as fighting between parents. Children mentioned violence in the home more frequently than young people. Overall references to violence comprised approximately a third of all the answers provided by children. These responses recorded below do not include information from the workshop with children with special needs as they preferred not to answer the question 'what makes children unhappy or worried at home?' Words relating to emotional neglect, poverty, and other experiences in the family home are discussed later in this report.

Below are some of the responses relating to **violence in the home** provided by children and young people (Figure 20).

Figure 20. What makes children and young people worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people)

### What makes children worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children)

*fear from violence*

*violence against children*

*violence*

beating

verbal violence and touching

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

harassment  
bullying  
being beaten by the parents  
verbal violence and touching  
problems of screaming  
punishment  
parents abusing their children  
beating the children  
screaming and anger  
fighting with parents  
fights  
physical violence between siblings  
don't let the children live in horror because of tyrants  
making the children live in horror  
children doing something and fearing the reaction of their parents  
bad treatment  
fighting in the family  
parents beating children if they have bad grades at school  
parents should not yell at their children nor beat their children  
quarrels between parents because this might affect the children  
screaming and fighting between parents in the night and early morning when the children are asleep  
throwing things in the house

### **What makes young people worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by young people)**

screaming  
verbal and physical violence  
violence  
neglect  
beating  
humiliation  
swearing  
bullying  
addiction drugs, alcohol, gaming, gambling  
do not feel safe  
domestic violence  
fighting in front of the children  
fighting among parents



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

*toxic relationships between parents*  
*dysfunctional families*

Conversely, when asked what makes children and young people happy when they are at home, the most frequently used words related to having parents that loved them and trusted them as well as protection, and respect. Children wrote about, "*not being beaten*", "*no-one screaming in the house*", "*understanding each other*", "*having supportive parents*", and "*feeling secure*". One child wrote about not wanting "*concerns or fear in the house*". Children with special needs expressed their ideas about different family members (biological and those not related but identified as 'family') and being happy when there are good relationships between them.

Figure 21 contains some of the answers of children and young people when asked 'what makes adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home?' that relate to violence and abusive behaviour.

Figure 21. What makes adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people)

### **What makes adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children and young people)**

*violence in the house between the father and the mother*

*parents fighting and quarrels*

*violence*

*sexual abuse*

*to be dominated*

*unfaithful marriage*

*thinking you are better than others in the same family e.g. father treats the mother with arrogance*

*adultery*

*quarrels and fighting*

*possessiveness and controlling*

*early marriage*

*arranged marriage*

*forced marriage*

*adultery*

*forcing the woman to get married*

*shouting and problems between partners*

*physical abuse between partners or children*

From these results it is apparent that not only are children and young people witnessing violence in the home, but they are very aware of the impact violence is having on adult relationships.

## Lebanon

Figure 22 shows information shared by adult family members who were asked, 'what makes families worried or unhappy or worried when they are at home?'. Words include 'violence'. Words such as 'lack' mostly refer to factors associated with poverty, and other experiences in the family home which are discussed in another section of this chapter.

Figure 22. What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by adult family members)



Figure 23 illustrates some of the specific answers when adult family members were asked, 'what makes families worried or unhappy or worried when they are at home?'

Figure 23. What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by adult family members)

### What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by adult family members)

*violence*

*violence the father who is violent to others and tyrannically and does not understand the others*

*family violence leading to the family being destroyed*

*shouting in front of each other and not convincing the other of something*

conflict between parents

*lots of problems and fights of parents who act irresponsibly*

not getting along with each other

*tyrannical behaviour and controlling life of others*

one person will be dominant of the others



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

shouting  
control of one another  
continuous fights of parents in front of the children  
adultery  
lack of honesty and screaming without understanding each other  
continuous shouting and disrespect  
family violence  
adultery  
oppression of the mother by the father  
family violence and neglect  
psychological distress  
being bullied

In contrast, the words most frequently used in relation to what makes families happy when they are at home, as told by adults, related to love, respect, understanding, health, care and honesty between family members as well as being together. Participants wrote *"not to shout and have quarrels"*, *"not to beat someone"*, *"not having selfishness and tyranny"*, and *"tranquility"*.

When asked why children are placed in alternative care, all interviewees cited violence as a cause.

*"Yes there is abuse toward children. Especially verbal violence. I think there is physical violence but we don't see it. Also in this country we hide violence."*

*"Child abuse, also it is getting more. We have more cases now. Because of the stress that people are living with."*

*"...families they are using violence in the home and some abuse as well."*

*"...children at risk...In their society or environment, they are more prone to risks of violence or sexual issues."*

*[there is] "violence against children and against the women."*

*"We see a lot of children who are at risk of violence."*

*"...and also when children witness domestic violence the impact is the same."*

Interviewees said violence manifests itself between adults in the family as well as all forms of physical, sexual and emotional violence inflicted on children. Some realise that being victims or witnesses of



violence can have a serious and long lasting impact on a child's mental health and well-being. As discussed later in the report, such experiences can also affect the way they interact in society and parent in the future.<sup>216</sup>

### 6.2.2. Physical violence

As seen in the workshop findings above, children and young people wrote about different forms of violence that is experienced including physical violence. This was further acknowledged by interviewees.

*"...our families – I don't know how much you can say this in an accurate way, but they are not so much aware of their behavior and the attitude how they are raising of what they are doing in their families they are using violence in the home and some abuse as well."*

A 2016 UNICEF study,<sup>217</sup> found 57% of children with Lebanese nationality, 82% of Palestinian child refugees, 77% of Palestinian child refugees from Syria, and 65% of Syrian child refugees, aged 1-14 years had experienced at least one form of psychological or physical punishment inflicted by household members in the month preceding the survey. It was thought numbers could have been higher but deficiencies in national data, and families and communities hiding abuse and exploitation, were issues related to accuracy of data and under-reporting.

A 2018 study, said 10,825 cases of violence, neglect, abuse and exploitation had been received in the previous year by child protection case management services in Lebanon, 'of which approximately 90% were assessed as medium and high risk.'<sup>218</sup> The report went on to say 54% of children of Lebanese descent had experienced at least one incident of, physical abuse (54%), and 30% had witnessed violence (30%).<sup>219</sup> Violence as a means of disciplining children was also a common occurrence.<sup>220</sup>

Reports<sup>221</sup> have also drawn attention to the impact of enforced lock down of households during COVID and how this exacerbated the presence of violence in the home: *"Violence in the home increased during COVID 19. we saw a lot of higher numbers of calls of the hotline of the police"*.

The use of **violence to discipline** children was raised during the research.

---

<sup>216</sup> Alliance for the Rights of Children, Adolescents and Youth in Lebanon 2022.

<sup>217</sup> UNICEF 2016

<sup>218</sup> El Jardali et al, 2018:6

<sup>219</sup> ibid.

<sup>220</sup> El Jardali et al, 2018

<sup>221</sup> Alliance for the Rights of Children, Adolescents and Youth in Lebanon 2022.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

*"So to be a responsible person I should raise my voice in this situation, I should slap you, I should make a fear as motivation to create a responsible person."* (interviewee explaining how some parents think they should discipline their children)

*"But on parenting, given that sixty percent of the children have been subject to some form of violent discipline it tells you that there is a need for better parenting in this culture. To change the attitudes toward discipline in general and parenting more broadly."*

*"Social norms this is a country that has a general acceptance of violence. Which is interesting that while in the last MICs we had while I think eighty-five percent believe that violence is not a good form of disciplining a child, we still had sixty percent of children being subject to violence."*

A recent study<sup>222</sup> commissioned by UNICEF Lebanon, explored attitudes towards violence against children. Violence was thought by some to be 'a tool for child discipline.'<sup>223</sup> Though 'largely seen as an unacceptable but justifiable behaviour',<sup>224</sup> respondents thought violence contributes 'to the development of a stronger personality for the child'<sup>225</sup> and in some instances, they believed there was no other way for them to get messages across to their children.

### 6.2.3. Sexual violence

Children and young people (and adult family members) who participated in our research workshops made no direct mention of sexual violence against children. However, this form of abuse was raised by some interviewees when asked about reasons children were placed in alternative care.

*"[They are in alternative care] first if they are exposed to violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or maybe neglect."*

*"Also sexual abuse of children in the family. Here in Lebanon there is child protection and social workers and they are working on protection. we have these cases of emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse"*

*"We are talking about girls who have experienced sexual abuse and rape and forced early marriage."*

---

<sup>222</sup> UNICEF 2020b

<sup>223</sup> UNICEF 2020b:75

<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> UNICEF 2020:76

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

*"Very very rarely is there sexual violence [reported]. Very rare – this is not very rare but it's because we do not know about it... Sometimes because I have the experience, sometimes there is a certain behaviour that will alert me. A child with physical not eating not sleeping for example. When I ask them where do you sleep and sometimes they tell me. "*

*"We aim to protect them from any abuse any harm so the aim of the shelter was to accept children who are at high risk of sexual abuse..."*

*"We are trying to work with the family and find someone from the family or another shelter to protect these girls. We are talking about girls who have experienced sexual abuse and rape and forced early marriage."*

A study<sup>226</sup> published in 2018 gathered information from 521 Lebanese and refugee children and young people who revealed high levels of concern about their protection including risks of physical and sexual violence and emotional abuse. However, fear of sexual abuse was lower than from other forms of violence. The study revealed girls to be to be at higher risk of sexual violence. Boys were less likely to report such abuse to anyone. The magnitude to which these young people perceived all risk of violence is illustrated in Figure 23.<sup>227</sup>

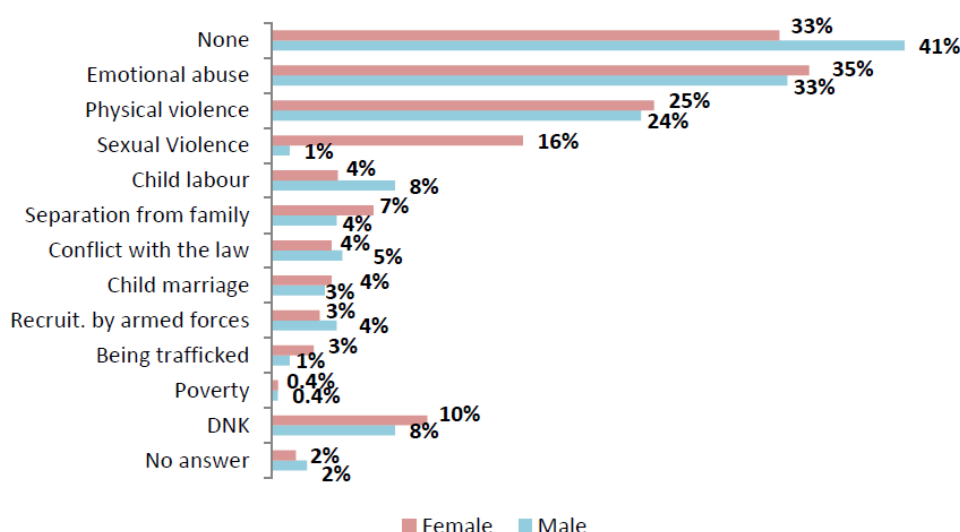
---

<sup>226</sup> Plan International and War Child 2018

<sup>227</sup> Plan International and War Child 2018

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 24. Main protection risks as mentioned by girls and boys (sample size:521) (2019)



(Source: Plan International and War Child 2018)

Of the children of Lebanese descent who participated a study published in 2018<sup>228</sup>, 15% said they had experienced at least one incident of sexual abuse.

### 6.2.4. Emotional and psychological violence and neglect

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines emotional or psychological violence as including, 'restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.'<sup>229</sup> Emotional abuse can have a negative impact on feelings of self-worth and emotional well-being as well as other life-long effects.<sup>230</sup> The term 'emotional neglect' is also used by several other authors. For example, Ludwig and Rostain define emotional neglect as 'a relationship pattern in which an individual's affectional needs are consistently disregarded, ignored, invalidated, or unappreciated by a significant other'.<sup>231</sup> They explain how parents 'may have trouble understanding their children's needs for love, affection, closeness, and support, or they may feel too overwhelmed or powerless to meet these needs on a consistent basis'.<sup>232</sup>

During our research, in answer to the question, what makes children and young people unhappy or worried at home, workshop participants wrote about being treated differently from siblings, feeling discriminated against, belittled, not trusted, being left out, feeling lonely, and lacking care and

<sup>228</sup> El Jardali et al, 2018

<sup>229</sup> Please see: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>

<sup>230</sup> SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

<sup>231</sup> Ludwig & Rostain 2009

<sup>232</sup> *ibid.*

attention. As noted above, such events that can have a negative impact on children and young people's sense of self-worth and emotional well-being. The importance of parents recognising children and young people's abilities and being unhappy when they don't receive enough attention from them was highlighted. It was noted that, although some wrote about times children and young people feel uncared for, only one child wrote about lack of "love" in the family. Some of the responses from children and young people can be seen in Figure 25.

Figure 25. What makes children and young people worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people)

### What makes children worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children)

*not being cared about*  
*belittling the children*  
*absence of love between family members*  
*not caring*  
*depression*  
*disrespect*  
*not being trusted*  
*feeling insecure*  
*not having someone to talk to*  
*solitude and loneliness for children*  
*discrimination between siblings*  
*problems between the children and the parents*  
*comparing children to anyone and this is not a good thing*  
*when parents are not proud of you even when you do the best*  
*putting one child before another*  
*strict laws that are applied only to some children*  
*being left out*  
*crying*  
*parents being upset from small things*  
*parents that don't believe in their children*  
*parents that believe others but don't listen to their own children*  
*they are not giving time to their children*  
*being without their parents*  
*father is far away from the children*  
*no presence of parents*

### What makes young people worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by young people)

*no understanding*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

*no-one cares*  
*no support*  
*no communication*  
*being misunderstood*  
*lack of trust*  
*isolation*  
*no one is listening*  
*loneliness*  
*being nervous*  
*discrimination between the children*  
*non-supportive parents*  
*feeling bad when their parents compare them to others*  
*not appreciating the effort children make*  
*not giving them attention*  
*no communication*  
*not appreciating talents*  
*parents have high expectations*  
*no rights*  
*child not having control on his own life*  
*having no privacy or space*  
*limiting the freedom of the children*  
*when children are not listened to*  
*not being able to go out*

Conversely, when asked what makes children and young people happy, many who participated in our workshops wrote about the importance of *"love"* and *"love of the parents"*. They said it makes children and young people feel happy when they are part of a *'united', 'happy and secure'* families. They wrote about children and young people feeling happy if both parents are present, they have *"parents that understand"* and the *"understanding of mother and father"*. They want *"a lovely relation between parents and children"* and *"parents listening to their children by understanding them and calmly"*. They also wrote about the importance of *"respect"*, of *"parents being a role model"*, the *"presence of parents"* and parents being together. In addition, young people wrote about having their opinions respected, *"freedom within limits"*, and *"when restrictions are justified through dialogues and discussions"* and when they are not compared to others.

These answers signify the importance they particularly place on closeness and good relationships with their parents. Children and young people placed an emphasis on time spent together as a family makes them happy, having the *"family gathering for meals"* and *"doing things with the family"*.



When children and young people were asked what makes adults in the home worried or unhappy, they mentioned when parents are disappointed in their children, especially if they don't achieve good school grades. They also wrote about adults being unhappy and worried when children and young people seem to be "failing", are not "successful", do not behave "well", have "bad friends", or do not offer them respect. Being fearful they will not meet parent's expectations seems to be placing pressure on children and young people.

Interviewees also noted issues related to emotional violence. One interviewee said, *"So recently in my experience they cannot accept the behaviour of children so they start emotionally abusing them by some words by not taking care of them. As this is an example. They use bad words or telling them like cursing them. Criticizing them."*

Of the children of Lebanese descent who participated a study published in 2018<sup>233</sup>, 65% said they had experienced at least one incident of psychological abuse.

#### 6.2.5. Physical Neglect

When asked what makes families vulnerable to separation, interviewees spoke of neglect. For example, they spoke of children being left at home alone, and issues of nutrition, health and hygiene.

*"A child is not being taken care of, does not have proper clothes, etc. There is no one there for the child"*

*"They don't have anyone to take care of them and they are neglected."*

*"So we need here to focus on the persons with disabilities. When we decide to take a child from their family is when the child is at risk, when the child is neglected, she heard about a case when the child was eating from rubbish..."*

Although some forms of neglect might not always lead to serious harm to a child, especially if still being emotionally and physically well cared for, in Lebanon this situation can still place a child at risk of being placed in alternative care known as 'social care'.

---

<sup>233</sup> El Jardali et al, 2018

## 7. Further factors that lead to children's placement in alternative care

### 7.1. Abandonment

For the purposes of this report, abandonment is a situation in which children are left anonymously in a 'public' or other place by persons unknown e.g., a baby is left in front of a hospital. However, we have noted that in Lebanon, the term 'abandoned' is not necessarily being used by everyone to denote children whose parentage is unknown. For instance, some use the term abandoned when a parent/s has left the home, as for example, to migrate for work. This has made us alert to the use of the term in reports and during interviews.

Of those interviewees who did speak of child abandonment, we sought clarification to ensure they were referring to children whose parentage is unknown.

It was not possible to obtain accurate data on children who are abandoned each year, either numbers or reasons for abandonment. The little information that was provided by interviewees suggests,

*"Abandonment is not huge..."*

*"The abandonment is mostly babies and young children. Even in research I don't think we have asked the question if it is also related to sexual violence. But I don't know. Maybe unwanted pregnancy. Maybe child marriage. I don't know but it is an interesting question. It could be all of the above but I cannot give you evidence. There is not research that spoke to this."*

*"There is a problem with data about abandonment. I will not be able to give you proper data. We saw a wave at the beginning of the recent crisis of abandonment of children. But eventually there has been a respite."*

A 2017 report issued by Child Frontiers<sup>234</sup> suggest stigma surrounding women who give birth out of wedlock is one reason children are abandoned in such places as hospitals and outside residential alternative care facilities. A 2021 UNICEF report<sup>235</sup> alerted readers to the possibility there will be more abandoned children because of Lebanon's multiple crises' that includes an ever deteriorating economic situation.<sup>236</sup> According to UNICEF, partner agencies say destitute families are abandoning their babies in the street.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>235</sup> UNICEF 2021

<sup>236</sup> UNICEF Lebanon 2021b

<sup>237</sup> *ibid.*

## 7.2. Orphanhood

For the purposes of our research, we define an orphan as someone whose both parents have died. However, in Lebanon the term 'orphan' is used interchangeably for children who have lost one or both parents.

It has not been possible to find data regarding the number of children in alternative care who have been placed there because they are orphans.

We were careful to note when some interviewees used the term 'orphan' in cases where parents had left the child, either for reasons of migrating for work, no longer wanting to care for them, or were in prison. When asked about reason children are placed in alternative care in Lebanon they said,

*"But when they lose both [parents], if the siblings or other family members refuse to take care of them, they reside here, they are boarding. And we protect them from the street, because if they have no parents, no father, no mother, they will be on the street. If they are on the street, they will have sexual harassment, they may be robbed, they may be used, abused."*

*"So I will tell you about the standards of acceptance. The first standard is orphans and who don't have anyone to take care of them. Orphan of either one parent or both parents."*

*"And others they are orphaned so they lost their parents or even one of their parents so they cannot live on their own. They need our support to provide them with their needs."*

*"I remember when I came, they were taking social cases. But before [I came], 90% were orphans. But after, they took social cases. We have orphans, surely, but little number, and mostly they are social cases now."*

In Lebanon, children, who have lost one or both parents and considered orphans, can be recipients of kafala. One interviewee indicated this can apply if the child is placed in a residential institution or stays at home with a remaining parent. The interviewee implied kafala is more often applied when it is the father who has died.

Newspaper reports speak about orphans and orphanages but once again, because it is understood the definition of an orphan in Lebanon is a child who might have lost one parent due to death rather than both, it cannot be verified how many true orphans there are. A 2019 newspaper article

suggested 'about 28,000 children are "deposited"<sup>238</sup> in alternative care homes, of whom 4,500 are orphans.' It has not been possible to verify this information or clarify terminology. Our research did find a small number of residential care providers that have now stopped accepting children as 'orphans' if they have one parent still alive unless there is a protection order. Instead they are trying to offer family support.

### 7.3. Disability

Interviewees acknowledged that *"children with disabilities are put in care"*. However, it is understood, total numbers are small. This is in part due to the low number of alternative care institutions that will accept them. Due to the lack of up-to-date disaggregated data on children in alternative care in Lebanon, it has not been possible to confirm the number of children with disabilities currently in care.

It is understood reasons children with disabilities are placed in care relate to parent's feeling they lack the ability to cope, and lack of access to, and cost of, services. Issues of stigma are also believed to play a role. Furthermore, it is understood some of the NGOs that were working with families in which there were members with a disability are no longer functioning due to economic reasons.

*"If the family has the chance to take the child to a centre for children with disabilities they will do this because they do not have the capacity to take care of them. I see for instance we no longer have money from MOSA and we have don't have a lot of NGOs looking after children with disabilities. And it is very difficult for the families without monetary support and counselling on how to deal with such situation. There is discrimination but now most of the NGOs are involving children with disabilities in their programmes. Also the parents had the problem because we have some children with disabilities – mild disabilities in our school – but the parents cannot accept the children that they don't go out with them. They keep the children in the house. These children don't have their rights. Also we have law and sometimes the parents don't know about the law. And treatments are very expensive. For some kinds of disability it is so costly."*

*"...accepting this child is a very, it's a priority, they are feeling embarrassed, are ashamed of having a child with disabilities at home."*

*"You can't blame the parents. Some parents are not able. One of our students, I think the mum has some sort of special need, and that's why she cannot cope with her son's needs..."*

---

238 Please see: <https://al-akhbar.com/Community/269028>

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

*"Or they put the child [with a disability] in an institution for education and for well-being. Or they put the child there to get rid of the child. Or they leave the child in the home and they close the door and nobody can speak to them or can see them. There are many cases unfortunately."*

*"If the family has the chance to take the child [with disabilities] to a centre for children with disabilities, they will do this because they do not have the capacity to take care of them. I see for instance we no longer have money from MOSA and we have don't have a lot of NGOs looking after children with disabilities. And it is very difficult for the families without monetary support and counselling on how to deal with such situation."*

*"But look here in Lebanon we can find not so much alternative care specifically for children with disability... There are less children with disabilities placed in alternative care... In all cases in Lebanon there are a few associations that take children with disabilities. But since four years ago they stopped to take any additional cases because already there are few and already closed because of lack of funding and they cannot take many."*

Children with disabilities are being placed in residential facilities also known as 'schools'. Interviewees said reasons include little opportunity for inclusion in local schools, discriminatory treatment, lack of trained /specialist staff, and few appropriate educational resources.<sup>239</sup>

*"The government schools are not equipped. UNESCO had a case study for three years trying to build an inclusion inside the schools. First it was only for three years so there was no sustainability. It was just a pilot study. After three years, these children had to leave the schools because there wasn't any follow-up. So, even other schools and the government schools are not equipped. I would not put my child with disabilities in any government school because I know they didn't take proper care of him, but I can put my other child in this school for free. Here you have discrimination."*

*"Because I've worked a lot with the inclusion at mainstream schools and it's very costly. They cannot afford it at all."*

*"So sometimes there are children that are deprived from education due to their physical disabilities. We can see them on the streets and in many of the area. Especially in poor areas in rural areas"*

---

<sup>239</sup> See also Child Frontiers 2017

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), as of May 2023, it was estimated that up to 15% percent of the population in Lebanon 'has physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities.'<sup>240</sup> It also estimated that 32% of this number are below the age of 18 years. A breakdown of the data by nationality shows 31% are Lebanese and 68% are of other nationalities.<sup>241</sup> Identified challenges for people with disabilities include stigmatisation, fear when out in society, lack of opportunities to engage in society, physical access barriers, and not knowing where and how to seek assistance.<sup>242</sup>

#### 7.4. Access to education and the use of 'boarding schools'

Some participants in our research workshops referred to concerns around access to, and costs associated with education. It was also a topic often raised during interviews. Education is a specific pull factor in terms of children losing parental care and residing in residential facilities, many of which, are known as boarding schools that offer government subsidised social care. As noted previously in this report (please see Chapter 1), children with disabilities are being placed in residential institutions where they will also receive an education.

When asked why children are in alternative care facilities, interviewees highlighted education as a contributing factor in the following ways:

*"Especially poor families – for example, they cannot afford to send their children to schools, even if they were free government schools."*

*"...the fact that the public education system in this country is not very strong."*

*"Yes. Because the parents are responsible. They bring children into life without wanting to take care of them. So they put them inside a boarding school or other institution because the family is not assuming their responsibility. Or they are really unable financially because they have a huge financial burden."* (interviewee when asked if children are being placed in alternative care unnecessarily)

*"They [children] are not in school. The public school is closed. The economic situation is very hard for families."*

*"And the financial crisis also especially now, and they don't have the money to put their children in school."*

---

<sup>240</sup> Please see: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/disability-inclusion-survey-results-may-2023#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%20between,%2C%20intellectual%2C%20or%20mental%20disabilities1>.

<sup>241</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *ibid.*



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

As noted in this report, there is currently a significant breakdown in the public education system in Lebanon. Furthermore, although public education is free, there are some costs as for example, for books, uniforms and transportation which parents in our workshops said they struggle to pay. In addition, a study in 2017<sup>243</sup> found children being placed in residential institutions because parents believed the quality of education was higher than in State schools. A specific pull factor is many of these residential institutions continue to receive Government subsidies to also offer 'social care' i.e. housing, feeding, clothing and paying for medical services for children.

*"Then in the social welfare centres, and that's why we are using the word because that is what they use for boarding schools, because they most almost all of them are actually schools. That is like a triple problem where MOSA is subsidizing private education plus sheltering for children. The profile of these two are completely distinct... Ok another thing these have funding that come from MOSA but also from the religions funding schemes etc..."*

*"So in a lot of cases the drivers studies gave us that they [parents] see it in the best interest for the children actually giving them a chance of a better life. Because unfortunately the public education system continues to fail children."*

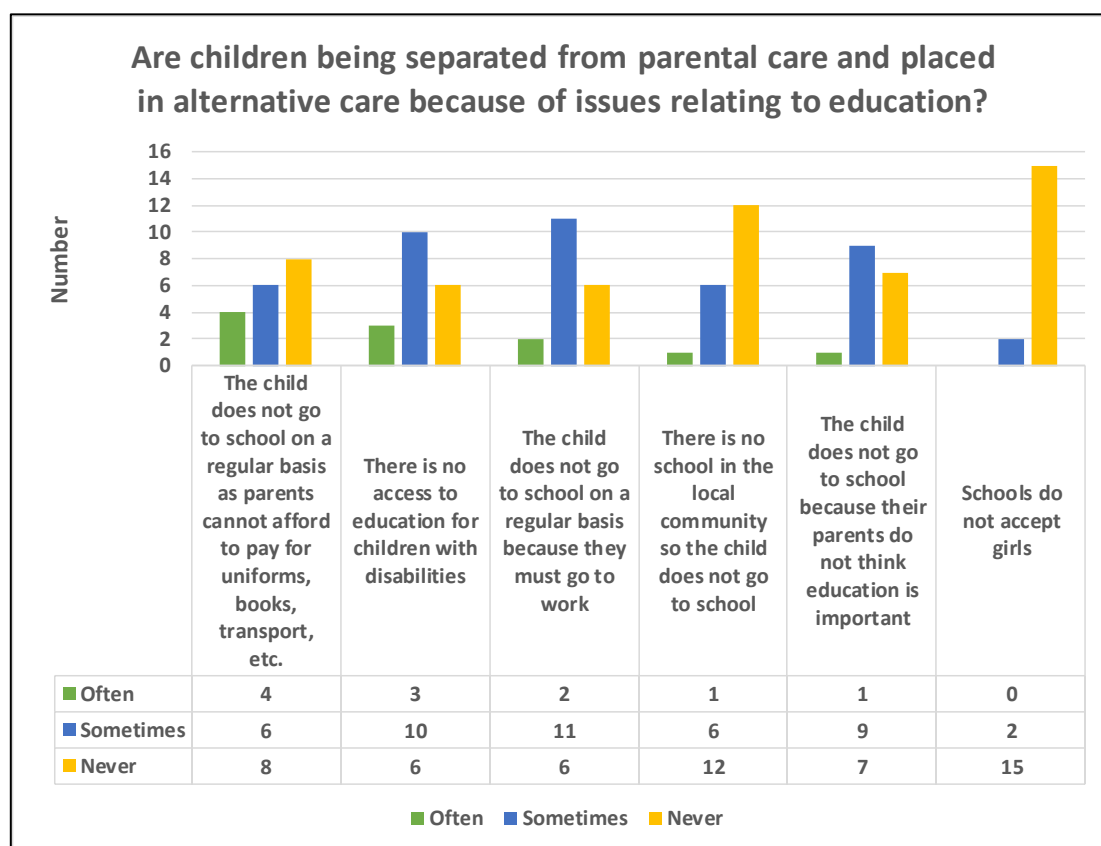
Our online survey asked respondents about the reasons they thought children were placed in alternative care due to issues of education. Respondents first ranked costs related to education, as a reason children are 'often' placed in care (Figure 26). However, there was a greater number of responses indicating reasons that are 'sometimes' responsible for placement with the two most highly ranked answers being children having to go to work and lack of access to education for children with disabilities. This was followed by parents not thinking education is important. It is noted, some respondents believe the given categories are never reasons for separation. Although not shown in the graph, a few respondents indicated they do not know if any of these situations contribute to placement in alternative care.

---

<sup>243</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 26. Reasons children being placed in alternative care because of issues related to education



Many residential schools are managed by NGOs as well as representatives of different religious denominations. Based on interviews, we are aware some of these institutions are offering places to hundreds of children. Some of these settings are subsidized by MOSA as well as relying on their own fundraising. In 2015, an estimated 41% of all private schools were officially affiliated with religious establishments.<sup>244</sup> According to research, in 2018, 71% of Lebanese students attended private education although this was not all in a residential setting. This education was mostly being paid for by households themselves. However, this figure also included residential settings 'mainly affiliated to religious institutions,'<sup>245</sup> that received direct subsidies from the government e.g. from MOSA, on a per capita basis. These institutions were defined in the report as "free private schools".<sup>246</sup> In 2018, 14% of all Lebanese students were in 'free private schools'. Only 29% of students were in public schools.

Lack of government investment in education, and which, ultimately might contribute to greater numbers of children being in 'social care' boarding schools, was exposed in a 2020 report<sup>247</sup> revealing

<sup>244</sup> Abdul-Hamid, H. & Yassine, M. 2020:2

<sup>245</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> Abdul-Hamid, H. & Yassine, M. 2020

expenditure on national education ranging from only 2.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2005 to 1.8% in 2015. This was considered low in comparison to international benchmarks.

### 7.5. Sexual orientation and gender identity

When research respondents were asked about reasons children are placed into alternative care, no-one mentioned factors related to sexual orientation or gender identity. However, we think it important to recognise the possible protection needs of children and young people who identify as LGBTQI+. This is for two reasons. Firstly, it is widely recognised that some families around the world reject their children who identify as LGBTQI+. Secondly Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code criminalizes 'sexual intercourse against nature' thus placing children and young people at risk of prosecution and separation from family because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>248</sup>

According to Amnesty International, in respect of persecution and freedom, 'Today, the LGBTI people in Lebanon stand somewhere in the middle – their very existence is no longer being criminalized, but they still don't enjoy the freedom to exercise their rights. There is no doubt continued hostility towards any person identifying as or perceived to be LGBTI'.<sup>249</sup>

### 7.6 Exposure to drugs and alcohol

Very few references were made by children, young people or adult family members, to the use of drugs or excessive alcohol. However, it was raised by interviewees in relation to reason children and young people are being placed in alternative care.

*"Then, the difficult social situations - a father who may have mental deficiency, addicted to alcohol or drugs..."*

*"There are children using drugs and cocaine."*

*"I find that most of the children in alternative care are there because one of their family, one of their parents, father or the mother are in the prisons because of crimes like killing someone or drugs, or protection or other reasons."*

*"Also there can be special cases due to problem if adolescents are in crisis they are difficult and start to take alcohol or drugs. And when they go to centres to get rid of their addiction sometimes their parents prefer them to go into alternative care. This happens but it is not highlighted so much."*

<sup>248</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>249</sup> Please see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/05/lgbti-community-activism-in-lebanon-a-story-of-existence-and-oppression/>

Children exposed to drugs or alcohol is not only a protection concern in its own right but can also place them in situations where they become vulnerable to other risks. It has been difficult to source current data on children exposed to drugs and/or alcohol in Lebanon or the number of children placed in alternative care because of this issue. The lack of data on drug and alcohol abuse has been confirmed in a 2017 report published by the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health<sup>250</sup>.

A 2021 study<sup>251</sup> did reveal 'a considerable prevalence of addiction to alcohol, illicit drugs, and specially to smoking, among university students.' Reports also speak of 'an increase of 48% between 2005 and 2011 in adolescents' drunkenness.'<sup>252</sup> In terms of adult's use of drugs and alcohol, a WHO study of 2007 reportedly found 'a cumulative incidence of usage of 53.3% for alcohol, 67.4% for tobacco, 4.6% for cannabis, and 0.7% for cocaine.'<sup>253</sup> A 2017 report by the Ministry of Public Health<sup>254</sup> contains 2010 data showing the number of persons suffering from drug addiction was estimated between 10,000 to 15,000. Of these, it is understood 58% took drugs for the first time when aged between the ages of 14 and 19 years old.<sup>255</sup>

## **8. Additional child protection concerns related to risk of placement in alternative care**

### **8.1. Street connected children**

One cause of children running away and becoming street associated is violence and exploitation in the home. Street connected children, including those living and working on the streets, face an increased risk of violence. Children on the streets also attract the attention of police and child protection authorities concerned for their safety and welfare. According to the information collected during interviews, becoming street connected is one reason children are placed in alternative care, although interviewees suggested, this is not in large numbers. Some expressed concerns that due to the worsening economic situation, there may be more children working and begging on the streets.

According to Saab et al,<sup>256</sup> accurate and up to data on street connected children in Lebanon is not available although they do confirm a 'prevalence of non-Lebanese children among the street-child population. A 2015 report<sup>257</sup> said 1,510 children were living and/or working on the streets in Lebanon with almost two-thirds (71%) of street connected children being of Syrian descent. The report

---

<sup>250</sup> Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Public Health 2017

<sup>251</sup> Chalhoubm et al. 2021

<sup>252</sup> Berro et al. 2021.

<sup>253</sup> Degenhardt et al. 2007

<sup>254</sup> Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Public Health 2017

<sup>255</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> Saab et al. 2019

<sup>257</sup> Consultation and Research Institute 2015

revealed risky behaviour of children working on the streets included drinking alcohol and taking drugs. They were also at higher risk of being recruited into criminal gangs, and of coming into contact with the law.<sup>258</sup> As one interviewee said, *"Some children when they go back home they will stay on the streets. So they know that the things they will be exposed to on the streets. Maybe they will be exposed to drugs."*

## 8.2. Child labour

No workshop participants mentioned the issue of child labour but it was raised by interviewees as a reason children might be placed in alternative care.

*"Child labour is a lot and even we have children who are coming to our centre, most of them leaving after 6 o'clock when they are working to make deliveries at night."*

*"Child labour these are let's say bi-products of the Syrian refugee crisis...But we are anecdotally seeing also a rise amongst Lebanese. Similarly, for child marriages. So in the last decade they were mostly seen as refugee issues but now they are with the deteriorating economic situation and children out of school we are fearing we will see an even greater rise."*

*"I think child labour is on the increase especially of 14 or 15 or 16 years old."*

Research on the topic, recognises this is a situation that places children in environments where they face risk of exploitation and the involvement of police and child protection authorities that could prompt decisions to remove a child from parental care. The economic crisis in Lebanon has put pressure on households with one result being children's increasing engagement in the labour force.<sup>259</sup> Either they are forced to work or choose to help supplement household incomes.<sup>260</sup> Information suggests more children from Palestinian and Syrian refugee families are working than those from Lebanese families. Reasons for their engagement in child labour include parents' lack of official documentation that prohibits their employment.<sup>261</sup> Children identify a primary reason for working is to help contribute to family income and the meeting of basic needs in the household.<sup>262</sup>

A 2021 UNICEF survey<sup>263</sup> found more than 12% of the families they questioned were sending at least one child out to work, an increase of 3% from 6 months previously. The number of households of Lebanese nationality sending a child out to work had increased by 7 times in the same period.

---

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group Lebanon, Child Protection 2022

<sup>260</sup> *ibid.* and Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>261</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>262</sup> *ibid.*

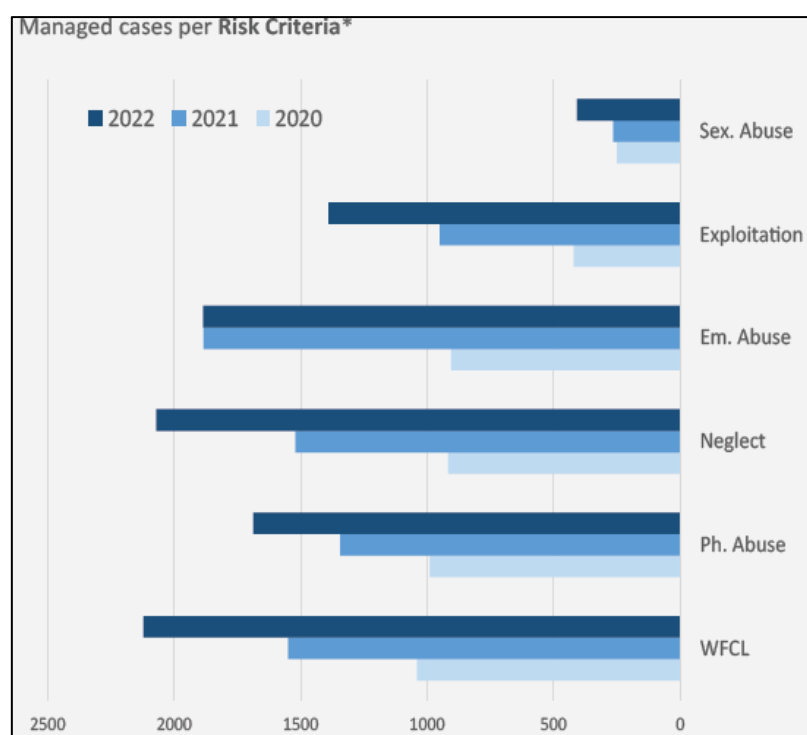
<sup>263</sup> UNICEF 2021b. See also UNICEF 2022a; UNICEF 2021c; UNICEF 2021d

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Between 2021 the number of working Syrian refugee children had reached 27,825: more than double the number in 2019.<sup>264</sup> Children were working on farms, on the streets, and illegally selling fuel. The majority were boys. UNICEF partner organisations report children as young as 6 years old were engaging in work.<sup>265</sup>

A report issued in 2022 explained that in relation to worst forms of labour, numbers of children being subjected to sexual exploitation, including trafficking and prostitution of children in Lebanon are on the increase.<sup>266</sup> Unfortunately no further details regarding where and how children are being trafficked are provided in the report. As recently as August 2022, the Inter-Agency Coordination Child Protection Working Group in Lebanon noted<sup>267</sup> child labour and/or street-connected children to be the most prominent child protection issue reported by member and partner associations. As illustrated in Figure 27, data in an Inter-Agency Working Group 2022 report<sup>268</sup> shows worst forms of child labour (WFCL) was the most prominent cause of opening a child protection case management file in 2022. A total of 67% of all children recorded as working were boys and 33% were girls.<sup>269</sup>

Figure 27. Managed child protection cases by risk by number 2020 – 2022



(Source: Inter-Agency Working Group Lebanon, Child Protection 2022)

<sup>264</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> acaps 2022

<sup>267</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group Lebanon, Child Protection 2022

<sup>268</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> *ibid.*



### 8.3. Participation in armed forces

No research respondents referred to participation in armed forces when asked about reasons children are placed into alternative care. The desk review reveals however, that some children are susceptible to such recruitment including pressure from family and community members, the need to earn money, or for reasons of family status and/or protection.<sup>270</sup> Some also feel it is their moral duty to protect their community. This involvement in armed violence has been recognised as a common feature continuing ever since the country's civil wars between 1975 and 1990. There is also an indication that children from Palestinian refugee camps are particularly at risk of involvement.<sup>271</sup> Such involvement in armed forces can bring children into contact with the law as well as child protection authorities. Although this is more likely to be detention rather than alternative care.

## 9. Factors that contribute to violence against children

When considering ways to address reasons children are placed in alternative care and having taken a socio-ecological model to inform the research framework, our research indicates experiencing violence outside as well as inside the home can impact family life. It is important therefore, to understand why, and how, violence is present in society.

One interviewee told us,

*"All of the drivers we have ever learned are here. Everything we have learned on violence against children is available in Lebanon. Everything from the legal framework to gender norms, to gender norms and equality, to economic drivers, to conflict, to displacement to children, for example now have been this is the fourth year they are out of school without regular continuous education. Mental health issues are on the rise. Social norms, this is a country that has a general acceptance of violence."*

### 9.1. The impact of war and conflict

Lebanon has been embroiled in civil war and conflict with neighbouring countries for many years. Between 1975 and 1990, the civil war in Lebanon had a devastating impact on families and communities. It was both an internal conflict as well as involving neighbouring countries, namely Israel and Syria, as well as other regional and international actors.<sup>272</sup> During the conflict an estimated 90,000 people were killed (although other estimates have put this higher), almost a million were displaced (a third of the population), and nearly 100,000 were badly injured<sup>273</sup>. Families are impacted by the legacy of this war that saw infrastructure destroyed; loss of homes and livelihoods; witnessing, taking part

---

<sup>270</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>271</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> Sune 2011

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

in, and enduring violence; suffering from endless bombing raids; and everyday survival impacted by physical and emotional challenges.

Furthermore, 17,415 people have been recorded as having been victims of 'enforced' disappearance.<sup>274</sup> To date there are still many of the disappeared who have not been found with families continuing 'to live in emotional agony due to the unknown fate and whereabouts of their loved ones, and from their unaddressed needs.'<sup>275</sup> Information gathered during interviews with 150 family members of missing and forcibly disappeared, show 87% of those interviewed still feel the overall impact of the Lebanese Civil Wars and 50% continue to experience mental health issues.<sup>276</sup>

Conflict between Israel and Lebanon has continuously affected families. This ongoing struggle saw Lebanon's involvement in the fight alongside other Arab States against Israeli in 1948, the invasion of Lebanon by Israel in 1978, the 1985 establishment of an Israeli occupied zone in Southern Lebanon, and the 17-day Israeli offensive that killed more than 200 people in 1996. Although Israel withdrew from occupied land in 2000 ending 22 years of occupation, a period of conflict began again in July 2006 when Hezbollah crossed into Israel and killed and kidnapped Israeli soldiers.

Many of those affected by these years of conflict are now parents, grandparents, and other family members of the current generation of children and young people. This is significant in light of studies that show the impact of the war, and how the emotional and other effects can in turn be passed on to the next generation. A study written by Farhood in 2013<sup>277</sup> reports on how enduring war stressors (i.e. material and social resource loss) resulting from the conflict can increase the risk of poor psychological functioning. She cites a survey of adult family members during the civil war in Lebanon that found not only hardships related to lack of basic needs but also poor mental health. Farhood cites a 1985 study by Chimienti, Nasr and Khalifeh who interviewed mothers of 1,039 Lebanese children aged between 3 and 9 years of age, to assess the effects of war exposure on emotional and social behaviour. They found children who had experienced death of a family member or someone else and destruction of their home were more likely to exhibit nervous, regressive, aggressive and depressive behaviour than those who had not. Farhood further identifies how the poor well-being, psychological health coping mechanisms, and emotional response particularly of mothers living in war conditions can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety symptoms in children.<sup>278</sup>

---

<sup>274</sup> Law Action Worldwide 2021

<sup>275</sup> Law Action Worldwide 2021:2

<sup>276</sup> Law Action Worldwide 2021

<sup>277</sup> Farhood 2013

<sup>278</sup> *ibid.*

Even in 2022, UNICEF reported on the ongoing violence that has permeated communities:

'Rising tensions – further fuelled by polarization within and between communities – have led to an increase in violence, including within homes and schools. Many Syrian children spoke of witnessing armed violence, and some reported acts of violence against themselves or their families. The rise in violent behaviour means that many streets and neighbourhoods where children used to play are no longer safe, further limiting children's right to play, which already had been affected by COVID-19 lockdowns. Girls are the most affected, being increasingly restricted from leaving their homes for fear they will be harassed.'<sup>279</sup>

A further study published in 2022 also found a significant number of household members were living in fear of kidnapping, being robbed, and having concerns about security, especially for children and women.<sup>280</sup>

In this way, ongoing traumatic and challenging experiences of parents and other family members in Lebanon may continue to impact family life and the healthy and happy functioning of the family.

## 9.2. Violence in schools

A 2001 memorandum from the Minister of Education prohibits educational staff from abusing children in school however, corporal punishment is not prohibited by Law. Human Rights Watch has identified violence against students inflicted by school staff with a persistent lack of enforcement of the 2001 memorandum.<sup>281</sup> A report issued by UNICEF and the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth,<sup>282</sup> provided data that indicted 40% of all school children had been subjected to physical violence by teachers. In some cases, school directors had responded to complaints about this abuse by punishing the child again rather than disciplining the teachers. Human Rights Watch has also documented<sup>283</sup> incidences of serious violence and humiliating treatment by school staff against Syrian children.

A 2020 study<sup>284</sup> involving 1,810 children aged 14 to 17 years old, investigated 'bullying victimisation' in schools in Lebanon. The researchers defined bullying as, 'a harmful, aggressive, intentional, and repeated negative behaviour by peers directed against a person who has difficulty defending

---

<sup>279</sup> UNICEF 2022a:6

<sup>280</sup> REACH 2022

<sup>281</sup> Please see: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/13/i-dont-want-my-child-be-beaten/corporal-punishment-lebanons-schools>. See also Save the Children 2019.

<sup>282</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Lebanon Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

<sup>283</sup> Please see: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/13/i-dont-want-my-child-be-beaten/corporal-punishment-lebanons-schools>

<sup>284</sup> Malaeb et al. 2020

oneself.<sup>285</sup> They found 49.9% of all students had been victims of bullying. The authors correlated these high rates of bullying victimization with 'lack of anti-bullying rules at schools, teachers not taking immediate action to stop bullying among peers in classes, absence of bullying prevention programs and awareness among schools' academic and administrative staff about its impact.'<sup>286</sup>

### 9.3. Living in a patriarchal society and gender based violence

UNICEF has defined patriarchy as a 'social system in which men hold the greatest power, leadership roles, privilege, moral authority and access to resources and land, including in the family.'<sup>287</sup> Patriarchy has also been described as a system in which 'attributes seen as "feminine" or pertaining to women are undervalued, while attributes regarded as "masculine" or pertaining to men are privileged.'<sup>288</sup>

During our research, a significant number of children and young people wrote about witnessing violence between their parents with some mentioning such issues as *"domestic violence"*, *"when the father beats the mother"*, and, *"father treats the mother with arrogance"* Adult family members also wrote of *"the father who is violent to others and tyrannically and does not understand the others"*, *"tyrannical behavior and controlling life of others"*, *"oppression of the mother by the father"*, *conflict between parents*" and, *"continuous shouting and disrespect"*. We do recognise there was a particular perspective of females reflected in our workshops which may in part, be due to the high percentage of women who attended.

Interviewees spoke about the impact of living in a patriarchal society and the correlation with domestic violence and abuse of girls and women. They said domestic violence is something that perpetuates women's dependence on men and, as a result, often means having to remain in an abusive situation. It is believed that women are remaining inside violent relationships fearful of being socially ostracized as well as lacking the ability to find employment and become financially independent. If domestic violence leads to marital separation, and especially when they lack support from extended family, friends or community networks, women can be left struggling to raise their children alone thus putting them at risk of losing their children into alternative care.<sup>289</sup> Interviewees told us,

*"They [children] are coming [into alternative care] from families who have a lot of social problems, addiction, relationship problems, divorce separation and also violence against children and against the women."*

<sup>285</sup> Malaeb et al. 2020:2

<sup>286</sup> Malaeb et al. 2020:7

<sup>287</sup> Please see: <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1761/file/Genderglossarytermsandconcepts.pdf>

<sup>288</sup> Please see: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/patriarchy#:~:text=Patriarchy%20is%20a%20system%20of,pertaining%20to%20men%20are%20privileged.>

<sup>289</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

*"Because what I believe it is because of the lack of education about equality between genders. In our country this is a main issue...Because you have the man who is most responsible...and masculinity in society. But when you have girls in society these are only for housework and raising children and not even having a job."*

*"But usually in the country we rely on the man. Many of the women do not work. Only in the capital. Really I need you to know how it is in this country because really it is different from one region to the other. In Beirut in the capital, the women work, they have liberty, somehow some independence. But in the regions not they are not independent. They cannot take decisions alone."*

Interviewees also spoke about the way children can be significantly affected by witnessing domestic violence.

*"And we see a lot of domestic violence. And also when children witness domestic violence the impact is the same. And with lack of resources the woman cannot take the decision to leave the home because she is economically dependent on the husband and because the reason is because she is afraid to lose her children. And this is the main main problem existing for the women. They are suffering from violence and the children are witness of this but they cannot leave the home because she is afraid to lose her children."*

*"Domestic violence is very hard for children...I worked with children who are affected because they have witnessed the domestic violence. It was a psychological matter So it is very hard for children because the girl or boy child they love their parents. When they love their father or mother but saw them fighting children came to me and expressed that they don't know what they can do. I love my father and I love my mother but when they are fighting I don't know what I have to do."*

It is noted that domestic violence and domination can also be experienced by men although interviewees suggested this is not common in Lebanon. They did say the harsh economic environment is placing additional stress on men. When they cannot meet social expectations and fully provide for the family needs they agree with the situation when, 'stress grows and leads to them practicing intimate partner violence and violence against children.'<sup>290</sup>

---

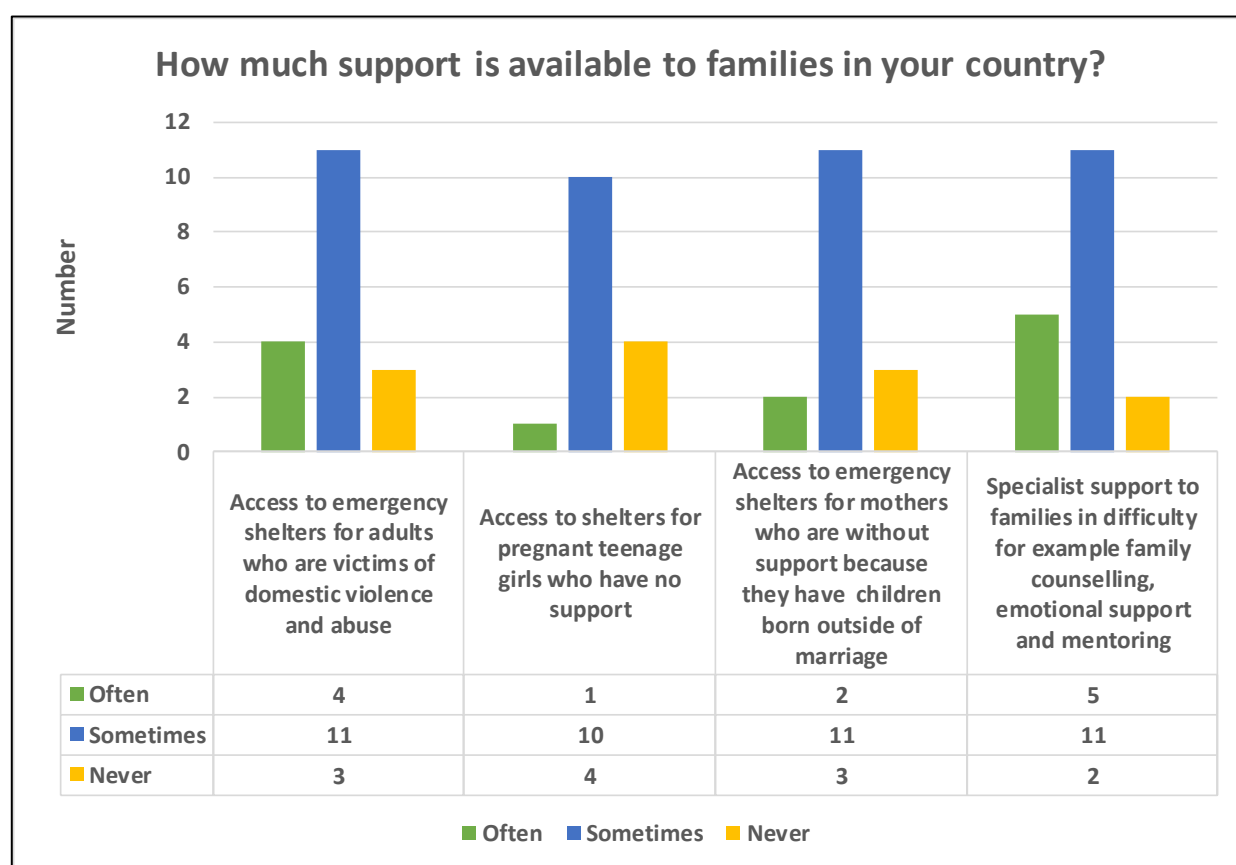
<sup>290</sup> UNICEF 2020b:35

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Interviewees identified the patriarchal social system and values as being more prevalent in rural communities and parts of the country where overall they said, levels of education are lower. This understanding is borne out in a 2023 report<sup>291</sup> on the safety of girls and women that also identified heightened concerns in 'more rural areas' and an increase in reported gender-based violence from households in Akkar, the North, and Baalbek El Hermel.

In relation to support that might help address some of the issues examined above, respondents of our online survey do not think any of the forms of support listed in the survey are 'often' available (Figure 28). Most respondents think they are offered 'sometimes' and a few think they are never provided. Although not shown in Figure 4, a few respondents said they didn't know about the amount of support available.

Figure 28. How much support is available to families



A 2020 study<sup>292</sup> to investigate drivers of violence in Lebanon found a women's role is perceived as a domestic one, she is expected to obey her husband, and not to bring shame on the family's reputation. On the other hand it is believed men are expected to be dominant, make the final

<sup>291</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>292</sup> UNICEF 2020b



decisions, entitled to sex and violence within the household, with some thinking the practice of male intimate partner violence is 'considered to make them more manly.'<sup>293</sup>

A further study published in 2020,<sup>294</sup> commissioned by an interagency working group on sexual and gender based violence, noted a 4% increase in intimate partner violence since 2019. Information in a January 2023 report published by the same working group illustrates how, 'for Lebanese, refugee and migrant women and girls, the accelerating crises have resulted in increased risks for exposure to gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, sexual violence, child marriage, and intimate partner violence.'<sup>295</sup> Rates of domestic violence was affecting one in three married women.<sup>296</sup>

Gender bias in Lebanon has been recognised as being, 'not only embedded in social, cultural, and religious practice, it continues to be embedded in individual attitudes and beliefs.'<sup>297</sup> As seen above, this bias can place women and children at risks which can contribute to family separation. As will be discussed in further detail below, single parent families, and especially those headed by women, face specific challenges that can lead to relinquishment of children into 'social care', or if situations escalate into violence, into the alternative care system for protection reasons.

## 10. The inter-generational aspect of family breakdown and violence

When asked why families reach a situation where separation of children is a consideration, interviewees drew attention to breakdown in family relationships in part due to what they consider to be inadequate parenting ability. Interviewees suggested lack of parenting skills is a significant factor related to deterioration of child-parents relationships which in turn, may ultimately lead to violence against, or serious neglect of, children. They recognised how lack of positive parenting skills can be an inter-generational phenomenon. Whilst discussing parenting skills and issues of positive attachment, interviewees acknowledged the way a parent's negative experience of family life during childhood could impact their own ability to parent well and the need to address this issue.

*"But on parenting, given that sixty percent of the children have been subject to some form of violent discipline, it tells you that there is a need for parenting in this culture. To change the attitudes toward discipline in general and parenting more broadly."*

---

<sup>293</sup> UNICEF 2020b:34

<sup>294</sup> Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon SGBV 2020

<sup>295</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023

<sup>296</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group 2023:15

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

*"There is more work needed to help build better relations. I would make a better parenting school that people are obliged to attend before they get married. And if they have children they should be obliged to go to parental school."*

*"Because the parents are responsible. They bring children into life without wanting to take care of them. So they put them inside a boarding school or other institution, because the family is not assuming their responsibility."*

*"There should always be training about being a good parent, about parenting, and about taking care of the child which is not just to provide money and things like that. It is much more than these things. The training should be given for the everywhere and for everyone in society, in schools in church and in everything."*

*"Yes, how the parents were raised. There is awareness. I'm not speaking about high diplomas. We have mothers with awareness about their role. We stand by them. We help them...because I said, is it inter-generational."*

*"The psychological problem that means the mother or the father abandon their role as a parent. The family experience when a mother or father were a child is something that is transferred it is inter-generational. It is their education in values and maybe their level of education that prohibits affection."*

*"We are in a paradigm shift of raising families and the importance in it is the awareness and education of these parents. Because they don't know actually another option how to raise children. Because they were raised in this way."*

*"I believe that as humans we see what is appearing in front of us. For us we see it is a mother not caring for the child. But this is not the problem. The problem is the mother herself. It is a vicious circle. This mother may not have received the tenderness when she was young. She may have suffered when she was young...She does not know that there are other things and maybe she didn't live it in her own childhood.. So the problem is with the mother and what happened to her."*

Many interviewees, when speaking of parenting skills and capacity, highlighted what they perceived to be differences across the country which they attribute to prevailing social, economic, educational and cultural norms in different regions. They particularly identified the Bekaa valley, communities in and around Tripoli, and the North as areas they thought family struggles and breakdown were more likely to occur.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

*"But they are more traditional in the Bekaa or in the North. So it is related to religious beliefs."*

*"In Lebanon we speak about the difference in the regions because in Beirut it is different from the north or the Bekaa or the South. Yes we have a few cases there is no percentage in Lebanon that is so big but there is some cases and it depends from the area. It is higher in the North and in Bekaa. Because of the situation of the poverty in the North it is much more than Beirut and we don't see the support and the education for parents and for the community in Bekaa. It is different in Beirut to the regions. These regions are historically deprived regions so not newly deprived but now the situation is more and more exasperated than in other regions."*

*"And to be really very blunt in my replies this answer couldn't be applied let's say in the South or the middle of Lebanon or in the North or in the East. So it really depends where we are applying this. Because where there is more education and awareness I can say this. Where there is less education and awareness I doubt... [there is] a different mindset and openness in Beirut..."* (interviewee when asked about family unity)

However, data for 2020 to 2022 published<sup>298</sup> by an Inter-Agency Working Group in Lebanon shows there were actually higher numbers of child protection cases in Mount Lebanon and that cases in Beirut, were almost as high as in the North, and higher than in the Bekaa region. This draws attention perhaps to decision making of professionals that is not only influenced by experience but also perceptions.

During interviews, interviewees were asked a hypothetical question about two families being investigated by the child protection authorities, and why one family might be more proactive than the other in preventing authorities placing their children in alternative care. Overwhelmingly, positive emotional bonding between children and parents and parenting skills were identified as important traits in those families who would challenge separation. It is believed that those parents making efforts to keep their children would have been influenced by the care and love they received in their own childhood. It is *"important how they were brought up, how they were raised in their childhood, what they have learned from their parents, their environment and how they apply it."*

---

<sup>298</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group Lebanon, Child Protection 2022

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

There is an acknowledgement that adverse childhood experiences (ACES),<sup>299</sup> can contribute to behaviour<sup>300</sup> which may be repeated throughout life. In the same manner, it is also recognised how, through 'observation, learning and imitation'<sup>301</sup> of adults, and/or being a recipient of violence, physical neglect, lack of love and affection, children also risk repeating such behaviour<sup>302</sup> which in turn, can result in violence, instability, and family dysfunction continuing from generation to generation in Lebanon. Our research gathered these messages:

*"We are used to saying this child is bad because his parents are bad. No this is not the issue. I want to work with the child because I don't want him to take all these bad things and reflect them on the future generation. This is why we should be working in schools with this child to make him good."*

*"...so that a child should know that if his father hits him, it's not right. He has to be able to know how to understand what's right from wrong, because many children believe that it's his father's right to hit him or his mum's right to punish him by not providing food. The basic rights of a child for shelter, love, and this generation should be educated."*

*"You know that when a child passes through this life so this might be reflected either this child when he grows up will do the opposite. Extremely the opposite or do the same. Some of the children they do the opposite on purpose to do the opposite because they passed through these difficult conditions. Because they experienced all of that they refuse their children to pass through the same thing and to repeat the same. And others they do the same because they passed through these difficult conditions."*

A 2020 UNICEF study<sup>303</sup> to investigate reasons for violence against children found parents referring to their own violent childhood experiences and a how they now inflicted this on their own children. They recognised that 'children would most likely repeat the actions performed by their parents'.<sup>304</sup>

Writing about children exposed to violence in Lebanon, Tarabah et al. explain how this can increase the possibility of them 'imitating the aggressive behaviours they watch and considering such

---

<sup>299</sup> SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

<sup>300</sup> Moylan et al. 2010

<sup>301</sup> Contreras and del Carmen Cano 2016:44

<sup>302</sup> Contreras and del Carmen Cano 2016; Bevan & Higgins 2002

<sup>303</sup> UNICEF 2020b

<sup>304</sup> UNICEF 2020b:76

behaviour as normal.'<sup>305</sup> The research goes on to define other negative impacts of exposure to violence including, 'a variety of negative emotional and behavioural reactions, including fear, anger, anxiety, depression, PTS symptoms, aggressive behaviours, and substance abuse.'<sup>306</sup> All factors that can contribute to the dysfunction, breakdown, and separation of families.

## 11. The multiple dimensions of poverty

Our research identified multiple dimensions of poverty, including for many families, a severe lack of financial resources coupled with insufficient access to government services, as being a major factor contributing to worry and unhappiness in families. Issues that may lead to feelings of stress, anxiety, an inability to cope, as well as impacting parenting ability. Furthermore, issues related to poverty have been identified previously as a principle factor directly related to children being placed in residential care in Lebanon known as 'social care'.<sup>307</sup>

The results of the research workshops show children and young people are very aware of, and concerned about, different issues related to poverty. Below are some of the answers provided by children and young people when asked what makes children or young people worried or unhappy when they are at home (Figure 29). Answers related to poverty accounted for approximately 10% of children's answers and 13% of young people's answers. Their remaining answers related to other issues in the home including violence and poor relationships.

Figure 29. What makes children and young people feel worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people)

### What makes children and young people feel worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children and young people)

*when the family is poor*

*poverty*

*lack of accommodation, security and food*

*bad living environment*

*basic needs like food, clothing and education not secured*

*lack of basic food, water, electricity, wifi*

*lack of a certain meal during the day*

*hunger*

*lack of electricity*

*not being warm*

*incapacity to buy clothes and pens and books*

<sup>305</sup> Tarabah et al. 2015

<sup>306</sup> Tarabah et al. 2015:2

<sup>307</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

*lack of things we want in the home  
not having their needs secured  
if someone is ill  
chronic disease  
child labour especially for Syrians  
no work  
unemployed parents  
lack of education*

When children and young people were asked, what makes adults worried or unhappy when they are at home, as illustrated in Figure 30, they show an understanding of the financial challenges and access to services adults are facing. This issue represented approximately a third of all their answers.

Figure 30. What makes adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people)

### **What makes adults feel worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children and young people)**

*bad financial situation  
financial problems  
no money  
poverty  
the expensive dollar  
unable to purchase food  
they cannot secure everything needed for the family  
not securing the needs of the family  
when they don't have heating during winter  
the inability to buy things  
bad salaries  
losing their jobs  
work pressure  
unemployed  
not being able to secure a good living  
because the father sold the house  
destroying the house after being arranged many times  
fear of being kicked out of the house  
the house is flooded with water and cannot be repaired  
they have to sell the things in the house  
no satisfaction – due to job or anything or don't have a salary or community life apartment  
the children are sick and they cannot provide treatment*





## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

*incapacity and illness*  
*unable to send their children to school*  
*unhappy because their children are unhappy and they cannot send their children to study*  
*not being able to do activities*  
*parents are not taking care of their children and not taking care of other things*  
*dirtiness*  
*stinginess*  
*education cost*  
*health costs*  
*not being secure*  
*worry about retirement and old age*  
*having too many children*  
*death of a family member*  
*not having a means of transportation*  
*comfort and security in the home*  
*legal problems*  
*everything*

There is a clear correlation between answers of children, young people, and those of adult family members in relation to the issues of poverty (Figure 31). The total answers related to issues of poverty accounted for approximately a third of all responses received during the adult family workshops.

Figure 31. What makes families worried or happy when they are at home (as answered by adult family members)

### **What makes adults worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by adult family members)**

*not enough money*  
*difficulty of economic situation*  
*poverty*  
*my daughter asked if we are very poor*  
*expenses are much higher than income*  
*dollar fluctuation*  
*having less and less money*  
*no financial stability*  
*debts*  
*not having something to eat*  
*hunger*  
*not being able to buy essentials such as food and clothes etc.*  
*children are not feeling warm*  
*in my house the problem is start with poverty for example if we don't have gas*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

*not being able to provide the hygiene needs for the daughters  
feeling insecure because of the situation financial situation  
not being able to pay for the needs of the children and what they want  
if we pay for a generator and a bus for the school there will be no money left  
cannot afford enough food for all the children and do not want to tell them  
unemployment  
having to work outside and inside the house  
not having a house  
lack of money to pay the rent and for the generator  
fuel prices  
politicians not giving us electricity  
illness of a child and being unable to cure him  
being unable to go to the hospital and have medical care and education  
absence of health insurance  
lack of money to for pay drugs and x-rays and medical expenses  
cannot find medicines or from somewhere else that do not have any effect  
not being able to send children to school  
not being able to pay tuition fees  
not being able to pay transportation for school  
even if we have health we are in a dire situation  
expensive transportation  
happiness is not money alone*

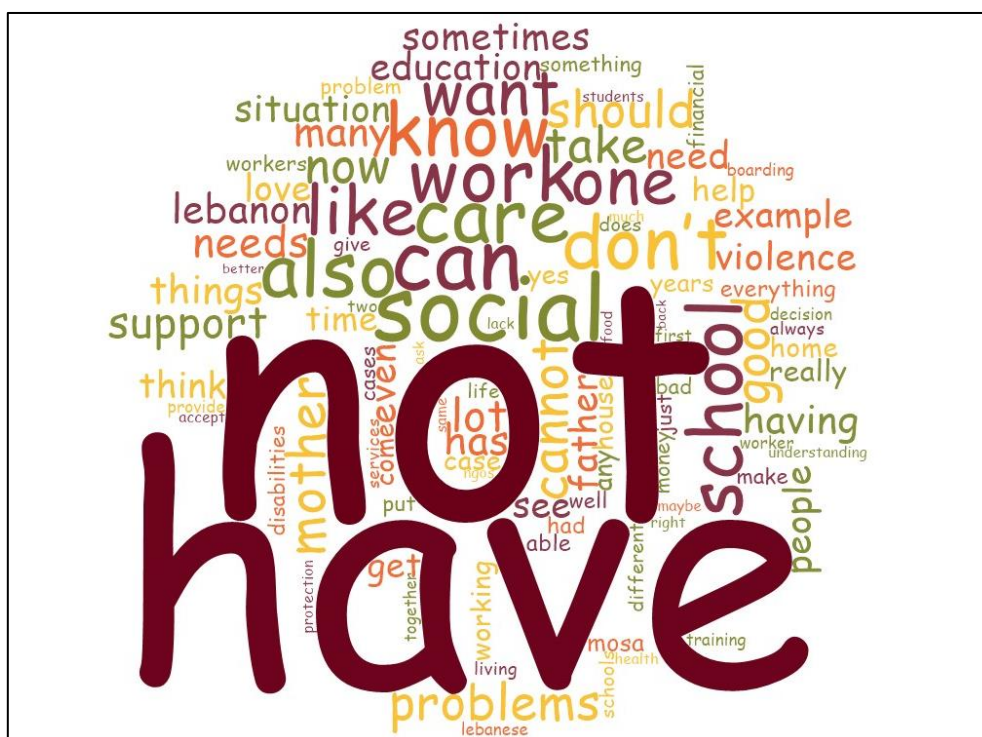
These answers also prompted some heart-felt discussion in the adult family workshops about the financial hardships households are currently facing. The national closure of banks, and the fact thousands from rich, poor and middle income families having lost access to their savings, is leaving people feeling desperate about their personal circumstances as well as the national economic and political future. Some identified, not being able to feed or clothe their children and they are hoping the government will reduce the cost of basic commodities. Lack of basic needs include adequate housing, rising rent costs, and not being able to pay for generators so they have electricity. They are also concerned about their children's education. There is a particular concern about the quality and cost of education as well as the fact many schools remain closed. A further shared concern is someone in the family falling sick as they cannot afford health care costs. The need for better paid employment opportunities was also mentioned.

As indicated in Figure 32, children, young people, and adult family members, repeatedly used the words '*not have*'. Further analysis reveals this in the answers from adult family members this is particularly linked with not having financial and other resources and services. In terms of answers

## Lebanon

from children and young people, the words also related to issues of poverty as well as not having care and attention etc. from parents.

Figure 32. What makes children, young people and adult family members unhappy or worried when they are at home



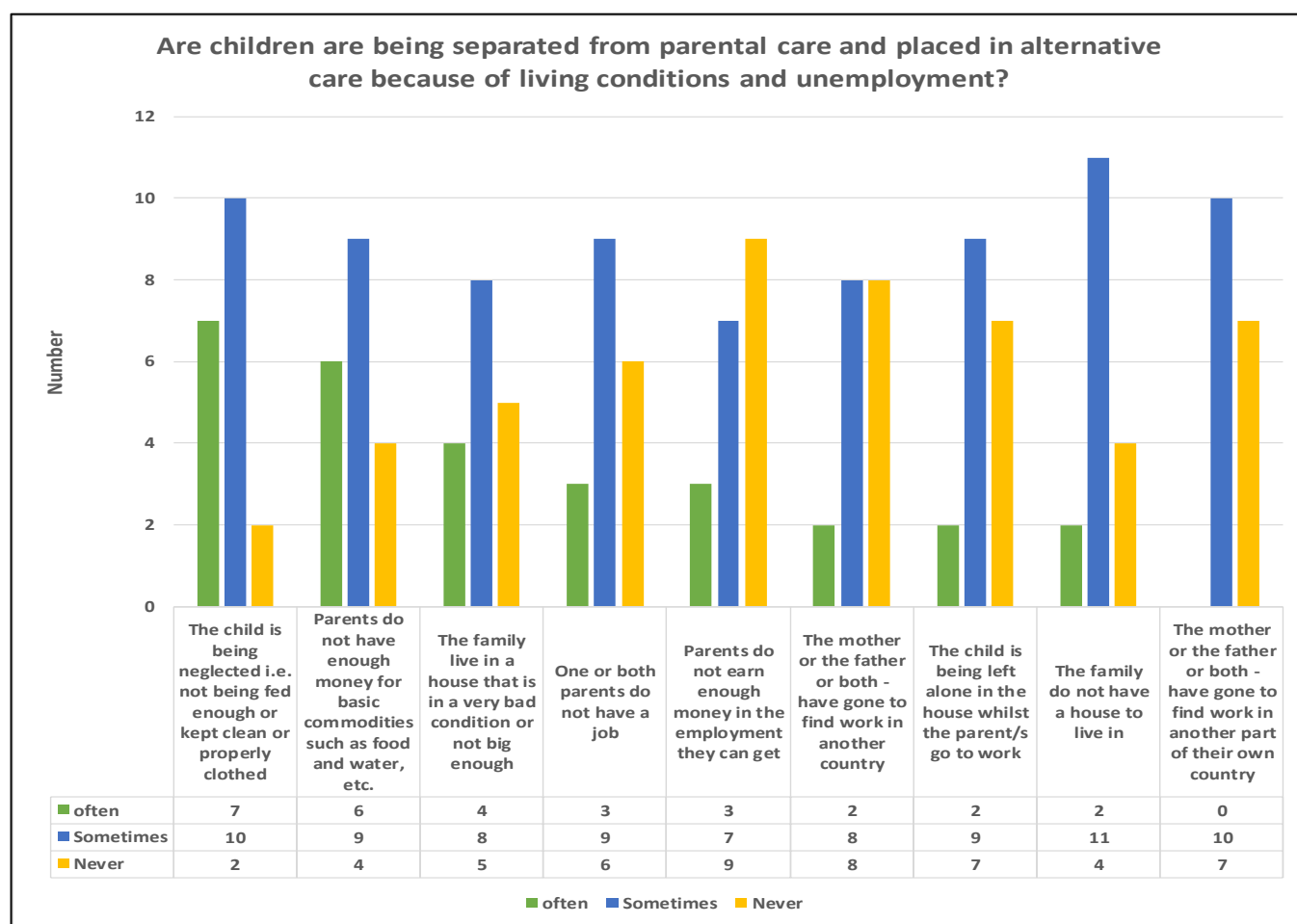
Access to services including free health care, good education, and provision of electricity and clean water, is seen as a government responsibility and adult family workshop participants expect more to be done to improve the situation in Lebanon. There is a general feeling that, government is failing families by not providing assistance that would alleviate the stress of everyday living and help mitigate the circumstances that can lead to the separation of children from their parents and/or extended family. They also spoke about their fear that the ongoing deterioration of the socio-political and economic situation in Lebanon will not be resolved. Little disparity was noted in the answers given in workshops between those living in Beirut and a less urban setting (the second location chosen for our workshops was a setting only 25 kms from Beirut).

In our online survey respondents were asked about reasons they thought children were placed in alternative care. When asked about the impact of living conditions and unemployment, respondents first ranked neglect of children i.e. not being fed enough or kept clean or properly clothed, as the reason they think children are most 'often' placed in alternative care (Figure 33). This was followed by parents not having enough money for such basic commodities as food and water and living in inadequate housing. However, there was a greater number of responses indicating reasons that are 'sometimes' responsible for placement with the three most highly ranked being, not having a house

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

to live in, neglect of children i.e. not being fed enough or kept clean or properly clothed, and one or both parents having gone to find work in another part of the country. Some think the given categories are never the reasons for separation. Although not shown in the graph, a small number of respondents had indicated they didn't know.

Figure 33. Reasons children are separated from parents and placed in alternative care because of living conditions and unemployment



There are many reports documenting the current economic situation in Lebanon and further information has been provided in Chapter 1 of this report. However, the information<sup>308</sup> contained in Figure 34, provides a stark illustration of the challenges facing families.

<sup>308</sup> UNICEF 2022a:4

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 34. Results of a UNICEF child focussed rapid assessment in Lebanon June 2022



(Source: UNICEF 2022a:4)

A 2022 UNICEF report<sup>309</sup> contains details of how the unprecedented economic and financial crisis had pushed individuals and families towards extreme vulnerabilities. People were unable to afford basic commodities and services and an estimated 2.3 million vulnerable Lebanese, Palestinian refugees and migrants, including 700,000 children, faced multiple deprivations.<sup>310</sup>

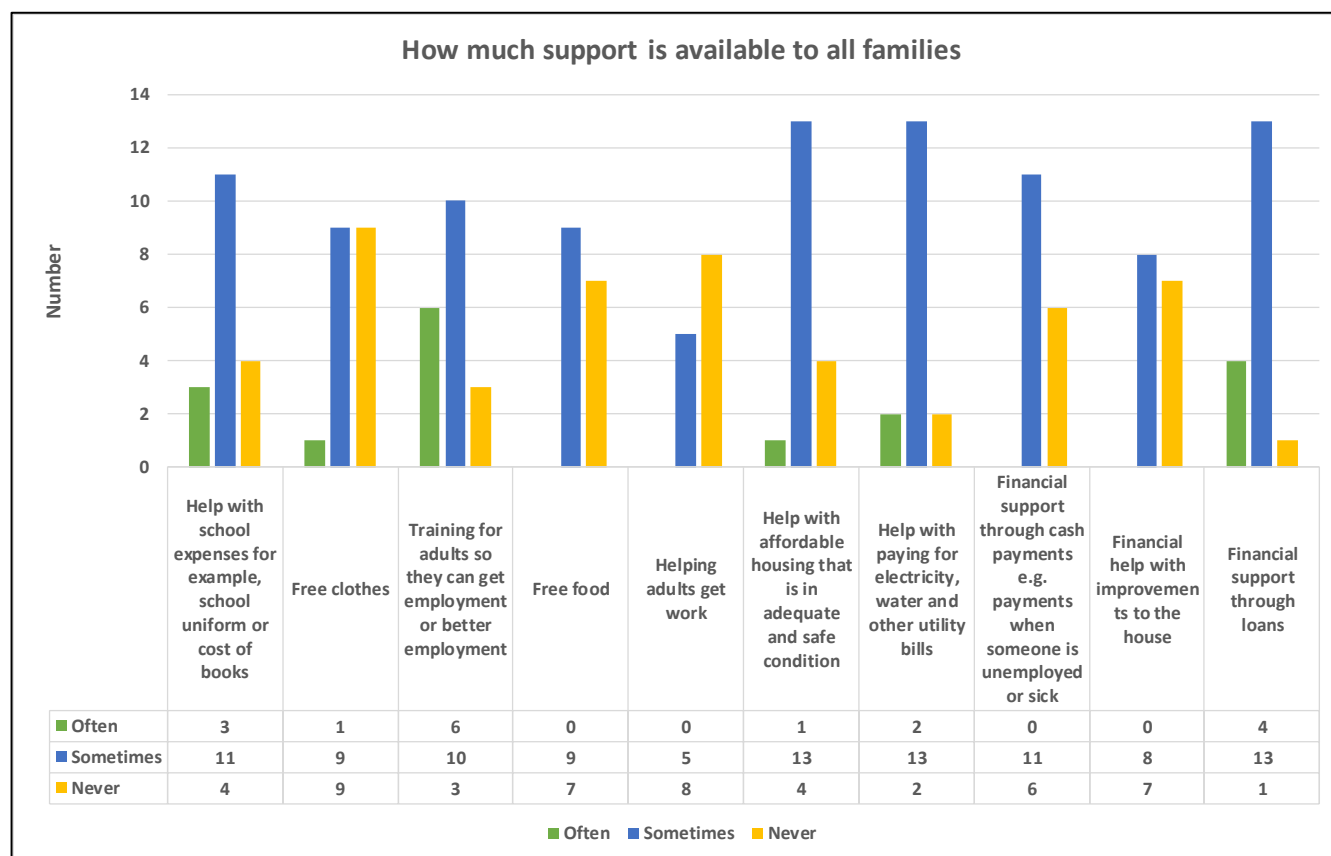
In relation to support that might help address some of the issues discussed in this section of the report, as seen in Figure 35, most respondents in our online survey do not think any of the mentioned forms of support are 'often' available. In relation to support that is 'sometimes' available, the highest ranking was help with housing and utility bills followed by help with school expenses and cash payments when someone is unemployed or sick etc. Some believe these forms of support are never available. Although not shown in the graph, a small number of respondents indicated they didn't know.

<sup>309</sup> UNICEF 2022b

<sup>310</sup> UNICEF 2022b

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 35. How much support is available to all families



There are Government welfare programmes (please see Chapter 1) and NGOs, including SOS Children's Villages, providing different elements family strengthening and support programmes, including both direct resource provision and capacity building elements. However, information gathered during our research, including responses to the online survey, all indicate a much greater need for such support. Programmes on positive parenting and family guidance services are also available but once again, this is an area of work research respondents identify as requiring far more investment.



## 12. The correlation between poverty, family breakdown, and placement in alternative care

As indicated above, our research suggests children are at risk of placement in alternative care as a result of family dysfunction, breakdown and violence. It is understood that issues related to poverty can be a contributing factor to this situation. Children, young people, adult family members, and all interviewees, wrote and spoke about lack of financial resources and support services as a major challenge negatively impacting family life. The general impression of participants in the adult family workshops and interviews, was an overwhelming sense of despair. They said the shared optimism and hope that used to be the norm in Lebanese society, even in times of extreme crisis such as the civil war, was now depleted. It is hard for people to see how a new government will be formed and they lack faith in anything politicians might try to do to improve the country's situation. So whilst many parents, and sometimes their extended family, are doing their utmost to care for children in these very difficult circumstances i.e. *"some poor families love each other, play with each other"*, the perception of some professionals is an increasing reliance by parents on residential alternative care facilities that offer 'social care': *"they don't want to assume the liability. If we teach them, yes, they want to do it, but some other people do not want at all"*.

*"Because you hear the mother saying I cannot vaccinate my children. I cannot pay for the vaccine. Sometimes I assure you I heard this a hundred of times, they are warm. My children if I put them in any alternative care at least they are warm. They are not cold at night...So I heard the mother say I want them to be warm at night. At least if they get sick they can provide medicine for them. Education and a future."*

*"You know the widows mainly because I have my experience with widows they mainly prefer to put them in alternative care so they are at least tranquil. And they are not worrying about their [children's] future."*

Daily struggles and not being able to provide for the family are resulting in feelings of stress and inability to cope. This in turn is thought to be diminishing resilience and impacting the ability to maintain strong relationships and unity in the household. Direct links were made by interviewees between the stress caused by poverty, lack of access to necessary support services, and the manifestation of breakdown of relationships and violence in the home. Interviewees referred to such situations when asked about the treatment of children and the reasons they are placed in alternative care in Lebanon as follows,

*"The stress of poverty is a main reason for delegating the responsibility of the children. And even if both parents exist this is not enough to cover the needs, the basic needs of the children. And can you imagine if there is only one caregiver in the*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

*family and this caregiver is incapable. They have no skills to work. They have no education. They are lost in their stress... So it is the economic first and the stress and the feeling that we cannot do anything with these children."*

*"So if you want to speak about the correlation of why these parents who are poor or became poor, why are they treating the children like this. Because whenever you have a poor situation or you cannot provide for the needs for the family it creates an anxiety in yourself a stressful feeling and all these bad feelings and negativity will be reflected on the way they treat their children or work with their children. And this is the correlation between being poor and the bad treatment."*

*"So this also had a load on the families. How about talking of the families with one parent. Even if the both parents exist and both of them are trying to educate their children. To take care of them. Have time with them, play with them. Talk to them. This is not what we can see these days. These days there is stress all over. The parents are overloaded by the responsibilities and they prefer to delegate this responsibility to someone else. Because of the stress they are living and this stress is coming from the situation in Lebanon. From everything around."*

Challenges and stress are also seen as manifesting themselves in absence of a parent/s including migration for work, chronic illness, substance abuse, and poor mental health. In terms of the latter, a number of interviewees believe stress, caused by different factors including struggling with everyday living and survival, as well as experiencing and witnessing violence, is both the result of and/or factors contributing to poor mental health. Their perception is there is a significant need for more, and improved, access to psychosocial and psychological services.

*"I think that at the personal level the parents have a lot of issues and problems. First of all mental issues that mental not in the same way of psychosis but perhaps depression that can lead to neglect. We faced a lot of cases like this neglect is due to the depression. When you treat the depression you don't have to put the children in a shelter."*

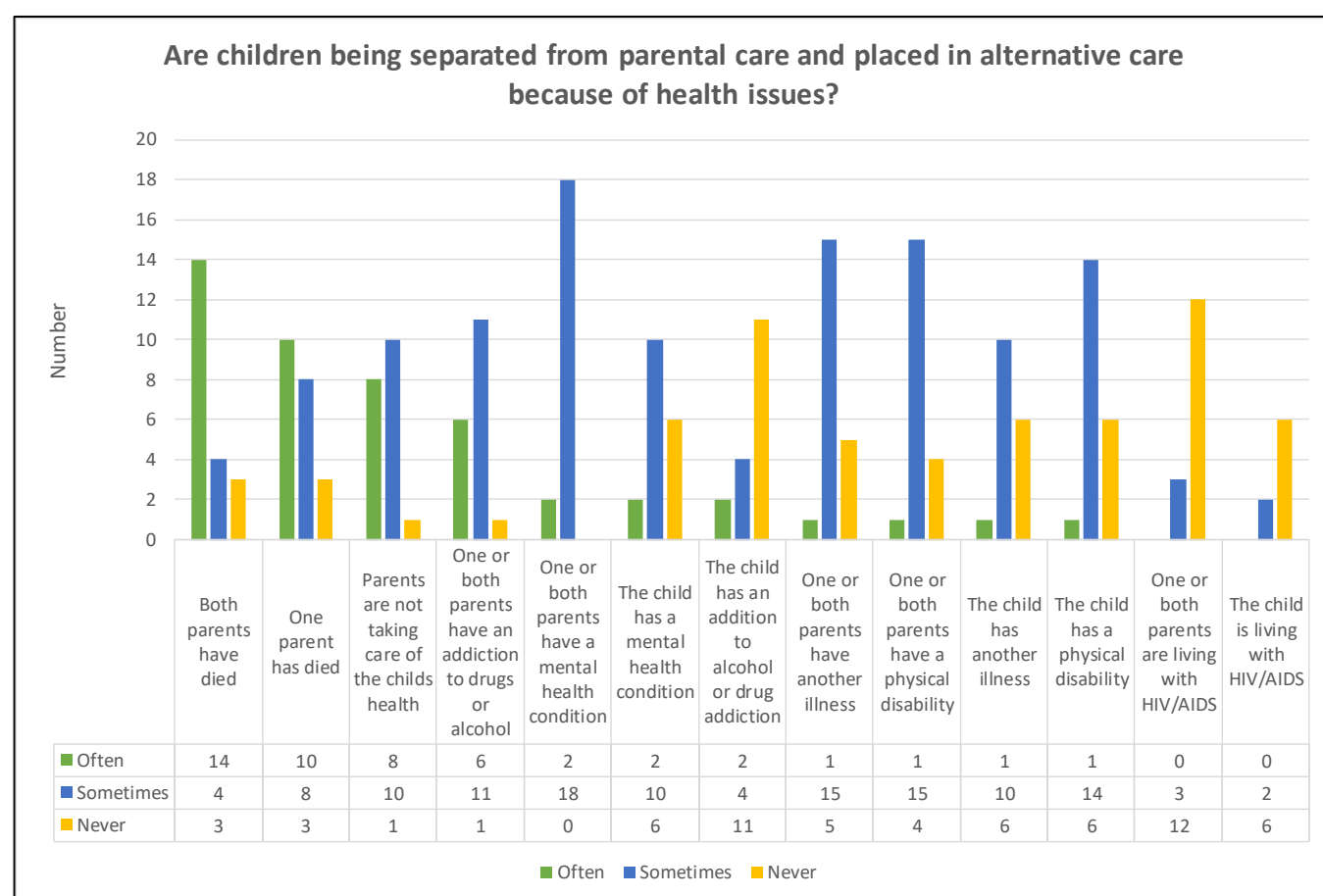
*"I forgot to mention because we are talking about mental disorders. One of the reason for family child separation on the mental health when parents are hospitalized or in specialised psychological centres or are taking psychological medication so this is one of the reasons."*

*"Mental health issues are on the rise."*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Our online survey asked respondents about the impact of health, including mental health, in terms of a child's placement in care. As seen in Figure 36, one or both parents having a mental illness was chosen as the most frequent reason children are 'sometimes' placed in alternative care. However, respondents ranked death of both parents, death of one parents, and parents not taking care of a child's health as the top three reasons they think children are most 'often' placed in alternative care. Some believe the given categories are never the reasons for separation. A small number of survey respondents indicated they don't know in answer to each category.

Figure 36. Reasons children being placed in alternative care because of health issues



Some interviewees spoke directly about the socio-economic backgrounds children in alternative care have come from. Whilst some said they recognise how abuse also happens in rich families, *it won't necessarily make a difference if one family was rich and one family was poor*", they believe the majority of children in care come from poor households.

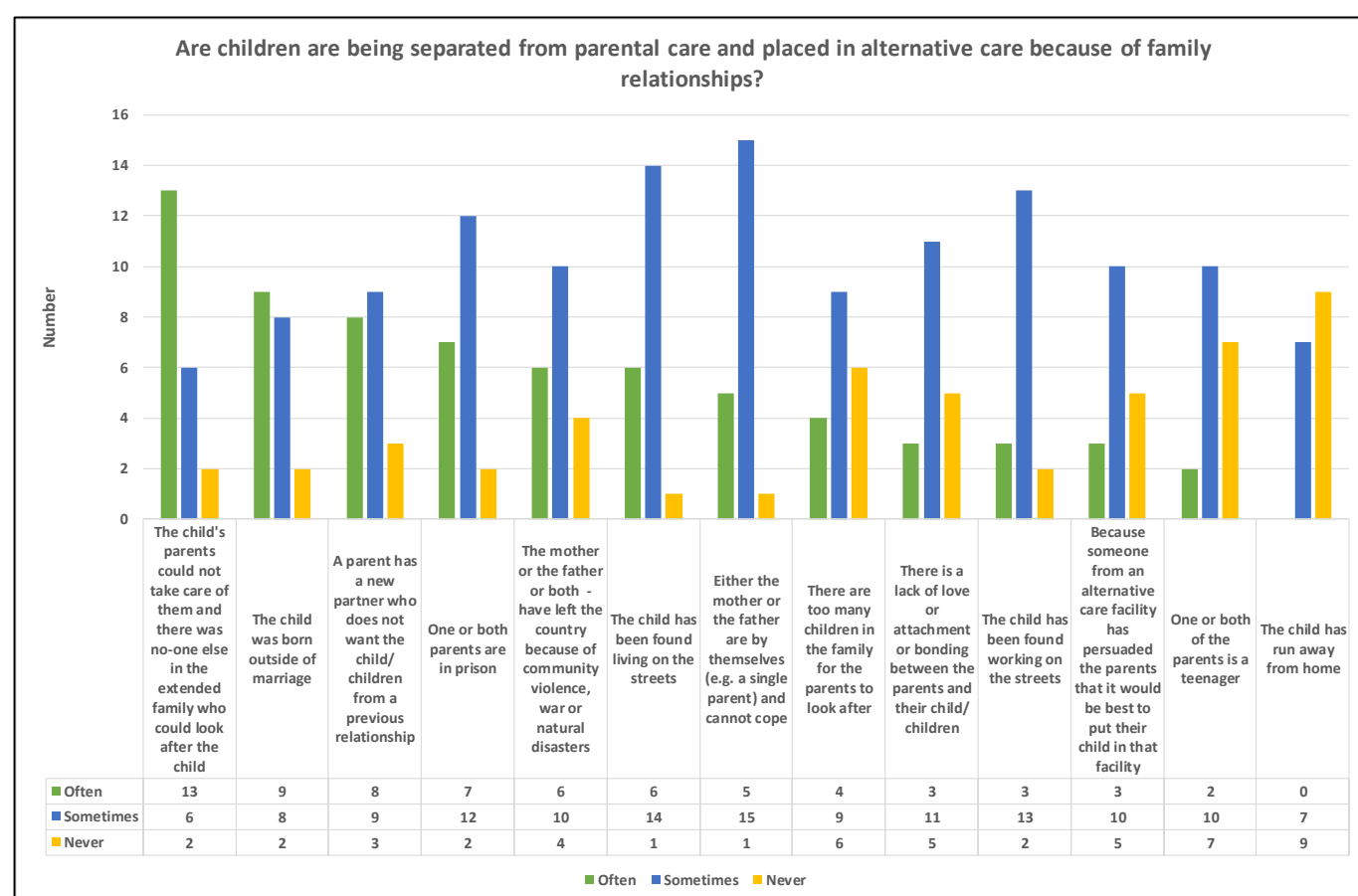
It is also understood that many people living in poverty love their children and are doing their best to care for and protect them. Most certainly this was identified amongst parents and other caregivers

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

attending the adult family workshops who are desperate to care for and protect their children even when facing dire economic circumstances.

When online respondents were asked about the impact of relationships, they placed parents and extended family not being able to take care of a child as the most highly ranked reason children are most 'often' placed in alternative care (Figure 37). This was followed by a child being born out of wedlock, and a parent having a new partner who did not want the child. Once again, there was a greater number of responses indicating reasons that are 'sometimes' responsible for placement with the three most highly ranked answers being, single parents not being able to cope, children being found living in the streets, and children found working on the streets. Some believe the given categories are never reasons for separation. A few respondents had indicated they didn't know.

Figure 37. Reasons children are separated from parents and placed in alternative care because of family relationships



Linking the impact of poverty to family breakdown is highlighted by the findings of a study published in 2018.<sup>311</sup> The study found household income and limited access to basic services in Lebanon was resulting in increased levels of stress within households and negatively impacting parents' ability to

<sup>311</sup> Child Protection Working Group Lebanon 2018

provide adequate care, protection and support for their children. It was believed that this loss of coping mechanisms was contributing to heightened risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children and increased cases of children participating in the worst forms of labour, and of child marriage.

Parents in a 2020<sup>312</sup> study said stress and fatigue was pushing them to adopt violent behaviours they didn't necessarily agree, especially in relation to intimate partner violence and violence against children. Information published by UNICEF in 2021,<sup>313</sup> noted:

'With stress simmering at home, a lack of regular school routine during COVID-19 lockdowns and a decline in social services, at least one million children in Lebanon are at risk of direct violence. UNICEF partners are reporting increasing rates of domestic violence, which puts both women and children at greater risk.'

Two thirds (66% per cent) of respondents in the UNICEF survey said they felt "the urge to yell" at their children and approximately a quarter of the families (31%) acknowledged feeling less tolerant towards their children than before.<sup>314</sup> The anxiety of parents regarding Parents spoke of not knowing 'how else to treat their children when they were having a bad or stressful day other than through violence.'<sup>315</sup> The report went on to recognise how, in 'this pressure cooker environment',<sup>316</sup> mental health issues are also on the rise for young people, 'often resulting in risky, violent behaviour and substance abuse.'<sup>317</sup> Furthermore, findings of a 2021 household survey<sup>318</sup> also confirm how the crisis in Lebanon had contributed to rising protection concerns, stress, and vulnerabilities at household and individual levels.

As the socio-political and economic crisis continues to impact families in Lebanon, the fear of some interviewees is there will be an ever growing dependence on social care residential facilities as well as the need for protection of children in households where the deterioration of relationships escalates into violence.

### 12.1. Divorce/separation and re-marriage/new partnerships

Interviewees suggest stress and lack of good communication in the family is contributing to breakdown of marriages/partnerships resulting in separation and divorce. This is a situation that can result in children being placed in care, especially when either the birth parent, or the step-parent, do

---

<sup>312</sup> UNICEF 2020b

<sup>313</sup> UNICEF 2021b

<sup>314</sup> UNICEF 2021b:6

<sup>315</sup> UNICEF 2021b:6

<sup>316</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> REACH 2022:3

not want children from a previous relationship in their new family. Children are also at risk of losing parental care when marital breakdown leads to custody battles resulting in activation of the courts to child protection referrals and placement into care.<sup>319</sup>

*"Sometimes children are rejected by the new husband or wife. We have cases like this where the children can be rejected by one of their parents or both parents if they are remarried again."*

There is also the possibility that the courts, of which each religious denomination has its own jurisdiction, will take the children from the mother and give custody to the father even if this is not the wish of either parent. In relation to this situation, as with interviewees, reports recognise children are at risk of being relinquished into care due to remarriage and rejection of children by the new partner.<sup>320</sup>

*"And we have 19 religions and each religion has put for example the age of custody. So we don't have any standard civil law like for divorce and domestic violence. We have to go to the religious court which is very unfair sometimes. For example when the women leaves home she does not have any rights because she left the home. She doesn't have the right to have the children with her or even, so as a case worker what do we do. We don't support her to leave home we are telling her and explain the situation with a safety plan and empower because to leave the house you need to have the confidence to take the right decision. We cannot tell her to leave, she must decide what to do not the NGO. Some NGOs are telling them you go and make a divorce but then they are coming to us and saying I don't want to divorce, what can I do as I have no work, I lost my children, I don't get to see them".*

---

<sup>319</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> Child Frontiers 2017





### 13. Decision makers

Under the Lebanese Child Law 422<sup>321</sup> children can be separated from parental care and placed in alternative care for their protection. It requires social workers, police, and other nominated child protection workers, to investigate family circumstances and decide if a child should be removed from the family home. Due to the lack of official published data it has not been possible to find exact numbers of children in protective care. However, information gathered during our study suggest there are less children in alternative care for protection reasons than for 'social care' purposes.

In conclusion, the child protection system in Lebanon has made attempts to improve case management including more rigorous child and family assessments on which informed decisions about a child's protection and well-being can be made. The system is still largely reactive however, with a lack of primary focus on gatekeeping principles that would prevent child-parents separation. According to El Jadali,<sup>322</sup> deficiencies also include limited availability of early identification and preventive interventions for child violence, neglect and exploitation along with poor coordination between sectors in the management of child protection concerns.

In terms of decision making overall, for those children placed in social care in particular, a primary motivation of some decision makers appears to be a belief that children will be better off in care facilities. In general, however, there is a poor understanding of 'gatekeeping', attachment theory and the detrimental impact losing parental care can have on a child, or the importance of preventing unnecessary child-parents separation.

We believe the decision to place a child in alternative care is particularly influenced by two factors: the circumstances they are living in, and the decision making of those with responsibility for child safeguarding judgements. Therefore, our research framework included a focus on decision makers, and factors influencing their decisions on safeguarding and determining whether or not to place a child in alternative care.

Most especially we considered decision making within the context of a national child protection system. To this end, we thought about the way decision making is guided by a normative framework

---

321 Law 422, Article 25. A juvenile is considered threatened in the following cases -1 :If he is found in an environment that exposes him to exploitation or threatens his health, safety, morals, or conditions of upbringing.-2 .If he is subjected to sexual assault or physical violence that exceeds the limits of what is permissible by custom of non-harmful forms of discipline -3 .If he is found a beggar or homeless. A juvenile is considered a beggar under this law if he becomes proficient in begging for charity by any means .He is considered homeless if he leaves his home to live in the streets and public stores, or if he does not have a home and is found in the aforementioned situation .

<sup>322</sup> El Jadali 2018

containing national legislation, policy, and statutory guidance. We recognised how the functioning of child protection services, as well resources with which to undertake responsibilities to children and families, can impact the work of decision makers. In addition, consideration has been given to the capacity of professionals as influenced by their knowledge, understanding, training and experience, as well as the 'gatekeeping' mechanisms and child protection case management, including use of child and family assessments. Availability of data on child protection and alternative care that could help the knowledge and understanding of professionals was also reviewed. The information contained in this chapter has been informed by a brief desk review and interviews with professionals (interviewees) working within the child protection system.

Those holding responsibility for gatekeeping decisions i.e., whether a child can safely remain in parental care, whether it is in the best interest to temporarily remove them, and when it is possible for care-experienced children to return to their parents, is a highly responsible role. Key decision makers in Lebanon include social workers employed by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), social workers or their equivalent employed by NGO care providers, the police, and the judiciary. It is important to note that a significant amount of child protection services, including provision of alternative care is provided by NGOs and religious organisations. The implication being the importance of their adherence to national laws and policies in relation to decision making for children and their families.

Decisions are being made in reference to two distinct forms of alternative care in Lebanon. Firstly, placement into what has been termed 'social care' in Lebanon is based on the socio-economic situation of a child rather than the primacy of protection. This include families taking a decision to relinquish their children, and/or through a decision made by a social worker from Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). It is our belief their involvement is often taken after the placement and following an application for funding for the child. It is also the decision of social care providers whether to accept a child or not. In addition, MOSA upholds its responsibilities for child protection and referring of children to the courts so that a decision can be made whether or not to place them in alternative care for safeguarding reasons. In some cases NGOs working with families also take a decision to refer a child to social care providers or notify MOSA of a child protection concern. Although lacking official government data, our overall findings suggest there are more children in alternative care who are there for reasons of financial concerns and education rather than protection reasons. This suggests in terms of international standards, many of the placements are unnecessary as children could safely remain in the care of their parents, especially in cases that require support to address issues of poverty and social exclusion.

The normative framework in Lebanon lacks a specific law for the protection of children. There is also a lack of clarity in the current law on protection of juveniles, as it juxtaposes articles related issues of juvenile justice and for children in need of care and protection. The 2015 guidance on Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs) for child protection case management is comprehensive but still allows

for two tracks of decision making one of which does not require any court order before placing children in residential 'social care'. Overall this indicates legislation and policy that fails to provide an effective child protection system that guarantees the best interest of the child and prevents unnecessary placement in any form of alternative care.

In terms of efficacy of decision makers it is thought the quality of assessments and decision making is not consistent and there are calls for improvements. In part, it is believed this situation is due to lack of sufficient numbers of trained social workers resulting in high caseloads and lack of time to dedicate to child and family assessments that would accurately provide evidence as to the form of support a child requires. Our research suggests many children in 'social' care are not there as the result of any initial assessment or referral from MOSA but are accepted on the request of parents or other family members. Furthermore, there is a lack of rigorous and systematic data collection that would inform the necessary and accurate development of child protection and alternative care policy and programming.

### **13.1. A normative framework for child protection**

In line with the UNCRC, a national normative framework, consisting of laws, bylaws and regulations, policies, and statutory guidance, should guarantee children's right to protection from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It should reinforce the primary responsibility of parents for the care and protection of children, obligate the State to support parents in this endeavour, and allow for intervention if, and when, necessary to care for and protect a child. A normative framework should provide for the necessary socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions in which children and families can thrive. It also offers a mandate for decision making and, in this regard, guides professionals in their roles and responsibilities toward children and families as well as to when, and how, they should take certain decisions.

Our review of the normative framework in Lebanon suggests it is complex due to both State law and Sharia law being followed and the differing principles that are then applied, as for example, decisions about child custody in the case of divorce. This leaves a situation where the basis upon which decisions are being made are not the same for every child but influenced and determined by issues related to their religion.

Furthermore, there is no one child protection law rather, protection and criminalisation of children converge in one law, Law 422. Apart from the 7 year Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs on the protection of Women and children issued in 2020, there is little evidence of recent development of legislation and policy for child protection and alternative care. As the Government of Lebanon is itself in crisis and currently without an elected President and cabinet, it is unlikely that any ambitions to develop comprehensive child protection legislation and policy will be developed in the near future.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

### International conventions and treaties

Upon signing or ratifying a UN convention or treaty, as with any other State, Lebanon is mandated to reflect the content in national law. Table 3 contains a number of international conventions and treaties that the Government of Lebanon has signed or ratified as relevant to the protection of children..

Table 3. International Conventions ratified by the Lebanese Republic

International Conventions	Year
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1972
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1973
Arab Charter on Human Rights	1990
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)	1991
CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	1997
CAT - Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	2000
ILO Convention on the worst forms of child labour (No.182)	2001
CRC-OP-AC - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (signed but not ratified)	2002
CRC-OP-SC - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography	2004
Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children	2005
CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (signed not ratified)	2007
CAT-OP - Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture	2008

### National legislation

Table 4 lists some of the relevant laws and policies pertaining to child protection and alternative care in Lebanon.

Table 4. National legislation relevant to child protection and alternative care in Lebanon

National Normative Framework	Year
The Constitution of Lebanon	1926
Penal Code 1943 with amendments	1943
Personal Status Law 1951	1951
Amended Constitution of Lebanon	1990
Decree No. 5734 of 29 Sept 1994 (Regulation and Organisation of Ministry of Social Affairs)	1994
Decree N° 700 (1999); Anti-Trafficking Law 164/2011 and Decree N° 8987 (anti-trafficking laws)	1999
Law 220/2000. (covering issues of disability)	2000
Law 422/2002 on the protection of delinquent minors and children at risk	2002

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Law 293/2014 Protection of Women and other Family Members from Family Violence. (forms part of the legal framework for the judicial protection of children in Lebanon)	2014
Labour Law 23 September 1946, amended 2010;	2010
Law 164 on human trafficking	2011
National Social Development Strategy (2012-2015)	2012
Law No.293 of 4/1/2014 "Law for the Protection of Women and Other Family Members from Domestic Violence	2014
National Action Plan for the Prevention and Protection of Children Associated with Armed Conflict in Lebanon	2014
National Plan for the Protection of Children and Women in Lebanon 2014-2017	2014
The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs On the protection of Women and children 2020-2027	2020

As already noted above, the legal system in Lebanon is complex due to the mix of State legislation and laws that are upheld by different religious authorities, including Sharia law. According to El Hoss, this means, 'unresolved challenges remain to reconcile the competing roles, interests and capabilities of the state, the non-governmental sector, and religious authorities under one cohesive framework.'<sup>323</sup> This in turn, writes El-Hoss, has led to a 'pluralistic'<sup>324</sup> child protection system, 'where despite the introduction of a statutory framework, substantive authority and responsibility for child welfare remains diffused among a variety of national and local stakeholders.'<sup>325</sup>

In 2012, UNICEF, while recognising legislation in Lebanon 'generally provides for the protection and promotion of children's rights as required by the Convention on the Rights of the Child', <sup>326</sup> an assessment of the normative framework also identified gaps. It was acknowledged that in the domain of family and child welfare issues, 'religious communities'<sup>327</sup> have significant autonomy in matters such as child custody and were basing decisions on local cultural norms and practices. El-Hoss recently wrote about religious courts that consider a child's best interest as 'being fulfilled within 'natural' family environments, consisting of male and female caregivers and a secure identity rooted in religious and communal belonging.'<sup>328</sup> He went on to say religious 'judges and case workers believed these priorities were missing from the state's CP [child protection] system which is willing to withdraw children from family and community links to place them in institutional care.'<sup>329</sup> There are other reports<sup>330</sup> that considered the decisions being made in religious courts to be following customs and norms that actually override consideration of a child's best interests.

<sup>323</sup> El-Hoss 2023:1.

<sup>324</sup> El-Hoss 2023:2

<sup>325</sup> El-Hoss 2023:2

<sup>326</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>327</sup> UNICEF et al. 2012

<sup>328</sup> El-Hoss 2023:2

<sup>329</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

As a result, such decisions as those relating to the separation of a child from parental care, and with whom they will be placed, are not systematically applied in the same way to all children and families as they are dependent on different legislation, court jurisdiction, and social norms and customs. In this way, what happens to a child can be based on many different factors including their religion, community, and gender etc.

Below is a short precis of a few of the laws and policies that are particularly relevant to the protection of children and placement in care.

### **Law 422 of 2002 Protection of Minors in Conflict with the Law, or at Risk**

Law 422 (2002) is the principle State legislation that contains some provision for children at risk. It establishes the judicial process for dealing with violence against children and outlines responsibilities and powers of social workers and the judiciary in the provision of protection orders. However, it is primarily a juvenile justice law and not a comprehensive child protection/child rights law. Only one chapter is specifically relevant to children at risk and the Law merges, and speaks inter-changeably, about procedures for children in conflict with the law and children in need of protection.

Chapter 3 (Article 25) of Law 422 specifically mandates for children of any age that are at risk if they are:

- Found in an environment that exposes children to exploitation or threatens their health, safety, morals, or the conditions of their upbringing
- Subjected to sexual assault, or physical violence that exceeds the limits allowed by customary forms of non-harmful discipline
- Found begging or homeless (live on the streets or in other public places)

Furthermore, this Law recognises children who are begging or considered as vagrants as delinquents. This is a concern as being associated with begging and vagrancy is criminalised under the Penal Code.

Under Law 422, judges are required to make decisions that are for the child's benefit, including their protection. This action can be based on a case initiated by the child themselves, one of their parents, a guardians, trustee, or another responsible persons, or the social services representative. The Public Prosecutor or the juvenile judge should be given results of a social investigation (assessment). They can order this protection investigation to be made if not previously undertaken. If the case is deemed an emergency, the judge must give it their immediate attention.

The judge must provide an opportunity for the child and one or both of their parents, legal guardian, or other responsible person to be heard. In terms of gatekeeping, it is important to note how a judge

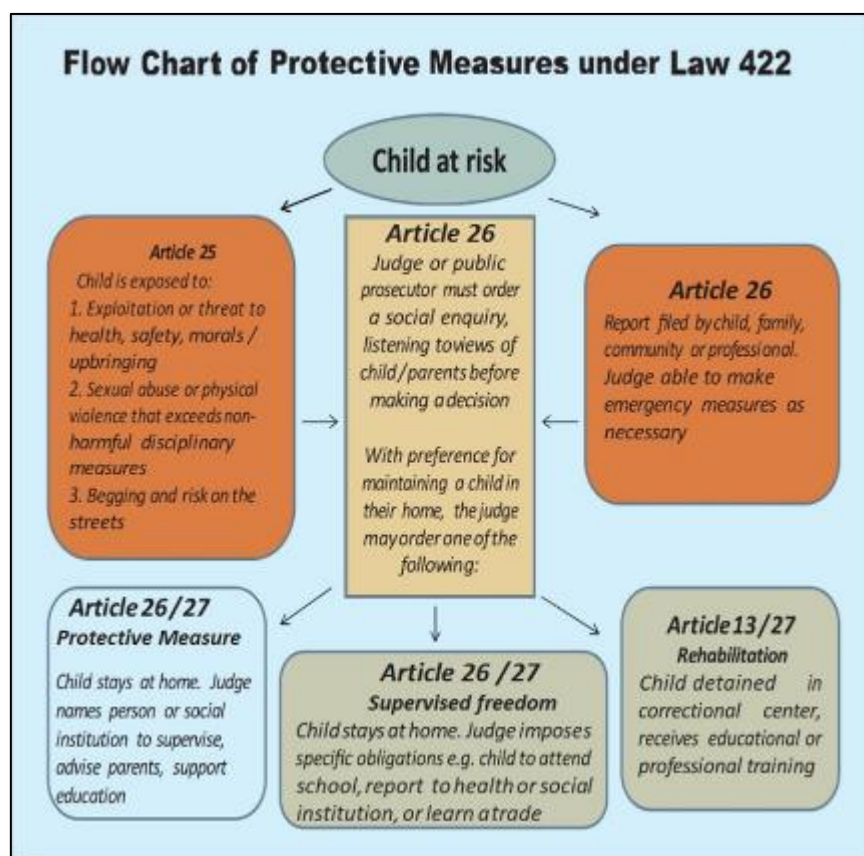


## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

can take steps prevent placement in care by nominating a designated person or 'social institution' to observe and provide advice and help to the primary caregivers with the upbringing of their child. This situation is supposed to be monitored and decisions taken whether to 'impose' service providers, such as education and health care, to provide support, and for the costs to be covered. In this respect, this Law could be seen as placing emphasis on preventing unnecessary placement in care. There is no mention in this Law about official removal of parental rights, or who has legal rights to make decisions on behalf of a child whilst in alternative care. Judges can issue emergency orders and request police investigations.

Figure 38 has been extracted from an UNWRA document<sup>331</sup> that provides a diagrammatic explanation of the implementation of Law 422 and how it contains an inter-changeable focus on children in conflict with the law and children at risk.

Figure 38. Flow chart of protection measures under Law 422



(Source: UNRWA 2014)

<sup>331</sup> UNRWA 2014

### **Penal Code Legislative Decree No. 340 of 1943**

Legislation in Lebanon does not prohibit corporal punishment in the home, alternative care settings, day care and schools.<sup>332</sup> Amendments in 2014 to the Penal Code permits 'types of non-violent discipline which are practiced by fathers and mothers on their children provided that it does not leave any effect on the child's body or lead to harm to their physical or psychological health.'<sup>333</sup> In addition, Article 90 allows for 'guardianship' of a child and the ability to deprive parents or other legal caregivers of such role. Article 500 refers to punishment for the abandonment of a child under the age of 8 years old, whether temporary or permanent, and if for financial benefit.

### **Law 164 on human trafficking of 2011**

Law 164 on human trafficking introduces the situation of 'exploitation' into Lebanese legislation with severe penalties for those who force children to participate various harmful activities such as sexual exploitation, begging and forced labour. Overall, our understanding is there has been little advancement in terms of child protection legislation since 2011.

### **The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs on the protection of Women and children 2020-2027**

Outlined in the preface to the Strategic Plan for the Protection of Women and Children 2020-2027, is the ambitious aim of taking steps to achieve social protection, social security, population well-being, and improving the economy. The Plan requires the strengthening of working partnerships between sectors and organisations. It also speaks of the role of women and children as being 'essential partners' in the protection process. The Plan clearly places MOSA as the lead ministry in terms of management, coordination, and supervision of protection programmes and services in Lebanon. It identifies the ministry as being 'pivotal' and 'pioneering' in terms of women and children's protection within a human rights framework, whilst 'providing' and 'enhancing quality services' guided by international standards in order to help achieve 'a society free of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect against children and women.'

There is recognition in the Plan that the economic crisis in Lebanon is impacting the lives of women and children and the manner in which this is increasing their risk of exposure to violence. It is understood that 'violence has profound negative repercussions on children's development, well-being, and their inherent right to life.' There is also a significant focus on the prevention of gender based violence.

Specific aims include improved quality of life for women and children including improved access to education and health care, enhanced child development particularly for the most vulnerable, and increased child protection. This is to be achieved through awareness raising, one-stop shops for

---

<sup>332</sup> Please see: <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/lebanon/>

<sup>333</sup> Penal Code (Legislative Decree No. 340). Please note this is an English translation from Arabic.

access to services, improving human resources and infrastructure, and improved protection legislation.

During our research, no respondents referred to this policy or to the efficacy of its application.

### 13.2. Structures for child protection system delivery, co-ordination, and oversight

#### Higher Council for Childhood

Amongst the bodies responsible for the protection of children in Lebanon is the Higher Council for Childhood established in 1994. The Council is an inter-ministerial body working in coordination with non-governmental and international organisations.

The Council's programmes include the 'Family environment and Alternative Care', and the 'Child prevention and protection from all forms of exploitation, abuse and neglect'. Within these programmes are responsibilities to prepare national strategies on the family environment and alternative care for the child. An evaluation of the Council's work in 2017,<sup>334</sup> whilst noting some achievements, also pointed to a lack of funding and poor inter-sectoral coordination.

#### Ministry of Social Affairs

A key ministry with responsibility for decisions in relation to the protection of children is the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). MOSA is responsible for delivery of the national child protection system, including provision of alternative care. It also has a duty to offer welfare support to families. Within the Directorate of Social Services is the Social Welfare Department which holds responsibility for both child and family welfare and child protection. This responsibility is delivered through the Juvenile Protection Department, the Specialised Social Welfare Department, and the Social Welfare Department for Families and Children.

Our assessment of the functioning of MOSA indicates a distinct disconnect between responsibilities to address welfare needs of children and families and child protection. This is resulting in a siloed approach that leads to the Ministry sponsoring the placement of children into what is known in Lebanon as 'social care' for reasons of poverty and social welfare, whilst a distinctly separate responsibility is placement for protection reasons.

In the 2015 written submission by UNICEF<sup>335</sup> to the Committee on the Rights of the Child recognised the majority of children in residential 'institutions' were not orphaned or abandoned children, nor in need of temporary protection. A report issued just a few years earlier in 2012 said children in residential care included those from 'poor families, children with disabilities, children in broken or problematic families, orphans and abandoned children, and children who are in trouble with the law.'

---

<sup>334</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>335</sup> UNICEF Lebanon Country Office 2015

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

The report went on to say that although some children may have suffered from abuse, for the most part, children had been placed in care due to lack of family coping mechanisms and/or because it was thought this would offer children better opportunities, especially educational ones.

Although providers of alternative care are required to register with the Ministry of Interior, (except some organisations that have exemption due to special religious status), MOSA also has an accreditation scheme for those NGOs applying for, or receiving, funding from the Ministry. The Ministry is also responsible for monitoring the provision of alternative care.<sup>336</sup>

### Provision of alternative care

The provision of alternative care is a component of the national child protection system. The availability and functioning of alternative care can have a significant impact on decision makers as for example, the ease of access to, and availability of, care placements, that might influence a child protection worker's decision whether or not to use alternative care as an option for a child, as well as the expected norms about use of such care.

As previously noted, the sub-division of responsibilities for social welfare and for child protection within MOSA is a contributing factor impacting the different decisions to place and or/ sponsor a child in a 'social care' residential setting and placing a child in a protection facility. At the time of our research, MOSA was providing subsidies to care providers of between 0.23 and 0.5 USD per child per day for shelter, food and education of children in residential facilities. In real terms, due to the economic crisis facing Lebanon and devaluation of the Lebanese currency, this payment has reduced exponentially with some care providers seeing it as a purely tokenistic contribution.

It has not been possible to find up-to-date disaggregated data on the number of children in alternative care or the reasons they have been placed there. We are aware there are a number of residential institutions specifically for children with disabilities but once again, we have not seen official data that would confirm numbers. It is recognised that a significant amount of alternative care is provided by NGOs and religious organisations. Information for 2016, published in a 2017 report,<sup>337</sup> provided the following information about 'social care' residential institutions:

In 2016 there were 24,106 children funded by MOSA in overnight care in 201 social welfare facilities. This figure has fallen slightly in the last three years from 24,747 in 2014. Around 1,000 of these children are infants aged under 4...The number of children placed in social welfare facilities varies considerably by area of the country, with much care centred close to urban centres. Some 37 per cent of children in residential care are in facilities in Mount Lebanon, adjacent to Beirut ...Most of the children in social

<sup>336</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

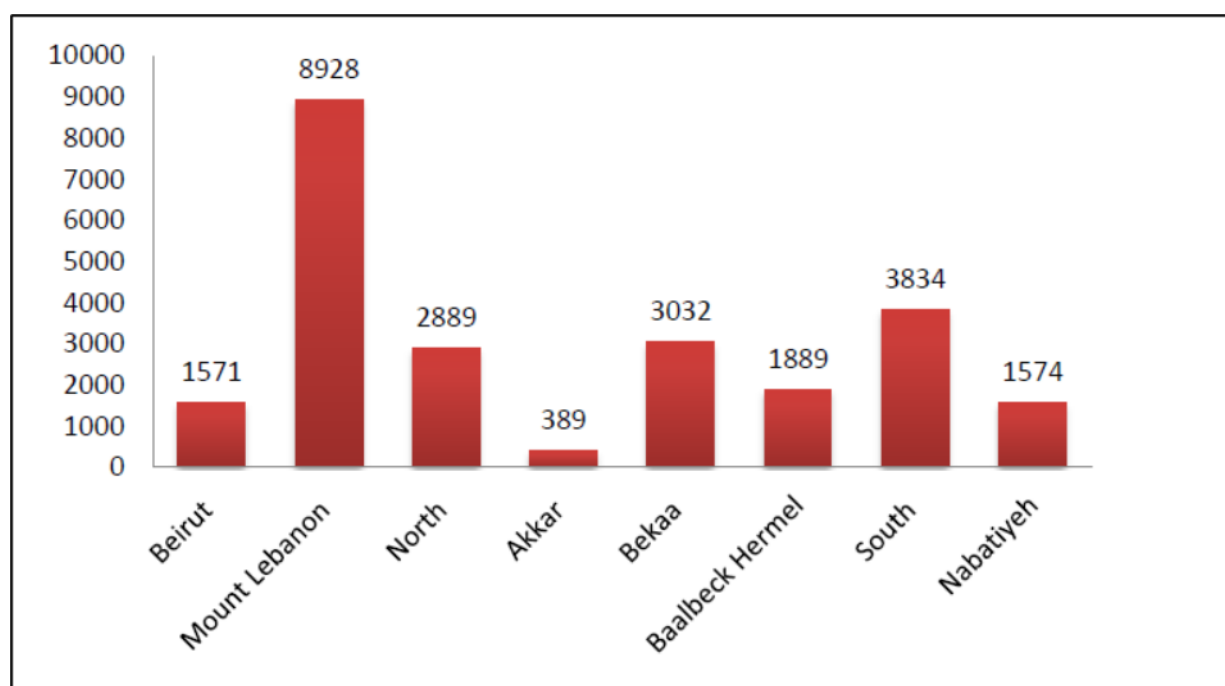
<sup>337</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

welfare shelters are Lebanese as MOSA will not fund social welfare placements for refugee children.

Figure 39, reproduced from the same 2017 report<sup>338</sup>, illustrates the number of children in MOSA funded overnight social care in 2016.

Figure 39. Number of children in MOSA-funded overnight social welfare care in 2016, by governorate



(Source: Child Frontiers 2017)

The report of 2017<sup>339</sup> also identified 15 government-funded residential care facilities for children in need of protection. MOSA can provide refugee children with protective care, but not social care. However, numbers in protective alternative care are believed to be low as some facilities will not accept them.<sup>340</sup> This issue was confirmed during interviews we conducted for our research. It is understood that the Ministry of Justice also contracts out case management of children in conflict with the law to NGOs, including children found on the streets, even in cases where there are protection concerns.

It is difficult to perceive any incentive to change practices and instigate closure of residential institutions whilst MOSA continues to sponsor such facilities and there is no national formal system of family-based alternative care. Some interviewees said it would be culturally unacceptable for a family to take in a child that was not of their own blood and, whilst recognising the importance of

<sup>338</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>340</sup> *ibid.*

deinstitutionalisation, they do not see how foster care can be developed in Lebanon in the foreseeable future.

In terms of reunification, our research indicates very few children being returned to parental or extended family once placed in care. Adoption was not a focus of this study and was not an issue raised by interviewees.

### **13.3. Capacity of decision makers and use of child protection case management**

Gatekeeping procedures that prevent unnecessary child-parents separation are an essential component of a national child protection system. In this regard, child protection case management guides and facilitates decision making that is in the best interests of each child and in meeting their individual needs, circumstances and wishes.<sup>341</sup> International guidance also highlights the importance of decision makers from all responsible bodies and organisations sharing the same gatekeeping tools and processes that include the use of comprehensive child and family assessments and the setting of risk thresholds in relation to child safeguarding to inform any decision making processes<sup>342</sup>.

#### **Reporting children for whom there is a protection concern**

In the first instance, reporting is by those deciding whether or not to report a concern about a child. This might be to state authorities or an NGO. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) produced in 2015 call on mandatory reporting of protection concerns by both professionals and members of the public of suspected or actual cases of child abuse and provide sanctions against those that do not report. However, the SOPs are guidance and not a law.

Interviewees suggested families, neighbours, and sometimes teachers and medical staff, are amongst those who usually decide to report issues of child protection. However, previous studies<sup>343</sup> explained how cultural values and beliefs mean some child protection cases are not being reported. For example, research with community leaders and families<sup>344</sup> revealed a set of social norms related to the sanctity of the family unit and the belief in the inherent right, and responsibility, to manage affairs without interference from the authorities. In this respect, some families and communities do not report cases of child abuse to the authorities but find solutions themselves. In part, this is driven by a belief that intervention by an external authority can stigmatise the family in the eyes of the community and render intra-familial relationships even more fragile. Furthermore, they believe a resolution to the problem should enable the perpetrator to 'save face' and at all costs, avoid a 'humiliating submission before the law'.

---

<sup>341</sup> Cantwell et al. 2012; Csaky and Gale 2015

<sup>342</sup> Cantwell et al. 2012

<sup>343</sup> Gale 2021

<sup>344</sup> UNICEF & Université Saint-Joseph & Government of Lebanon Social Affairs



## Child Protection Case Management

Preventing unnecessary placement in alternative care through gatekeeping procedures is an essential component of a national child protection system.<sup>345</sup> It involves a systematic process and use of tools and procedures that enables all those involved in the protection and care of children to make choices that are in the best interests of each child and meet their individual needs, circumstances and wishes.<sup>346</sup> It is essential that all responsible bodies and organisations share the same gatekeeping tools and processes including setting of risk thresholds and parameters as part of assessment and decision making processes. Such processes should also take into account guidance in the 2019 UNGA Resolution on the Promotion and protection of the rights of children<sup>347</sup> that clearly states that financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely imputable to such poverty, should never be the only justification for the removal of a child from the care of his or her parents or primary caregivers and legal guardians, or for receiving a child into alternative care.

In 2015 the Government in Lebanon developed a set of National Standard Operating Procedures for the Protection of Juveniles in Lebanon (SOPs)<sup>348</sup> in partnership with UNICEF and the University of Saint-Joseph in Beirut. This process was undertaken in consultation with national NGOs. The SOPs are set out over 132 pages and explain procedures and methodology in line with Law 422/2002 for the Protection of Juveniles in Conflict with the Law and/or at Risk in Lebanon. They include tools and methodology for all steps of child protection case management including identification and referral, assessment, protection measures and case plans, monitoring and case closure. Instructions for child protection assessments include evaluating parental capacity, suitability of a child's environment, and determining the threshold between risk and danger. It was the intention of the Government to use the SOPs Lebanon's diverse governmental and non-governmental child protection actors around a common national practice standard and methodology.

It is understood many government social workers and employees of NGOs have received training on the SOPS and during our research several interviewees confirmed they had attended such training. Reports<sup>349</sup> also claim that the SOPs have been welcomed and are being utilised by various organisations. However, 2 years after the publication of the SOPs, a report<sup>350</sup> said difficulties related to implementation, particularly when connected to decisions about placing children in care, include:

- A lack of appropriate procedures for emergency placement into care.
- Problems associated with the mandatory reporting requirements, and/or inadequate training on this topic.

---

<sup>345</sup> Csaky and Gale 2015

<sup>346</sup> Cantwell et al 2019

<sup>347</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2019

<sup>348</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), University of Saint Joseph- Lebanese School for Social Work 2015

<sup>349</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>350</sup> *ibid.*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

- Insufficient efforts to encourage the use of a non-judicial pathway and keeping the child in the family. Some noted that the SOPs focus too much on risks and not enough on strengths within the family. Gathering more background information on the family and the child's history should also be encouraged.
- Problems with assessment processes and forms, including the lack of a specific form for reporting to judges, with concerns that forms provide inadequate information on which to make an informed decision.
- Confusion over roles and responsibilities, for example, around the role of the General Prosecutor in care proceedings.

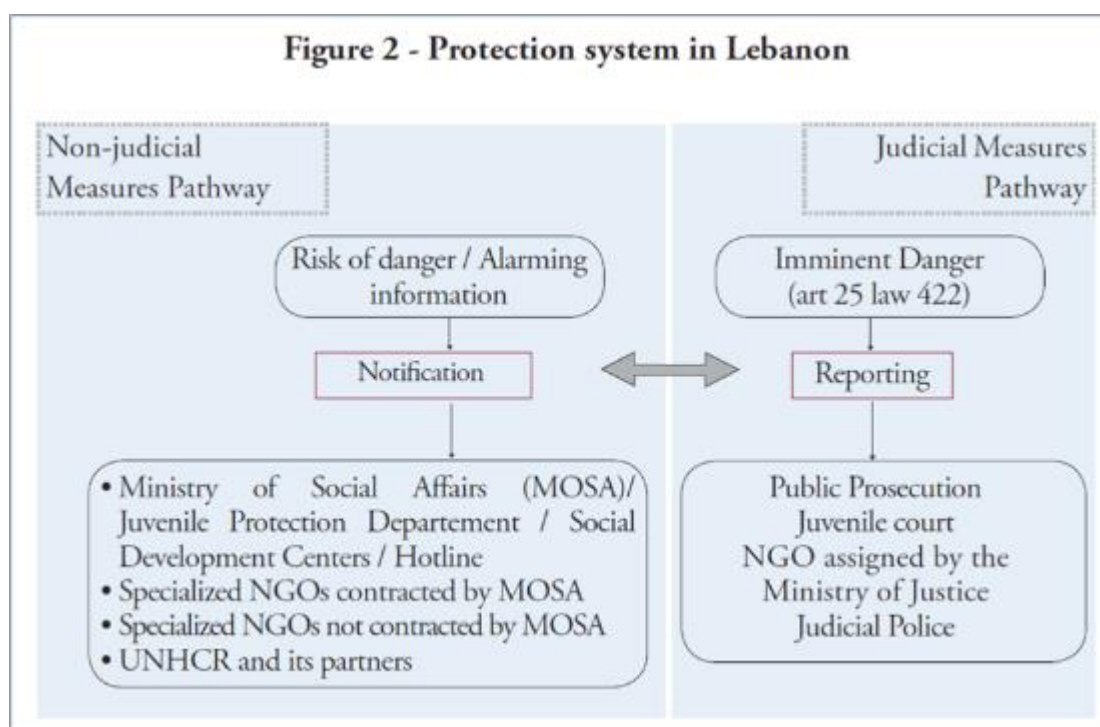
Our research also suggests that the 2015 SOPs are not being systematically applied, especially when admitting children into social care. It is concerning for example, when some interviewees mentioned the criteria being used for 'selecting' and accepting children into care. For example, one care provider said they have *"informants"* in residential zones who help identify and assess children to see if they would be better off in their institution. This often involves children of female-headed households, including widows. A lack of understanding, or disregard of attachment and family preservation is perhaps reflected in the way they sometimes decide to leave just one child with the mother so they are not alone: *"because the mother is a widow, she needs one of her children."*

A further issue is the manner in which the SOPS provide two pathways in to care: through a judicial process or a non-judicial process depending on the level and type of risk. This means, as seen in Figure 40, some children can be placed into alternative care without any judicial oversight if parents or other carers consent to the placement,.

*"The state does not interfere in this case where children are placed in alternative care by NGOs. So the state does not interfere unless there are protection decisions from the juvenile court."*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 40. Judicial and non-judicial pathways into care (Government of Lebanon SOPs 2015)



(Source: Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF, University of Saint Joseph- Lebanese School for Social Work 2015)

### The role of social workers and decision making

Amongst primary decision makers in Lebanon, and users of the 2015 SOPs,<sup>351</sup> are teams of social workers with responsibilities for social welfare and for child protection employed in the Ministry of Social Affairs, or those working in non-governmental organisations mandated this responsibility by the Ministry. Social workers are also employed in NGOs and State courts. It is understood that the courts' social workers are mostly employed by a number of commissioned NGOs.

A question put to all interviewees related the efficacy of initial assessments and decision making by government, and other mandated social workers. They were also asked whether the right decisions for children are being taken in relation to their placement in care. Even though many personnel received training on the 2015 Standing Operating Procedures overall it is thought the quality of assessments and decision making is not consistent and there are calls for improvements.

*"I believe the decision it is not 100% accurate."*

*"The social workers do not always make the right decision. It depends on the situation of each family. But not always the social worker or specialist take the right*

<sup>351</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF, University of Saint Joseph- Lebanese School for Social Work 2015

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

*decision. Sometimes there is a good decision and sometimes it is not. And sometimes when they put them in alternative care they think afterwards no why did we do this and sometimes the opposite. And it might be because of lack of experience or lack of information or they don't do the assessment before. They don't have a systematic use of case management for all the NGOs or related to the government. It changes each are working with their own specific internal case management procedures. There is no unified system."*

*"Sometime for example they decide that the parents are not capable of raising their children so there should be an evidence. Maybe certain tests that test their abilities if they can raise a child or not. So the work should be more professional. More systemized to take such decisions."*

*"Sometimes you know when you are acting quickly and very fast and with urgency sometimes you may miss some you may miss. But it depends on the social worker. It depends on the social workers in the court and working with MOSA."*

*"I don't think they do this assessment well. Because of there being only a few number of people who can do this assessment well and properly - qualified person and well paid person because this must be a well-paid job."*

*"What we found as the greatest gap is the rigour of the analysis and of the situation and of the capacity of families."*

*"The problem here is varied. One is that the assessment is very kind of brief. The criteria are vague etc.... And our understanding is that yes, the first reaction any social problem, send them to an institution."*

Some interviewees spoke of the subjectivity applied to assessments and decision making, *"So it is more of a certain issue of attitude than more about training and understanding how to do it"*, and once again, the speed with which they are completed.

It is recognised however, that those social workers making initial alternative care placement decisions are impacted by challenging working conditions. There is a concern amongst most interviewees that failures in decision making should not always be attributed to the ability of individuals themselves, but to the system they are working in.

According to one interviewee, there should be 75 social workers employed within the Ministry but at the time of our research, this had fallen to around 50. A primary reason for this loss is the considerable

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

reduction in salaries due to devaluation of the Lebanese pound. Interviewees believe this numbers will continue to fall in the coming year. Due to international funding sources, some NGOs can pay salaries in 'fresh dollars' i.e. US dollars that hold a higher value, and this is more attractive to social workers and other child protection personnel. Interviewees spoke to us about the stressful working environment facing social workers including high caseloads, and the pressure to undertake the child and family assessment as quickly as possible. Social workers have very little, if any time to sufficiently follow up on cases of children once they are placed in care or, sufficient services to refer families to.

One interviewee said of social workers working for Government departments, *"They are good social workers. They are strong so you can't say anything about that"* whilst also recognising the *"problem is the child protection component. The decision making is nowadays very restricted by available options. So a thirteen-year-old boy with complex issues, a street-base, we don't have a place for him."*

Of the small number of residential care providers we spoke to during our research, they all said they complete a second more comprehensive child and family assessment, including sometimes completing visits to the child's home, after a child is placed in their facility.

*"But I think the home visit...is just to verify whether the assessment that was taken in assessment of the family, is accurate yes or not. But there is no step forward saying I am going to work with you to make sure that we keep your children with you. It is like ok we take them. You fit the profile so we take your children...so there is an over reliance on care as a solution for social problems in general."*

This suggests there are many children for whom better child protection assessments, and more informed decision making, might have resulted in their remaining safely at home. This is particularly concerning when noting Lebanon's rate of institutionalisation of children is thought to be one of the highest in the world with many of the facilities identified as being 'large' and some even accommodating over 500 children.<sup>352</sup>

In addition, our research suggests many children in 'social' care are not there as the result of any initial assessment or referral from MOSA but are accepted on the request of parents or other family members. One interviewee spoke of the pressure they face when a mother begs them to take their child so she will know they will be fed and kept warm at night.

*"In terms of entry into care, the criteria are very very vague. Very broad to a point where anyone can access it as long as you are poor. If you meet the poverty criteria, you just get in. there are no other gatekeeping mechanisms. "*

---

<sup>352</sup> Child Frontiers 2017:13

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

*"We do the assessment. Among the case it might be referred but this is only a small numbers and not all from the ministry. It is our social assistant who do the assessment and then follow up. I don't know even who is the social assistant in MOSA."*

Concerns have also been raised regarding decisions that result in placement of children in social care when they should actually have been recipients of child protection support. According to the aforementioned 2017 report,<sup>353</sup> even within the 15 government-funded protection residential facilities, only a 'small fraction' of children were there for protection reasons.<sup>354</sup>

A comprehensive study of the capacity of the social service workforce in Lebanon was undertaken by UNICEF, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and Maestral International in 2019.<sup>355</sup> For the sake of the study, social service workers were defined as 'governmental and nongovernmental professionals and para professionals whose primary function is to engage people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing of individuals and communities.'<sup>356</sup> Survey respondents highlighted some of the challenges they were facing as illustrated in Figure 41. This includes heavy workloads (39.9%), lack of services at the local level (36%), and limited financial, logistical and human resources (34%).<sup>357</sup> They also considered weak cooperation and coordination between stakeholders (30.5%), lack of promotion opportunities (28.6%), and low salaries (26.5%) to be of concern.<sup>358</sup>

---

<sup>353</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>354</sup> Child Frontiers 2017:11

<sup>355</sup> UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and Maestral International 2019

<sup>356</sup> *ibid.*

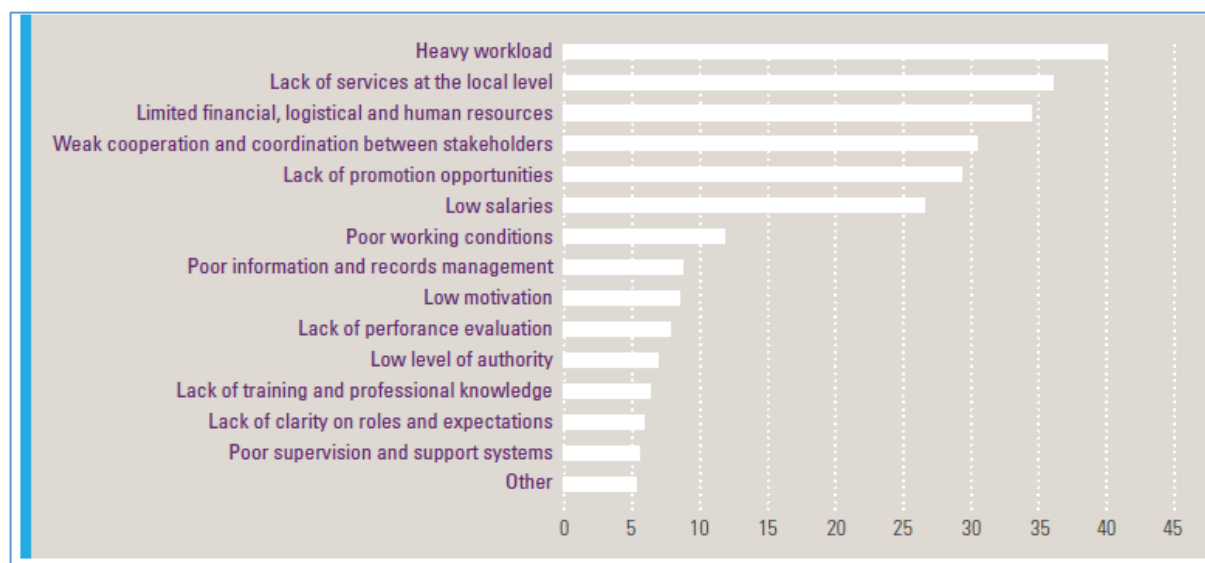
<sup>357</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> *ibid.*



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 41. Challenges faced by the social services workforce in Lebanon (published 2019)<sup>359</sup>



(Source: UNICEF, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and Maestral International 2019)

Due to lack of available data, the social services workforce study<sup>360</sup> was not able to calculate the ratio of social workers to children. In part, this was due to the majority of social workers in Lebanon work for NGOs or UN agencies such as UNWRA, with some not accredited or registered with a Ministry.

### The role of alternative care providers

As illustrated in the data in Figure 42 collected during a 2012 survey,<sup>361</sup> NGOs play a significant role in provision of protection and alternative care services in Lebanon.

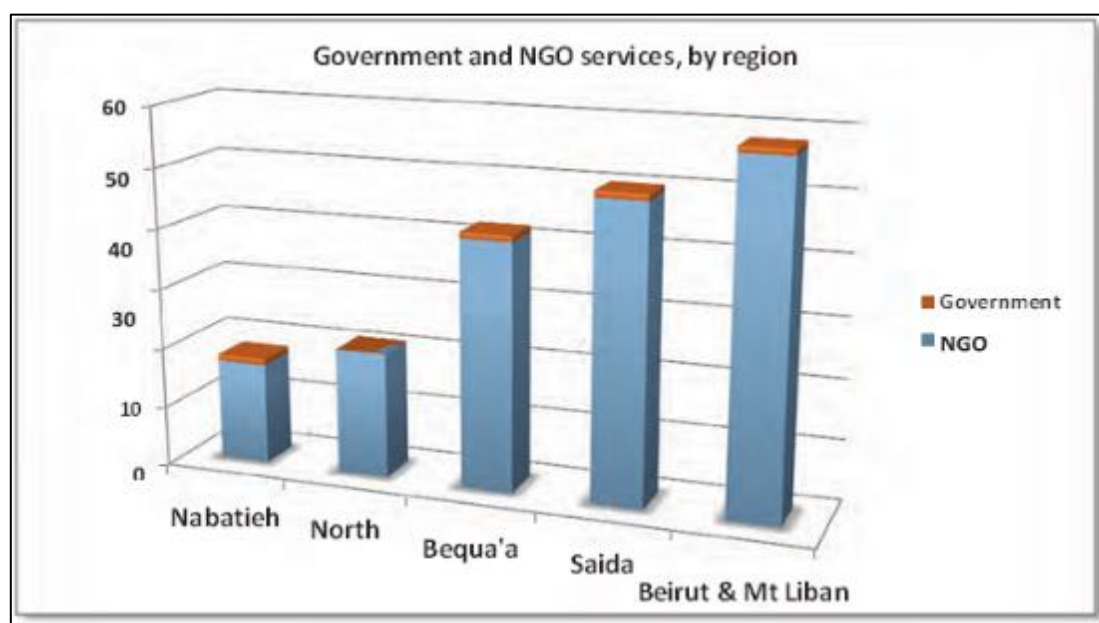
<sup>359</sup> UNRWA 2014

<sup>360</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 42. Share of Government to NGO child protection service delivery by region (published 2012)<sup>362</sup>



(Source: UNICEF, Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012)

During our research interviewees said, the economic crisis and the devaluation of the amount MOSA pay per child in residential facilities, has forced some alternative care providers to close their facilities. Contrary to this is a fear that numbers of children ending up separated from family and placed in residential care could increase as families continue to struggle.<sup>363</sup> Interviewees said that in recent years some agencies have made efforts to change the way they practice and are reorientating use of funds to support rather than separate families.

There is also an understanding that some NGO providers of residential care are not registered, and/or do not receive MOSA funding. As a result, there is some uncertainty as to actual numbers of children in residential care. This was recognised for example, in a 2017 report stating the figure of 24,106 children in residential care was probably an under-estimation<sup>364</sup>.

As also reported in 2017,<sup>365</sup> many NGOs had been operating with very little government oversight or regulation with, 'a multitude of private services that are undocumented, especially those provided by localized faith-based organizations.'<sup>366</sup> During our research we asked a number of interviewees about the MOSA inspection process. It was described as an inspection that focuses more on the environmental aspects of the facility, e.g. food, cleanliness etc., than the emotional and other care of

<sup>362</sup> ibid.

<sup>363</sup> UNICEF Lebanon 2021b

<sup>364</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>365</sup> ibid.

<sup>366</sup> ibid.

the children. Some interviewees said sometimes an inspector might speak to a child but it was a cursory exercise.

*"They do not have direct interaction with the children. If they see a child they may ask them a few questions but it is not a formal process."*

*"The inspectors are barely here only they say they are here let's say. But they don't really do their job."*

It has not been possible to assess just how many social care residential facilities are being run as an opportunity to earn money and/or gain social recognition. Our research suggests some of the residential care facilities are run by people who want to do help children but perhaps lack an in-depth understanding of issues such as attachment theory and best interests of the child. Furthermore, it is concerning that there is a poor or no use of good gatekeeping mechanisms in line with international standard being employed by some residential care providers.

### **Office of the Prosecutor General**

Although juvenile judges hold primary responsibility for the implementation of Law 422, General Prosecutors can also respond in emergency situations and can temporarily place a child in, though they must refer the case to a judge for further investigation and long term decisions.<sup>367</sup> The Office of the General Prosecutor also receives child protection cases from the police. According to respondents in a 2012 study,<sup>368</sup> the decision of the General Prosecutor is not always consistent and clearer guidelines about when a protection case must be opened were urgently required.

### **Role of the judiciary**

The judiciary, in both State and religious courts are important decision makers in Lebanon as they take the legal decision whether a child should be separated from parental care. They also play a role during in custody cases.<sup>369</sup>

During our research we only gathered a small amount of information from research participants regarding competency of the judiciary and decision making. A respondent said alternative care providers can only accept judicial orders that come from a State court. One perception provided by a few interviewees is judges in State appointed courts rely heavily on social worker assessments and one interviewee mentioned the significant delays in court decisions especially as members of the judiciary have also been on strike. One respondent told us that there are no social workers Islamic courts. State courts have social workers from two nominated NGOs, Himaya, and UPEL but

---

<sup>367</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>368</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

<sup>369</sup> *ibid.*

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

interviewees think they are insufficient in number. Information in this report already highlighted the issues related to differing decision making processes by judiciary depending on State or the religious denomination of the court. This means decisions about children's lives are not necessarily being based on equitable criteria.

Under Law No. 422/2002, final decisions as to alternative care placement in are rest with the judges in State run courts. The judge should receive assessment information on which to base their decisions. They can request additional information when needed. The judge can order measures which allows the child to remain with their parents and order social workers to follow up on these cases. They can also make a placement order and a social worker must then find an alternative care placement for the child. A judge is also able to request monitoring reports for each case. If the judge has awarded measures that involve the child remaining with their family, if there is no improvement in a child's situation and there is persistent risk, the judge can change the order.<sup>370</sup>

Although most placements into kinship care in Lebanon are informal, judges may also place children formally into kinship care through a child protection order. One judge interviewed for a 2017 study<sup>371</sup> told the researchers that around half of protection cases lead to a protection order, and 15% cent of these orders include a recommendation to place a child in formal kinship care. However, the report said others have disputed this figure, claiming that this happens far less often with another judge saying out of 100 to 150 cases, only 2 to 5 cases ended up with a formal kinship care placement. It is understood this was due to families being unwilling to take children in because of poverty rather than reluctance on the part of the courts to place children with extended family members.

As already noted in this report, the legal system and decision making differs in relation to the religion of the family with some decisions about children and families being made in religious courts. Although acknowledgment has previously been given,<sup>372</sup> to an increasing understanding, of child rights, concerns were raised in a 2012 report<sup>373</sup> in terms of custody settlements and decisions to grant custody of the child to the father or mother based on the age of the child, rather than on a best interest determination. A study in 2017<sup>374</sup> also considered the role of religious courts in this regard and how their decisions relate to placement of children in care. Whilst religious courts do not have a mandate to place children in residential alternative care, they do make child custody decisions, usually as a result of divorce. When neither parent is deemed able to care for the child, or if both parents have died, these courts are taking decisions whether to place children with relatives. Under international standards this is known as formal kinship care. Of concern is how decisions are being made in

---

<sup>370</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs 2015

<sup>371</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>372</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

<sup>373</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>374</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

parental custody cases based on such factors as mothers lacking 'proper religious education' or having 'questionable moral behaviour.'<sup>375</sup> Results of the 2017 study also illustrated how judges in religious courts sometimes consider women who remarry as not showing 'true dedication to the moral dictates of their religion'<sup>376</sup> and may have their children taken from them.

Religious courts can also indirectly impact gatekeeping in cases when parents wishing to challenge custody decisions then use State courts by claiming that the parent who has won custody is abusive or neglectful. This can result in a decision to recommend removal of the child from both parents and placement in care.<sup>377</sup> This case can only proceed if then picked up in a State court.

It has not been possible to find a more recent assessment of the capacity of the judiciary but a study published in 2012,<sup>378</sup> found only 6 'children's judge's in Lebanon, one for each region. The report explained how these judges, appointed by the Higher Institute of Magistrates also had other roles, so apart from one judge in Beirut, they only devoted part of their time to children's cases.

### The role of police

According to interviewees, police can be the first to respond to reports of child protection concerns. No further information about their role was provided although interviewees did think their decision making in emergency cases, and especially those involving sexual abuse were usually the correct ones.

Police usually become involved when a child is the victim of abuse and exploitation. Police patrols can also pick up children defined within the Law 422 as children at risk including those who are found in the street, selling goods, or selling sexual services.'<sup>379</sup> A 2012 study<sup>380</sup> confirmed cases where there was a suspicion of abuse, the police would first assess the situation through interviews with parents. If there are no parents or caregivers, especially in the case of children without documents, then a care placement will be found for the child through the auspices of a social worker before a case proceeds further. The police are able to utilise a number of options if parents refuse to engage with them including trying to find a resolution before having to refer the case to the General Prosecutor's office to secure a warrant.

A previous report<sup>381</sup> has cited the government system of staff rotation to be a challenge in terms of consistency and sustainability of staffing within social and justice sector services including that of

---

<sup>375</sup> Child Frontiers 2017:27

<sup>376</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>377</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>378</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

<sup>379</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>380</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> UNRWA 2014

police officers. This was confirmed by one interviewee who spoke about provision of specialist training for police and other personnel but, who were then moved into other posts.

### **The role of UN and non-governmental agencies**

Staff of UN bodies and NGOs are also decision makers in terms of children's protection and welfare when for example, they decide where to spend money and the advice and support they provide to government bodies, as well as the choice of support services they decide to offer children, young people and families. Furthermore, the UN and NGOs are instrumental in advising and working with government on the development of legislation, policy and strategic planning. This is complimented with work to raise awareness of children's rights and to advocate with and on their behalf for positive change.

NGOs, including faith based organisation, are a significant provider of child protection services and alternative care provision in Lebanon. They provide psychosocial services, awareness raising, parenting programmes and other family support projects. It is understood that whilst many of these activities are centred around major conurbations, there has been some expansion of service provision to more rural areas.<sup>382</sup> This in part, is due to international donor money in response to the significant arrival of Syrian refugees.

Not only do NGOs provide services that Ministries are mandated to deliver, but they are they have historically responded in their own right to the rising demand for child protection and alternative care services at a time when government resources and capacity are restricted. The response to a protracted, as well as sometimes critical humanitarian and refugee crises, has provided an opportunity, often sponsored by UN bodies and international organisations, to review and develop components of the child protection system building on international experience, as for example through the development and use of child protection case management tools.

Whilst these opportunities have been welcomed, there are challenges. For example, although social welfare providers are required to register with the Ministry of Interior (with exceptions), there are concerns regarding the development of parallel child protection services and alternative care may go unchecked if not accredited and funded by a Ministry.<sup>383</sup> Concerns were also raised in 2012, regarding the 'ad-hoc'<sup>384</sup> nature by which some NGOs conduct their work with children and families and questions about their professional capacity. The aforementioned SOPs for child protection developed in 2015 has been one attempt to reconcile different practices.

---

<sup>382</sup> Child Frontiers 2017

<sup>383</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

<sup>384</sup> *ibid.*



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

In countries of operation, including Lebanon, UNHCR implement the agency's Best Interest Approach (BIA) to child protection case management although their guidelines also encourage UNHCR staff to work closely with any national child protection system and not to duplicate or create a parallel system whenever possible. The BIA follows international standards for child protection case management including Best Interest Determination (BIA). This involves assessment of child and family situations and case planning. UNHCR has a mandated responsibility for all refugees except those from Palestine.

UNRWA has a mandate to provide direct service provision to the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon. The agency has announced it is 'uniquely placed to undertake detection and referral of child protection cases through the Agency's extensive network of frontline staff and services.'<sup>385</sup> To this end, in recent years, UNRWA has been developing the implementation of child protection case management. This is particularly important in Lebanon as Palestinian children are not recipients of the Lebanese state welfare system.

### Inter-agency working groups

A noticeable feature in countries in which international humanitarian agencies are present, is the development of child protection case management, especially through the presence of inter-agency working groups. Lebanon is no exception. There are a number of different inter-agency working groups in Lebanon comprising national and international child protection and UN agencies. It is a remit of such groups to partner with government departments. One of the initiatives of the Child Protection Working Group has been development of Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action in Lebanon in 2018. It is noted that development of these standards were also co-led by Ministry of Social Affairs and, although they are supposed to be used for child protection case management, they should not supersede the government standard operating procedures. There are also Child Protection Working Groups being utilised at a local level. For example, in an UNRWA report of 2014,<sup>386</sup> reference is made to the participation of UNRWA child protection staff in such groups that have also been set up in refugee camps in Lebanon chaired by NGOs and also attended by popular committee and local leaders.

However, whilst families are experiencing situations of multi-deprivation, there are mixed views about coordination and inter-sectoral approaches to providing services and support with some believing this could be improved:

*"Unfortunately, there is a need for better working together. Now we are really looking at better design of integrated social protection programmes at least. But the lack of coordination is not only it is also UN agencies and even among NGOS it is not like it*

---

<sup>385</sup> Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon 2018

<sup>386</sup> UNRWA 2014



*could be a better coordinated multi-sectoral community based response. Unfortunately, I think we could do better than this."*

#### 13.4. Training for decision makers

It has not been possible to accurately assess the quality of higher education or additional training opportunities for social workers, judges, policy makers, and others responsible for child protection decision making in Lebanon. However, a snapshot of opinions offered by interviewees include,

*"As a social worker I am confused about social work education because in some NGOs there is a lot of people who are doing the work of the case worker without being a case worker. This is too bad. It is not that if you do a training for days on the SOPs for GBV that you become a case worker."*

*Yes the university education is a good quality... But I know that some people are working as a caseworkers but they did for example did social science, international affairs, sociology and they are not case workers."*

*"So we have everything, our universities are well known. Even at the public sector the level is very professional, but don't have PhD in public university in field of social work, they cannot arrive to level of PhD."*

The provision of in-service workshops and other capacity building opportunities has been appreciated by some interviewees. This includes provision by UN bodies and national and international NGOs who contribute through training and capacity building for both their own staff as well as those working in Government services. However, there is a perception that too much ad-hoc training is offered. A finding in a previous report also suggested there were many different organisations supplying and implementing training but that much of the training available to front line workers was 'ad hoc'.<sup>387</sup> An interviewee in our research expressed the specific concern that a little bit of training on different topics should not be a signal that someone is qualified to work on those issues. Interviewees identified a particular need for training on violence prevention, gender-based violence, and trauma informed practice.

A study<sup>388</sup> that considered the capacity building of judges found a general consensus amongst the judiciary participating in the research, that they had insufficient child protection training. They were mindful of the trauma caused by separating the child from their families and, in accordance with the provisions of the law, said they try to maintain the child within the extended family whenever safe and

<sup>387</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

<sup>388</sup> UNICEF and Université Saint-Joseph and Government of Ministry of Social Affairs 2012

possible to do so. The same report<sup>389</sup> also identified the need for more specialised child protection training for the police but we cannot confirm if any of these gaps have been addressed or recommendation acted upon.

Overall, we recognise that only partial information was collected during this research relating to the topic of decision making, along with analysis of the efficacy of the child protection system and those working within it. It is suggested this topic requires further investigation.

### 13.5. Data collection and management information systems

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children<sup>390</sup> advise States on 'development and implementation of coordinated policies. Such policies should be based on sound information and statistical data. The necessity of accurate and systematic data collection for information on characteristics and trends of child protection and alternative care is crucial for the development and application of appropriate and evidence-based policy, practice, and services.

Legislation, policy, statutory guidance, planning and programme delivery, should be informed by evidence. The 2019 UNGA Resolution, highlights this by calling on States to,

'improve data collection, information management and reporting systems relating to children in Improving data collection, information management and reporting systems related to children without parental care in all settings and situations in order to close existing data gaps and develop global and national baselines.'

In the first instance, the Resolution is referring to data related to children in alternative care, including the reasons for placement. It is further necessary to continue to collate evidence that includes consideration of the following:

- What is the situation of children affected by the issue of child-parents separation
- What are the main drivers of child-parents separation, and how are these influenced by various factors, e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, access to services etc.
- How are children at risk of separation officially identified and recognised (e.g. in official data).
- Which child protection and social protection services are available to children at risk of child-parents separation and what are the gaps.
- What are the ideas and proposals of children, and other key stakeholders, about responses to the issue of child-parents separation and how they could be improved.

---

<sup>389</sup> ibid.

<sup>390</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2010

Our research findings suggest a lack of sufficient systematic data collection undertaken by the Government in Lebanon that would inform future developments in legislation, policy and service delivery to prevent unnecessary separation of children from parental care. There is a need for data that would call additional attention to all the issues mentioned in this study and provide evidence on which to build better programming and advocate for change. Our perception is the majority of data collection is currently undertaken and published by members of inter-agency working groups and UN bodies.

## 14. Solutions to challenges provided by research participants

During the workshops with children, they were asked to draw themselves as superheroes and write the three things they thought most important to change for families using their superpower (examples are shown below as Figure 42). As each child provided their own answer, there was no overall ranking. However, almost half listed factors relating to improving relationships and care within the family. Friendships are also important. The other half wrote about helping families by providing money and other resources.

Young people who attended the workshops broke into two groups to rank their solutions in order of the importance they thought challenges should be addressed. Below is the order of their overall ranking with a precis of each topic (Figure 43). The majority of solutions relate to improving family relationships including building trust, respect, equity, better communication and stopping violence in the home. Better parenting and parent education, access to mental health services, and rights were also mentioned. They also see the importance of addressing economic problems.

Figure 43. Ranking of solutions by young people

### Ranking of 1<sup>st</sup> Group

1. Basic needs and address rights – have a foundation in order to live
2. Good family interaction – so they will know how to raise their children and know what their needs are and the acts are good but also verbal interaction is good
3. Raising children – responsible/love/equality between children/peace/support
4. Mental health - live with hopes and dreams/tranquillity/ambitions/living with lack of tension
5. Good marital relationships – faithful marriage
6. Achieve success - be responsible/ seek the best for children
7. Encourage leisure activities

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

### Ranking of 2<sup>nd</sup> Group

1. Social solutions – support children/listen/respect/not use bad words/don't put people down/no violence/protect children
2. Economic solutions – secure needs of children/take responsibility for children on financial and social levels
3. Emotional/equal love
4. Health solutions

### Ranking of 3<sup>rd</sup> Group

1. Love
2. Marriage at a later age/ extending the duration of acquaintance before marriage
3. Financial support/ help with finding a job for any salary/ work for the wife to support
4. Psychology/ charitable organizations for financial support
5. Promote women's rights/ Improve men's rights

### Ranking of 4<sup>th</sup> Group

1. Secure work/ provide safety/ revive the spirits/ presence of a policy to support the parents/ accept any job
2. Increase awareness of parents/ increase awareness of children/ provide education/ agreement
3. Improve understanding/ trust/ prevent interference from the family
4. Address violence/ divorce/ ignore problems

### Ranking of 5<sup>th</sup> Group

1. Parents/family - improve parenting/better role models/ give children space, acceptance/self-development and open mindedness/better living environment/better communication between family members/explain beliefs and religions to children
2. Professional help – couple therapy/mental health help/aid from NGOs
3. Government help – offer more employment/more affordable and accessible healthcare and education/raise awareness about parenting/awareness about bullying/ respect for privacy

### Ranking of 6<sup>th</sup> Group

1. Education – marriage counselling/awareness campaigns for children and parents/education on love and relationships in the family/
2. Better communication – between family members
3. Economic solutions – more income/ social security payments/
4. Legislation – ban child marriage/social affairs for poor families/separate religion from resolving marriage problems/ Applying law and justice in case of marriage problems



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

### Ranking of 7th Group

1. Education – for health/sex education/psychologists for mental health/religion and morals
2. Communication and understanding – take care of children/don't involve in adult fights/don't fight in front of children/don't exaggerate punishments
3. Solutions pertaining to the family – respect for privacy/confidentiality/code of rights and responsibilities (conduct) in the home/love and help each other
4. Acceptance – accept parents as they are/accept children as they are/tolerate other cultures
5. Economic solutions – encourage participation of youth in improving household financial situation

### Ranking of 8th Group

1. Seeking financial help – help finding employment/learn to manage money wisely
2. Seek emotional/mental help – seek professional help/ask for help from friends and relatives when taking decisions
3. Knowledge and awareness – raise knowledge about hotlines/raise children properly/learn to accept each other
4. Behaviours – forgiveness/communication/stay with each other through difficulties/time and attention/equality
5. Self-confidence and do not give up

Adults attending the family workshops were also asked about solutions they thought would help address the challenges they had raised. A precis of their answers can be found in Figure 44. Over a third of responses related to stopping violence in the family, better parenting, and improving communication and family relationships, including between parents and children. A further third related to issues of poverty. Other comments included such topics as mental health and increased access to psychologists. Workshop participants also wrote about the political situation, the need to stop corruption and favouritism improved security, and they want the truth about the Beirut Port Blast. Separating State from religion and having a civil state was also discussed.

Figure 44. Solutions to the challenges being faced by families as answered by adult family members

### Solutions to the challenges being faced by families (as answered by adult family members)

*helping poor families*

*give us food*

*food cards for the most vulnerable*

*secure a good house*

*to control prices in supermarkets*

*electricity, heating and water*





## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

*provide a monthly income*  
*to increase the minimum wages*  
*to have employment for everyone*  
*stable employment*  
*to have fixed rate on the dollar*  
*pension for the elderly secure medical care and schooling for children*  
*free medical care*  
*to have insurance for people with disabilities*  
*secure schools for people with disabilities especially for the young*  
*education for free*  
*education costs uniforms and books and transport*  
*to have public transportation throughout the country and mend the roads*  
*public libraries that families can go to for free*  
*no violence*  
*no bullying*  
*stop prostitution*  
*stop the family violence*  
*gender equality*  
*not to have adultery – for example where the families are arranged – need for sex education –*  
*there is lots of violence and violence in the home*  
*not having early marriage and when getting married having a good insight about what is*  
*marriage*  
*to secure a place for women to feel safe*  
*being able to divorce because of a situation*  
*having more consciousness about the marriage*  
*loyalty between married couples*  
*have love and care between members*  
*to have a good time with the family*  
*listen to each other especially to the adolescent and make them feel safe*  
*cooperation between the family members*  
*mutual trust between family members and respect*  
*ongoing communication and exchange of ideas among members to reach a good result*  
*making concessions*  
*agree how to bring up their children in the same manner and not differentiate between them*  
*make frequent training for sessions on parenting – need specialised person from*  
*associations/NGOs and schools or churches because it is not being given from the state*  
*give the children the love they need*  
*listen to the problems of the children*  
*give children additional time and play with them*



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

*assume responsibility – which means many parents just throw children away – because they want to think about themselves so they should assume parenting responsibility*  
*the small children need psychological support so should be more – they are frightened*  
*psychological assistance*  
*give the support and heal the person who have addictions – drugs and alcohol*  
*get rid of corruption and make sure there is accountability*  
*to have a state*  
*courts should not interfere*  
*to send foreigners back to their country in order to let the Lebanese live in a good life*  
*noninterference politically of foreign countries in Lebanon*  
*change the political system*  
*improve public administration and ask for decentralization*  
*separate the state from the religion to have a civil state*  
*stop robbery and security in the streets*

When considering solutions, it is important to consider the things that make children and young people happy. When asked what makes children and young people happy when they are home, they wrote about feeling loved, protected, having a sense of family unity and feeling safe. Children and young people are happy when they are not discriminated against by other family members and they are listened to, their view respected and they have supportive parents. Having more family time together would make them happy and friends and relatives are important to them. Being given the opportunity to succeed in life, go to school and do well in their studies also makes them happy. So does playing with friends, having time for recreation, and eating good food. Young people also wrote about parents understanding them and being more open minded, allowing them to have the friend they choose, and having their privacy respected.

During the family workshops, written answers to the question 'what makes the family, happy, strong and united', were predominantly about issues related to family unity: of 271 written responses, 210 related to family relations. Families are happy when there is love; good communication; no violence; respect; cohesion; tranquillity; honesty, peace; understanding; cooperation; adults are able to care for their children; and having good family networks. Economic stability is also important and what makes the family happy is having more money, access to services especially electricity, having health insurance, better housing conditions, and stable employment.

Interviewees were asked for their recommendations regarding actions and services that could help improve the situation for families and prevent child-parents separation. They stressed the need for more investment in better parenting programmes, especially raising awareness as to the importance of emotional care for children and how loss of parental care can have a detrimental impact on the social, educational, physical and emotional development of a child. They spoke of the need to provide

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

opportunities for adults who did not complete or had a poor education as they feel this will contribute to their understanding of more positive social norms and behaviours that will also improve parenting. They believe awareness raising campaigns for the general public that highlight the importance of providing a protective environment for children would also be helpful.

*"But education, education, education is the thing for me because if you are financially stable but not educated well when you are becoming poorer you will have violence so it is about the mindset for me how they choose to think in this situation so education education, education."*

*"...it tells you that there is a need for parenting in this culture. To change the attitudes toward discipline in general and parenting more broadly."*

*The second factor is education - our families – I don't know how much you can say this in an accurate way but they are not so much aware of their behaviour and the attitude how they are raising of what they are doing in their families they are using violence in the home and some abuse as well. I think these are the main factors and the crisis and separation in the family."*

*"We are in a paradigm shift of raising families and the importance in it is the awareness and education of these parents. Because they don't know actually another option how to raise children. Because they were raised in this way."*

Interviewees believe a national programme of psychosocial and psychological services as a response to the mental health issues impacting a large percentage of the population is important. They also highlighted the need for better gatekeeping, and even though there were SOPs developed for child protection case management in 2015, they feel these should be used in a unified manner across agencies. There is recognition by some that more should be done to ensure children are not relinquished into residential institutions or 'boarding schools' offering 'social care. Protection should be the only reason children are placed into an alternative care setting through a rigorous formal assessment process and a legal decision. They also see the need for improved working conditions and more numbers of, social workers, especially those employed by MOSA, so they can spend more time making more thorough assessments and ensuring children are removed from parental care only when necessary for their safety.

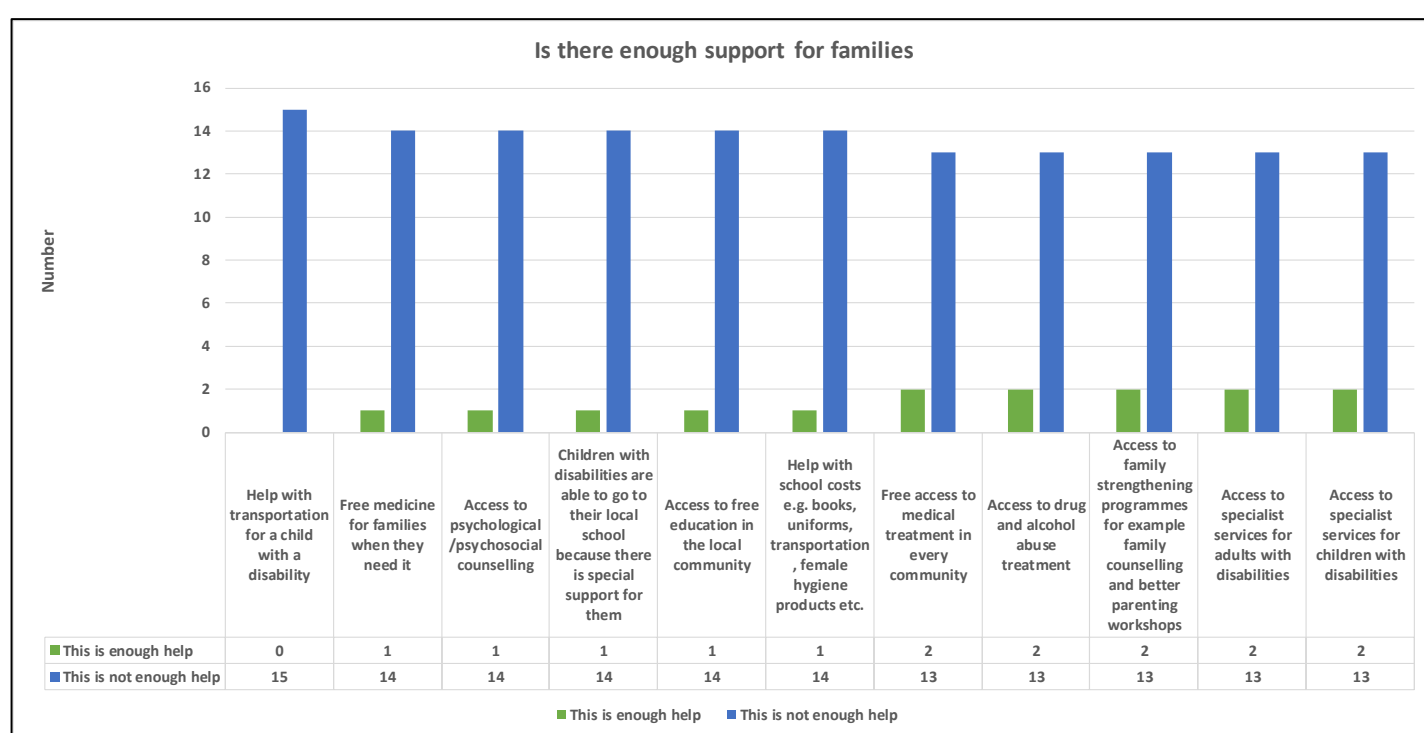
Interviewees believe families would also benefit if there was better coordination and joined up working between ministries. In addition, there should be campaigns to fight discrimination and stigma facing people with disabilities and provide access to inclusive education in public schools. They feel the issue of inter-generational violence must also be addressed not only through parenting

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

programmes but also through programmes in the school curriculum. A number of interviewees mentioned the need for more crises centres for women and their children to escape domestic violence. Recognising the causalities of poverty as contributing to child-parents separation, there is a call for improved social protection programmes and additional help for the many families facing financial instability.

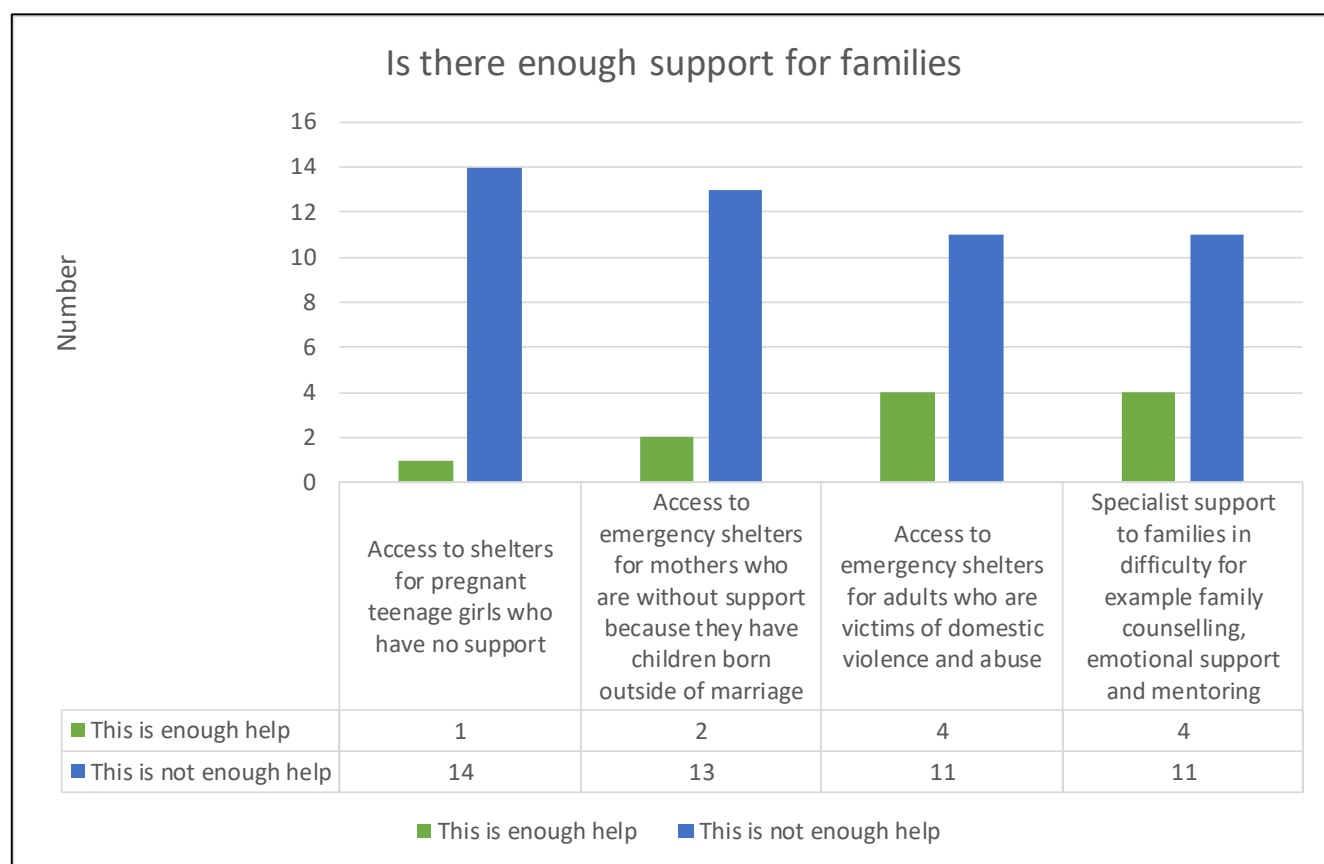
Respondents in our online survey overwhelmingly feel that current service provision for families who are at risk of separation is not sufficient (Figures 45 and 46) indicating a need to improve access the range of support in all categories we listed in the questionnaire.

Figure 45. Is there enough support for families?



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Figure 46. Is there enough support for families



## 15. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations have been particularly informed by the information children, young people, and adult family members provided during research workshops. These findings have been triangulated with the knowledge and understanding of a range of professionals holding responsibility to protect children and support families, as well as information gathered during a desk review.

The research framework, analysis of findings, and development of recommendations have also been guided by the UNCRC and the 2019 United Nations General Assembly Resolution, 'The promotion and protection of the rights of children' as well as the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Recommendations are therefore addressed in reference to children's rights. Although these rights are indivisible, and all are essential to the well-being of children, we have chosen to develop recommendations based on a certain number of rights thought most applicable to the findings of the research and prevention of child-parents separation.

With regards such guidance, it the responsibility of States Parties, and other bodies and organisations, to address drivers of separation and do everything possible so that children can remain with their parents in a safe and caring environment is not being fulfilled. This requires a society that is free from violence. It means combatting stigma, discrimination and marginalisation that individuals and families face on the basis of ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and birth status etc. It is incumbent on governments to develop the necessary normative framework, a strong economy, programmes of poverty alleviation and social protection. It requires the safety and security of all citizens, and systems and delivery of a range of basic and specialist services such as education and health as well as essential utilities, employment, and adequate shelter. A social protection system should provide for individuals and families when in need of such support including unemployment, sickness and disability benefits, pensions and other social safety nets. Furthermore it requires a strong child protection system, including the systematic application of gatekeeping mechanisms and a well-resourced and trained social services work force. This approach is grounded not only in the fundamental spirit of the CRC but also in many specific CRC provisions, such as a right to health (Article 24), education (Article 28), support for the role of parents (Article 18), conditions for separating a child from parents (Article 9), right to social security (Article 25), rights for children with disabilities (Article 23), and protection from discrimination (Article 2).

We recognise that responsibilities to address drivers of child-parents separation and prevention of placement of children in alternative care is primarily that of the Government of Lebanon through the provision of national and local socio-economic and cultural programmes and services. This is a significant responsibility. Our research has not included an in-depth analysis of all these different aspects of government responsibility but has considered some of the gaps in provision. It is



recognised that there was no functioning government at the time of our research and Lebanon was going through a severe economic crisis with an almost total collapse of the economy. We also recognise that UN and other international bodies play a significant role in service provision alongside national and international NGO, CBOs and private enterprises, and these differing roles and responsibilities should be a consideration when reading the conclusions below.

### Protection

Articles of the CRC that afford children the right to protection include, protection from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19 and Article 37(a)), from sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34) and, from sale, trafficking and abduction (Article 11, Article 35, Article 36, Article 39).

In particular, Article 19 requires:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

A conclusion of our research is violence is a driver related to children's placement in alternative care in Lebanon. Children and young people, along with other research participants identified violence within families, and their communities, and the need to stop such violations. This situation is confirmed by previously published data illustrating physical, sexual and emotional violence as reasons children have previously been placed in alternative care. The Ministry of Social Affairs has a particular responsibility to assess any reported cases of violence against children and decide whether or not they should be placed in residential facilities situated around the country. Children are also being sent towards, or are placing themselves in, risky situations which then brings them to the attention of police and child protection services. For example, children who run away from home due to violence or family breakdown, and become street connected, as well as those involved in child labour.

Children and young people said they want to be protected, loved, and cared for, and to live in a violence free and stable home environment. They particularly emphasised the responsibility of their parents to keep them safe from harm. However, stress and anxiety caused by breakdown of relationships within the home as well as pressures exerted by socio-economic events at community and national level are effecting the coping mechanisms and resilience of family members. This in turn is leading to anger, frustration and distress resulting in family dysfunction and for some children, being subject to violence in the home.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Inter-generational violence is a particularly worrying phenomenon in Lebanon. It has been recognised that violence can be a learnt behaviour<sup>391</sup> through 'observation, learning and imitation'<sup>392</sup> of adults, and/or being a victim.<sup>393</sup> During our research, children and young people wrote about witnessing and experiencing violence in the home. This situation is again confirmed by information contained within previous reports. Corporal punishment has yet to be banned in Lebanon.

Violence against girls and women is a concern. This is in part, attributed to the dominant patriarchal culture. Domestic violence, which is predominantly experienced by women in Lebanon, is a factor contributing to risks of children either being separated from parents when it results in breakdown of marriages and partnerships, as well as the possibility they become direct victims of that violence thus prompting child protection authorities to respond and remove children from parental-care. Victims of domestic violence are facing difficult situations particularly when they have no-one to turn to, no support network, and nowhere to go that is safe for themselves and their children. This is resulting in women in particular, either remaining with their children in violent circumstances, or becoming single-headed households with all the pressures and challenges this can bring. Our research suggests women-headed households are at higher risk of losing their children into social care although there is no official data to support this claim. It is recognised that the inter-agency working group for gender based violence in Lebanon is raising awareness on this issue and also advocating for more support. However, there is criticism of the ad-hoc nature of previous training on all forms of violence prevention and a lack of training and education programmes that reach children and adults in a sustained manner.

It should not be overlooked that men are also struggling within the family home, especially with societal expectations that place responsibility on them to adequately provide for their families. They, as with other family members, have also been impacted by years of civil war, the lack of security in the country and now the severe economic crisis. This, as with women and children, is also affecting their mental health which, as previously mentioned in this study, can result in violence against children and partners.

Although not always directly related to issues of violence and neglect, children are also living in alternative care because they are orphans or abandoned. These children are being placed in both residential facilities offering 'social care' as well as in protection centres. Children with disabilities are being placed in alternative care when parents are unable, or do not want to, provide the care they need. Persons with disabilities in Lebanon face stigma and discrimination and children and often lack access to the services and support they need.

---

<sup>391</sup> Moylan et al. 2010

<sup>392</sup> Conteras & del Carmen Cano 2016:44

<sup>393</sup> Conteras & del Carmen Cano 2016; Bevans & Higgins 2002

## Recommendations

- There is an urgent need for investment in violence prevention programmes for adults and for children to help break the inter-generational cycle of violent behaviour. These programmes should be systematically applied in a repeated and sustainable manner. To this end, provision of violence prevention programmes that reach children at an early age could be built into the school curriculum and comprise not just one-off 'civic' lessons, but continuous learning that promote positive messages and behaviour throughout school life. Violence prevention could also be built into family strengthening programmes that work with all members of the family together.
- Article 2 of the UNCRC guarantees children protection from discrimination. Violence prevention programmes should include efforts to combat factors that contribute to the presence of abuse and exploitation including discrimination, stigmatisation, and lack of equality. They should incorporate clear messages that promote tolerance and understanding. Issues of gender equity, discrimination against persons with disabilities or from different religious, ethnic, or other specific backgrounds, acceptance of those identifying as LGBTQI+ are examples of topics such programmes should include.
- To help inform policies and programmes that promote safe and united families, professionals would benefit from a better understanding of the factors that are contributing to violence in the home in Lebanon.
- In order to help break the cycle of inter-generational aspect of poor parenting ability, professionals would benefit from a better understanding of such topics as attachment theory – including the impact of separation from loved ones that children face when placed in alternative care - the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),<sup>394</sup> and trauma-informed practice. These topics should also be incorporated into programmes for parents and other caregivers as prevention of violence also requires sustained actions working closely with families to bring about an understanding of the harm being created when they use violence and finding ways to address such abusive situations.
- Those living in situations of domestic violence and gender-based violence, most especially girls and women, need someone to turn as for example, access to counselling and psychosocial services provided within a caring and safe environment. When rejected by extended family and the wider community, and with no-where else to go, crisis shelter centres, and other support services, for women and their children could offer immediate protection

<sup>394</sup> Please see: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next>. See also: SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

and help prevent situations from deteriorating to the stage where children may be separated and placed in alternative care. Access to child day care and after school clubs would also provide some respite for women. The building of stronger supportive social networks is also important.

- Men should be actively involved in family strengthening and other programmes that help them understand the importance of, and how to maintain, strong and caring family relationships. This should include awareness on issues of gender parity and prevention of domestic violence.
- Article 42 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to make the principles and provisions in the Convention 'widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.' Efforts to increase the awareness of child rights amongst the general public as well as the harm to children when they lack love, affection and are victims of violence - including impact of separation from parental care - can help strengthen the protective environment in the home and community. Messages might also include information about risk of violence and exploitation children face as for example, if spending time on the streets, engaged in child labour, and being exposed to drugs and alcohol.
- Efforts to ensure prohibition of corporal punishment into law would not only lead to less violence against children but also send a significant message that children should not be harmed.

### Adequate standard of living and well-being

Article 27 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to recognise the right of every child to a 'standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.' The Article also calls on State Parties to take appropriate measures to support and assist parents with their responsibility toward children and 'shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.' Other articles within the UNCRC also include a right to health (Article 24), education (Article 28 & 29) and survival and development (6).

The 2019 United Nations General Assembly resolution<sup>395</sup> on the 'Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child' calls on States to 'improve the situation of children living in poverty, in particular extreme poverty, deprived of adequate food and nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, with limited or no access to basic physical and mental health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection' (Article 1). Furthermore, the resolution clearly says that,

---

<sup>395</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 'Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child', December 2019 'A/74/395

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely imputable to such poverty, never should be the only justification for the removal of a child from the care of his or her parents or primary caregivers and legal guardians, for receiving a child into alternative care or for preventing his or her reintegration, but should be seen as a signal for the need to provide appropriate support to their family, benefiting the child directly.

We have observed how issues related to poverty are a driver contributing to children's placement in alternative care in Lebanon. And in particular, their placement in 'social care' institutions. Institutions providing 'social care' include 'boarding schools' which are not only being used by parents to access education for their children, but also because they offer food, clothing, medical care etc. Although lacking official data, our research coupled with information in previous reports indicates there are far more children in alternative care for this reason than for protection. This indicates, in accordance with international standards and guidance, decisions were made to place many children in alternative care unnecessarily. It is also believed that there may be children in 'social care' for whom there might be unidentified protection concerns.

Poverty is an inter-generational as well as a multi-dimensional issue with measurements of poverty taking into account not only financial means, but other factors that contribute to well-being.<sup>396</sup> Concerns raised by children, young people and adult family members in our research signalled many areas of their lives in which they are struggling with issues related to poverty. Our research findings also suggest a correlation between the ability to face such daily challenges as providing food, adequate shelter, paying utility bills, keeping children in school, and finding adequately remunerated employment etc., with stress and tension within households. High costs of medicines and health services are contributing to such situations with concerns that long term sickness can have particularly serious consequences for the household economy especially when the person who is sick is the main provider of household income. Persons with disabilities are facing multiple challenges including issues of exclusion and insufficient support services. Furthermore, insecurity around adequate housing, cramped conditions, poorly built houses, and lack of stability for many living in rented accommodation, is contributing to anxiety in some households. This is compounded by absence of adequate support services and a social protection system, including social security payments, that would provide a safe net when needed.

As a result, ongoing challenges exacerbate feelings of distress, anger, poor mental health, and for some, an inability to cope. This may even lead to violence against children. Interviewees particularly

---

<sup>396</sup> Please see: [https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure#:~:text=The%20Multidimensional%20Poverty%20Measure%20\(MPM,the%20%242.15%20international%20poverty%20line;https://ophi.org.uk/video-poverty-in-el-salvador-from-the-perspective-of-the-protagonists/](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure#:~:text=The%20Multidimensional%20Poverty%20Measure%20(MPM,the%20%242.15%20international%20poverty%20line;https://ophi.org.uk/video-poverty-in-el-salvador-from-the-perspective-of-the-protagonists/)

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

noted challenges within female-headed households where women felt they could no longer cope in looking after and caring for their children adequately. For some, they truly believe the best place for their children is in a residential institution where they will be fed and kept warm.

Although we have seen how issues related to poverty contribute to family breakdown and the presence of violence, nevertheless, it is recognised that there are families living in very difficult circumstances who are supportive and caring of one another and create a safe environment for children. This illustrates how strong loving relationships are an important factor in helping families stand up to the impact of poverty and other shocks experienced by households. This in turn can contribute to a violence free household.

Adult family workshop members spoke about their upset and despair in not being able to provide for their children in the way they would like. Furthermore, although parents and other caregivers see government being responsible for such most services with the assistance of NGOs, they also want to be able to provide for their families themselves.

It is clear not one agency can respond to all the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty leading families into crisis. However the child protection sector, as do other sectors, very often works in a silo (and indeed, alternative care is often seen as a separate issue/sector to child protection). Gaps were identified by interviewees in terms of coordination and service delivery between Government and non-governmental bodies and agencies, UN entities, academics, faith-based leaders, the private sector, and donors, including those responsible for education, health, security, social protection and social welfare, justice, and child protection. The most effective inter-agency coordination appears to focus on humanitarian crises.

Interviewees noted the need for additional support for women in particular, whose lack of education, training, and literacy is not only precluding them from the job market, but also impacting their confidence. Confidence that is needed when facing everyday challenges in the home and community as well as standing up to such concerns as gender discrimination, domestic violence, preventing violence against their children and other circumstances that might lead to separation from them.

### Recommendations

- Addressing issues related to poverty is a structural issue that needs a strong and stable government. It is beyond the remit of this report to provide detailed recommendations as to government efforts to strengthen the country economically, politically and socially. However, different actors can instigate advocacy for change and information sharing that would help government policy makers, and others, gain a clearer understanding of efforts needed to prevent placement of children in alternative care. Especially information that takes into account the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and the impact on families. This requires



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

awareness raising that informs the establishment of an evidence based multi-sectoral and family-centred approach to the design, development and delivery of support to families with the understanding it is often more than one pathway or issue that contributes to family breakdown. One specific focus of such advocacy should include the development and availability of fully functioning of social protection systems that reach all those in need of social safety nets.

- Helping families address the many challenges they are facing requires closer multi-sectoral cooperation and improved coordination between Government and non-governmental bodies and agencies, UN entities, academics, faith-based leaders, the private sector, and donors, including those responsible for education, health, security, social protection and social welfare, justice, and child protection. There should be a concerted effort together, and within each organisation, body or department, to assesses and recognise where each can most effectively contribute: whether it be direct service provision, advocacy to effect change, signposting so that families know how and where to receive the support they need, fundraising, or even leading/supporting such coordinated response. Organisations should also look at the breadth of their outreach to ensure they are reaching vulnerable families including those residing in rural areas.
- Families need informed and coordinated access to service provision in a way that will address all the inter-related challenges they face. This should be available universally to address the concern that support often comes too late and so that vulnerability of families might be prevented. To this end consideration should be given to providing families with signposting to basic and specialist services as well as ensuring joined-up provision in a way that overcomes barriers of access e.g. access to all support coordinated in one location rather than family members having to move from agency to agency to agency to resolve their problems. In some countries for example, this is sometimes called a 'one-stop shop'.<sup>397</sup>
- Helping families undertake the responsibility they seek to provide for their families might include increasing access to income generation schemes and help with obtaining stable, well remunerated employment. This should be linked with the need for more easily available and free capacity building and training, as well as adult education programmes, especially those related to improved literacy for women. This should be undertaken by organisations that have the specialism to implement such programmes.

<sup>397</sup> Please see: <https://www.undp.org/botswana/news/undp-supports-establishment-one-stop-shop-public-services-botswana> And: <https://www.undp.org/kazakhstan/stories/one-stop-shop-window-problem-solver-people-difficult-life-situations>

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

- The need for additional support for women in particular, whose lack of education, training, and literacy is not only precluding them from the job market, but also impacting their confidence. Confidence that is needed when facing everyday challenges in the home and community as well as standing up to such concerns as gender discrimination, domestic violence, preventing violence against their children and other circumstances that might lead to separation from them.
- Article 18 of the UNCRC requires States to 'take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.' Affordable or free day care for children would help women in particular, find their way into the work force. It could also provide respite for those struggling with household responsibilities, being overwhelmed by challenges of everyday life, and requiring help alleviating pressure building up within families. This includes day care for infants as well as after-school provision.
- Children should not be placed in alternative care solely for the reason of poverty. Alternative care should only be used when absolutely necessary for children who need protection. Efforts should be made to stop the placement of children in government sponsored (in terms of legal and statutory guidance and funding) and NGO run residential institutions including those offering 'social care' and 'boarding schools'. Deinstitutionalisation requires legislation, policies and strategies that refocuses the efforts and funds currently used to run residential institutions toward services and programmes that allow children to remain safely in their own homes.
- Increased efforts are needed to ensure access to free health care services and/or national health insurance. This includes a particular need for psychosocial and mental health services and counselling. The latter should also be a consideration in the delivery of family strengthening programmes.

### Support in parenting

The preamble to the UNCRC states that the 'family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community'. This requires States to provide parents, and other primary caregivers, with the support needed so that children have the best protection and opportunities in life.

Children and young people feel happy when they have parents that love, respect and understand them. They wrote about the importance of parents being good role models. When asked why families reach a situation where placement of children in care is a consideration, interviewees drew attention

to disharmony and dysfunction in the family due to what they consider as poor parenting skills. They see poor parenting skills as a significant factor related to deterioration of child-parents relationships which in turn, may ultimately lead to violence against, or serious neglect of, children.

Interviewees also identified how lack of positive parenting skills is not only impacted by socio-economic circumstances as described above but can be an inter-generational phenomenon. Findings in our research indicate the negative experience some parents had during their own childhood is impacting their own ability to parent, as well as having a detrimental effect on other aspects of their life. One outcome being an inability to maintain harmonious, unified, supportive relationships in the home leading to family breakdown, and even the manifestation of violence.

## Recommendations

- As with previous recommendations, actions are needed that will break any cycle of inter-generational concerns including those related to parenting skills. This requires consideration of parenting programmes that take a holistic and family-centred approach and incorporate such topics as attachment theory, the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),<sup>398</sup> and trauma-informed practice.
- It is important that professionals working with families do not dismiss parents as 'bad parents' but gain a deeper understanding of the different factors of parents they work with and any factors that might impact their parenting abilities. This includes recognising family dynamics, individual concerns, and existing resilience and coping mechanisms.

## Disability

Children with disabilities have the right to enjoy 'a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community (Article 23 of the UNCRC). Also contained within Article 23 of the UNCRC is provision of special care and assistance to ensure children with disabilities have, 'access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities'.

All the issues covered in this conclusions and recommendations section apply equally to children, and parents or other primary caregivers, with disabilities. There are, however, some risks that are heightened in the case of children with disabilities, including those of abandonment or placement in special residential institutions. It is understood children whose parents are disabled are also vulnerable to placement in care.

---

<sup>398</sup> Please see: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next>. See also: SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Amongst the reasons children find themselves in positions of risk are stigma and discrimination and lack of respectful treatment. Inadequate provision of specialist health services, and practical and emotional support for families are also factors.

According to our research, many children, even when schools are fully functioning, are not accessing local education. However, we were unable to source recent official data to confirm this. We believe this is for numerous reasons including violence and discrimination, lack of transportation, and teachers who are not trained to support their inclusion in the classroom.

### Recommendations

- Family support programmes should ensure the inclusion of families that have members with disabilities. And whilst interviewees believe in inclusion, they also see a need for a range of specialist services tailored to individual family needs and priorities.
- Violence prevention programmes, as previously mentioned, should inherently incorporate protection of children with disabilities.
- Advocacy and awareness raising programmes should promote an understanding and acceptance of disability, both within families and amongst the general public. Public information campaigns should speak about fair and respectful treatment of people with disabilities, the harm of stigmatisation, and topics that would help prevent violence and exclusion against persons with disabilities. Advocacy programmes by and with people with disabilities are important and help bring a specific focus to improving services, opportunities, and support.
- Inclusion in schools should not just offer children with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive an education, but they should also be a place of security.
- Children with disabilities, as with other children, should not be placed in residential institutions. Consideration should be given to the specialist support necessary to prevent the placement of children with disabilities in alternative care.

### Education

Article 28 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to 'recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity'. States Parties must also 'take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.' Furthermore, Article 23(3) recognises education should be provided free of charge in a manner that

responds to the special needs of a disabled child. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>399</sup> calls on States Parties to 'recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning'.

Access to education is a significant driver resulting in children being placed in alternative care. This is the result of various factors including a perception by some parents that education is of higher quality in residential boarding schools coupled with the fact that many of these schools are also offering free or subsidized social care. As seen in this report, the current public school system is dysfunctional due to the economic crisis leading to lack of government spending as well as ongoing teachers strikes. Children are also leaving education to take up work, and many children with disabilities are unable to access education in local schools.

The national school system is of course the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon however Lebanon is currently without a fully functioning government. Although Ministries are operational, it is understood due to lack of decision making in terms of legislation, funding and policy, there is little being done at present to progress service delivery and improve quality of education. Constant calls for such developments continue to be made by different organisations and UN agencies.

## **Recommendations**

- Investment in high quality and provision of free public education, including without costs of fees, materials and uniforms etc. should be made in all local communities.
- There is a need for increased awareness raising and efforts that will prevent placement of children in alternative care, for purposes of education, including into boarding schools. This includes raising awareness that boarding schools are residential institutions. Most particularly it requires governments and other organisations to refocus expenditure on residential education facilities, including those that also promote the provision of 'social care', into all necessary aspects of prevention of child-parent separation programming and public services.

## **Play and leisure**

UNCRC Article 31 of the UNCRC directs States to the right of children to rest and leisure and encourages access to cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. This right is highlighted in this report, not just because of the importance this brings to children's development, but also the opportunity recreational pursuits can play in strengthening family life.

---

<sup>399</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Children most emphatically wrote about the importance of time for recreation, both with parents, other family members, and friends. A sentiment repeated by young people and family members who highlighted the importance of spending time as a family, including eating and undertaking recreational activities together.

Time spent together is seen as being particularly important in the way it contributes to family unity and provides respite from the stresses they may be facing. There may, however, be parents who, despite working hard to provide for the family, do not recognise the benefits of time playing or pursuing other joint activities with their children and how this can help forge closer bonds.

### Recommendations

- Time spent together is seen as being particularly important in the way it contributes to family unity and provides respite from the stresses they may be facing. Activities that address this important aspect of unity and spending time together would add value to parenting and family strengthening programmes. This would also include raising awareness amongst parents and professionals as to the important benefits of time spent as a family and how this can help forge closer bonds.

### Capacity of professional decision makers and the efficacy of the national child protection system and gatekeeping

Article 1 of the 2019 UNGA resolution on the 'Promotion and the protection of children's rights', calls on States to ensure,

adequate and systematic training in the rights of the child, including by encouraging States to take the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children into account for professional groups working with and for children, including with children without parental care, including specialized judges, law enforcement officials, lawyers, social workers, medical doctors, care professionals, health professionals and teachers, and coordination among various governmental bodies involved in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child

It is our understanding that Lebanese legislation and policy for child protection, family strengthening, and gatekeeping is inadequate. For example, there is no one child rights/child protection law that clearly mandates prevention of all forms of violence against children, an effective national child protection system that requires the legal use of gatekeeping and child protection case management, and the prevention of unnecessary placement in alternative care.



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Although Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs) for case management were developed in 2015,<sup>400</sup> it is unclear how well they are being implemented and by whom. Our research found a belief amongst professionals that there is insufficient, and sometimes no, use of the SOPs before a placement is made, meaning the placement of children in care may be based on insufficient, or no, evidence and understanding. This in turn suggests there may be children for whom placement in alternative care was not necessary. Furthermore, the SOPs allow for some children to be placed in care, especially in 'social care' without any checks and balances through a judicial process if parents or another primary caregiver gives consent for the placement. More needs to be done to unify the use of the SOPs amongst relevant organisations and continuous capacity building of those who use them and also to address the gap in a multi-sectoral approach to completion of assessments.

Interviewees highlighted a number of factors contributing to this situation including insufficient numbers of staff and lack of resources necessary to effectively undertake child protection roles and responsibilities. Some believe high caseloads mean social workers lack time to complete assessments of children and family situations, and to follow up on cases.

In terms of achieving a strong focus on gatekeeping and prevention of child-parents separation, interviewees, and particularly social workers working in the child protection system, said decision making is impacted by the lack of services they can refer families to. This includes both government and non-governmental support for families with basic necessities such as food, clothing and housing, as well as specialist services such as mental health and counselling programmes. This suggests it is quicker and easier to place a child in a 'social care' facility than to support the family.

An assessment of the quality of social work training in higher education institutions is missing from our research. Evaluation of the quality of one-off and in-service training was also not possible within the remit of this research. Poor coordination between NGO training providers is resulting in repetition and gaps.

Once again identified topics that would help inform better decision making but require more intensive training include violence prevention, trauma-informed practice, and decision making that is in the best interest of the child. Lack of inclusion in child protection training for those working in sectors e.g. health and education, has also been identified.

There was little evidence of training and information sharing that would help promote deinstitutionalisation and reforms to the alternative care system. For example, typical barriers to deinstitutionalisation that are not being addressed by all agencies are staff concerns when funding is to be re-allocated to new activities and fear of losing employment.

---

<sup>400</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF, University of Saint Joseph- Lebanese School for Social Work, Beirut 2015

## **Recommendations**

- We suggest an in-depth review of Lebanese legislation and policies to inform future developments in line with international conventions, standards, and guidance. This should include a focus on protection of children whilst applying gatekeeping principles that prevent unnecessary placement in alternative care. Consideration should be given to incorporating mandated provision of services and programmes that support families in difficult circumstances, ensuring financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely ascribed, to such poverty, are never the only justification for the removal of a child from the care of parents, primary caregivers, or legal guardians, and the gradual elimination of all forms of residential institutions.
- To inform the development of future training and capacity building, it is recommended that an assessment of the quality of social work training in higher education institutions is undertaken along with a review of provision and standards of in-service capacity building. This should be coupled with a study of current skills, knowledge and capacities of all those responsible for making decisions about protection and care of children including social workers, police, judiciary, health and education workers etc. This might consider understanding of risk thresholds in relation to protection and how to apply the principle of the best interest of the child.
- A review of the use of 2015 SOPs would inform any further developments in line with international standards and help evaluate their current use including any gaps in the way they are understood and applied. This would also help inform further training on implementation of multi-sectoral child and family assessments.
- Training of those working in residential institutions may not only help alleviate some of the opposition to those working in such settings, but also contribute to re-skilling. If sufficiently trained, they could be offered new roles in family strengthening programmes and, if family based care settings are developed, they might become providers. In addition, training on how to re-focus the use of funds towards helping improve families access better quality public education rather than perpetuate it would be helpful e.g. the undertaking and application of cost benefit analyses.
- Steps should be taken to address such issues as professional burn out of social workers and making sure they are fully supported in their work, i.e., caring for the carers.

## **Data management systems**

Legislation, policy, statutory guidance, planning and programme delivery, should be informed by evidence. The 2019 UNGA Resolution, highlights this by calling on States to,

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

'improve data collection, information management and reporting systems relating to children in Improving data collection, information management and reporting systems related to children without parental care in all settings and situations in order to close existing data gaps and develop global and national baselines.'

In the first instance, the Resolution is referring to data related to children in alternative care, including the reasons for placement. It is further necessary to continue to collate evidence that includes consideration of the following:

- What are the main drivers that lead to placement of children in alternative care, and how are these influenced by various factors, e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, and access to services etc.
- How are children at risk of separation officially identified and recognised (e.g. in official data).
- Which child protection, social protection, and other services are available to the families of children at risk of placement in alternative care and what are the gaps.
- What are the ideas and proposals of children, young people, adult family members, and other key stakeholders, about responses to the issue of child-parents separation and how they could be improved.

Our research findings suggest a lack of sufficient and rigorous systematic data collection in Lebanon that would inform future developments in legislation, policy and service delivery to prevent unnecessary separation of children from parental care.

### Recommendations

- Investment is needed in the development of systematic and rigorous qualitative and quantitative national child protection data collection and analysis. Such data would provide policy makers and programme and service providers with the evidence necessary to provide more effective support to children and families and focus investment in the prevention of unnecessary placement in alternative care. Such data collection should be a government responsibility but the building of effective data management systems should be encouraged and supported by NGOs. Such data would call additional attention to the issues mentioned in this study and provide evidence to on which to advocate for change.

### Participation

Article 12 (1) of the UNCRC requires,

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

In recognition of the importance of children's right to participate in decisions affecting their lives, and indeed for anyone to play an integral role in deciding on things that impact their life, it is necessary to facilitate a careful and supportive process that allows for full and meaningful participation in different decision making situations.

Our research suggests the vast majority of children in Lebanon are not participating in any way during the process of completing protection or other assessments of their situation or in decisions being made about their lives, including placement in alternative care.

### Recommendations

- Children should be supported in a way that allows their full and meaningful participation in any decision making processes that will affect them, including their placement in alternative care.
- All children should be acknowledged as active citizens and afforded equal opportunity to contribute to their society. In this respect, policy makers and programme designers and implementers may need help understanding that children are experts in their own lives. This will require challenging any negative assumptions regarding children's capacities to engage and participate and providing them with opportunities that allow them to build and demonstrate such capability.

## Bibliography

Abdul-Hamid, H. & Yassine, M. (2020) Political Economy of Education in Lebanon: Research for Results Program. International Development in Focus. World Bank. Washington, DC: USA.

acaps (2022) Lebanon Humanitarian impact of crisis on children, Briefing Note May 2022. acaps.

African Committee of Experts on the Rights & Welfare of the Child (2022) Guidelines on Child Participation. African Union.

American University of Beirut – Medical School (undated) Reporting Child Abuse in Lebanon, Process and Limitations. American University of Beirut

Appel, K., Buckingham, E., Jodoin, K. & Roth, D. (2012) Participatory Learning and Action Toolkit: For Application in BSR's Global Programs. Paris: BSR.

Arber, S. (2006) Secondary Analysis of Survey Data. In: Gilbert, N. (ed.) (2006) Researching Social Life (2nd edition) London: Sage Publications Ltd. pp.269-286.

Arnstein, S.R. (1959) A Ladder of Citizen Participation. Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol 35(4) pp. 216-224.

Asmundson, G.J.G. & Afifi, T.O. (2019) eds. Adverse Childhood Experiences, Using Evidence to Advance Research, Practice, Policy, and Preventions. Academic Press.

Beebeejaun, Y., Durose, C., Rees, J., Richardson, J. & Richardson, L. (2013) 'Beyond text': exploring ethos and method in co-producing research with communities. Oxford University Press and Community Development Journal.

Berro, J., Akel, M. Hallit, S. & Obeid, S. (2021) Relationships between inappropriate eating habits and problematic alcohol use, cigarette and waterpipe dependence among male adolescents in Lebanon. BMC Public Health, Vol 21(140).

Bevan, E., & Higgins, D. J. (2002) Is domestic violence learned?: The contribution of five forms of child maltreatment to men's violence and adjustment. Journal of Family Violence, Vol. 17(3), pp. 223–245.

Bird, D., Hagger-Vaughan, A., Pinto, M., O'Toole, L., Ros-Steinsdottir, R. & Schuurman, M. (2020) We Are Here: A Child Participation Toolbox. Eurochild (Belgium) and the Learning for Well-being Foundation (Netherlands).

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Blanco, T.M., Sánchez-Lissen, E., Gil-Jaurena, I. & Romero-Pérez, L. (2022) Child-Led Participation: A Scoping Review of Empirical Studies. *Social Inclusion*, Vol 10(2).

Bourke, P. E. (2009) "Professional development and teacher aides in inclusive education contexts: where to from here?", *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, Vol 13(8), pp.817-827.

Bradbury-Jones, C & Taylor, J. (2015) 'Engaging with children as co-researchers: challenges, counter-challenges and solutions', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol 18(2), pp. 161-173.

Britannica Online (2023) Lebanon Facts and Statistics 2023

Please see: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lebanon>

Bromark, K., Knutsson, O. & Weitz, Y.S. (2023) Co-designing a dynamic tool to enhance participation for young people: A participatory design project with young service users and social workers. *Child and Youth Services Review*, Vol 127, pp.1-10

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, Vol 32(7), pp. 513–531.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986) Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol 22(6), pp. 723–742.

Bruskas, D.& Tessin, D.H. (2013) Adverse Childhood Experiences and Psychosocial Well-Being of Women Who Were in Foster Care as Children. *The Permanent Journal*, Vol 17(3), pp.131-141.

Bryson, C., Purdon, S. & Skipp, A. (2017) Understanding the lives of separating and separated families in the UK: what evidence do we need? Brydon Purson Social Research LLP.

Cantwell, N., Davidson, J., Elsley, S., Milligan, I. & Quinn, N. (2012) Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'. UK:Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. University of Strathclyde, Glasgow: Scotland.

Casky, C. & Gale C. (2015) Making Decisions for the Better Care of Children. Better Care Network and UNICEF

Central Administration of Statistics and ILO (2022) Lebanon Follow-up Labour Force Survey January 2022 Fact Sheet.



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_844837.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_844837.pdf)

Chaitkin, S., Cantwell, N., Gale, C., Milligan, I., Flagothier, C., O’Kane, C. & Connelly, G. (2017) Towards the Right Care for Children: Orientations for Reforming Alternative Care Systems, Africa, Asia, Latin America. SOS Children’s Villages International.

Chalhoubm, C., Obeid, S. Hallit, R., Salameh, P. & Hallit, S. (2021) Addictive profiles of Lebanese university students in terms of smoking, alcohol, and illegal drug use. Environmental Science and Pollution Research, Vol 28.

Chevalier, J., & Buckles, D. M. (2019). Participatory action research theory and methods for engaged inquiry (2nd ed.). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Child Frontiers (2017) Scoping study and recommendations for next steps on alternative care Lebanon. Child Frontiers.

Child Fund International (undated) Child and Youth-Friendly Participatory Action Research Toolkit. Child Fund International.

Child Protection Working Group Lebanon (2018) Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action in Lebanon. Child Protection Working Group Lebanon.

Clark and Statham (2005) Listening to young children Experts in their own Lives. Adoption and Fostering, Vol 29(1), pp.45-56.

Consultation and Research Institute (2015) Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude. ILO, UNICEF, Save the Children and the Republic of Lebanon, Ministry of Labour.

Contreras, L. & del Carmen Cano, M. (2016) Child-to-parent violence: The role of exposure to violence and its relationship to social-cognitive processing. The European Journal of Psychology Applied to Legal Context, Vol 8, pp. 43-50.

Cossar, J., Brandon, M. & Jordan, P. (2014) ‘You’ve got to trust her and she’s got to trust you’: children’s views on participation in the child protection system. Child and Family Social Work, Vol 21(1), pp. 103–112.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Crivello, G., Morrow, V. & Wilson, E. (2013) *Young Lives Longitudinal Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers Young Lives*. Oxford Department of International Development (ODID), University of Oxford

Cuevas-Parra, P. & Tisdall, K.M. (2019) *Child-Led Research: Questioning Knowledge*. Social Sciences Vol 8 (44).

Addictive profiles of Lebanese university students in terms of smoking, alcohol, and illegal drug use. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* Vol 28, pp.7657–57666

Dambach, M. (2022). *Policy Brief 2: Child's right to identity in alternative care*. Geneva: Child Identity Protection.

Davidson, E. (2017). *Saying it like it is? Power, participation and research involving young people*. *Social Inclusion*, Vol 5(3), pp. 228–239.

De Silva, N. & Punchihewa, A.G. (2011) *A Study based in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka: Push and Pull Factors of Institutionalization of Children*. Save the Children.

De Swart et al. (2012) *The effectiveness of institutional youth care over the past three decades: A meta-analysis*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol 34(9), pp.1818-1824.

Degenhardt, L., Chiu, W-T., Sampson, N., Kessler, R.C. Anthony, J.C., et al. (2008) *Toward a global view of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and cocaine use: Findings from the WHO, World Mental Health Surveys*. *PLoS Medicine*, Vol 5(7), pp. 1053-1067.

Desmond et al. (2020) *Prevalence and number of children living in institutional care: global, regional, and country estimates*. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, Vol 4(5) pp. 343-344.

Drew, C. (2023) *Microsystem Examples & Simple Definition (Bronfenbrenner)*. Helpful Professor. Please see: <https://helpfulprofessor.com/microsystem-examples/>

El-Jardali F., Abou Samra C., Hilal N. (2018) *K2P Briefing Note: Strengthening Child Protection Practices in Healthcare Institutions in Lebanon*. Knowledge to Policy, (K2P) Center. Beirut, Lebanon.

El-Hoss, T. (2023) *Reforming Lebanon's child protection system: Lessons for international child welfare efforts*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol 148.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

End Violence Against Children (2021) Corporal punishment of children in Lebanon, December 2021.  
End Violence Against Children

Available at: <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/country-reports/Lebanon.pdf>

European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (EEG) (2012)  
The Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care.  
European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care.

European Institute of the Mediterranean (2022) EuroMeSCo Policy Study: Social Protection Reforms  
in the MENA Region: Possibilities and Challenges. European Institute of the Mediterranean.

Family for Every Child (2014) Why Care Matters: The importance of adequate care for children and  
society. London: Family for Every Child.

Farhood, L. (2013) Predictors of child's health in war conditions: the Lebanese experience. The Arab  
Journal of Psychiatry, Vol.24 (1), pp.16 – 26.

Family for Every Child (2014) Why Care Matters: The importance of adequate care for children and  
society. London: Family for Every Child.

Flick, U. (2006) An Introduction to Qualitative Research (3rd edition). London: Sage Publications.

Flick, U. (2009) An Introduction to Qualitative Research (4th edition). London: Sage Publications.

Foster-Fishman, P.G., Law, K.M., Lichty, L.F. & Aoun, C. (2010) Youth ReACT for Social Change: A  
Method for Youth Participatory Action Research. American Journal of Community Psychology, Vol  
46, pp.67–83.

Fouché, C., & Light, G. (2011) An invitation to dialogue: 'The world café' in social work research.  
Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice, Vol 10(1), pp. 28-48.

Fry, D., Padilla, K., Germanio, A., Lu, M., Ivatury, S. & Vindrola, S. (2021) Violence against children in  
Latin America and the Caribbean 2015-2021: A systematic review. New York: UNICEF.

Gale, C. (2018) Children without Parental Care and Alternative Care: Findings from Research.  
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Gale, C. (2021) The National Child Protection System and Alternative Care in Lebanon. SOS Children's Villages International.

Garcia-Quiroga, M. & Salvo Agoglia, I.S. (2020) Too Vulnerable to Participate? Challenges for Meaningful Participation in Research with Children in Alternative Care and Adoption. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, Vo 19, pp. 1–11.

Gawler, M. (2005) Useful Tools for Engaging Young People in Participatory Evaluation. UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office.

Gilchrist, F., Rodd, H.D., Deery, C. & Marshman, Z. (2013) Involving children in research, audit and service evaluation. British dental journal, Vol. 214(11), pp. 577-582

Government of Lebanon (2013) Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child Fourth and fifth periodic reports of States parties due in 2013 submitted in 2016 CRC/C/LBN/ 4-5. Government of Lebanon.

Grant, T. (2017). Participatory research with children and young people: Using visual, creative, diagram, and written techniques. In Evans, R., Holt, L., & Skelton, T. (Eds.), Methodological Approaches. Springer.

Haijes, H.A. & van Thiel, G.J.W. (2016) Participatory methods in paediatric participatory research: a systematic review. Paediatric Research, Vol 79(5), pp. 676 – 683.

Hansen, A.S. (2017) Co-Design with Children How to best communicate with and encourage children during a design process. Psychology.

Haugbolle, S. (2011) The historiography and the memory of the Lebanese civil war, Mass Violence & Résistance. SciencesPo.

Available at: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/historiography-and-memory-lebanese-civil-war.html>

Holland, S., Renold, E., Ross, N. & Hillman, A. (2008) Rights, 'right on' or the right thing to do? A critical exploration of young people's engagement in participative social work research. Economic and Social Research Council.

Howard, A.H., Gwenz, G.D., Taylor, T. & Wilke, N.G. (2023) The relationship between adverse childhood experiences, health and life satisfaction in adults with care experience: The mediating role of attachment. Child & Family Social Work, Vol 28(3), pp. 589-896.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Inter-Agency Group on Reintegration (2016) Guidelines on Children's Reintegration. Inter-Agency Group on Reintegration.

Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon (2018) Child Protection Sector Data Sheet January 2018, Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon.

Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon (2020) Statistical Dashboard July 2020. Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon.

Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon SGBV (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on the SGBV Situation in Lebanon, Inter-Agency SGBV Task Force Lebanon - May 2020. Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon SGBV.

Inter-Agency Working Group Lebanon, Child Protection Working Group (2022) *Monitoring Children's Situation between January and June 2022*. Inter-Agency Working Group Lebanon, Child Protection Working Group.

Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95021>

Inter Agency Working Group Lebanon (2019) Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (2017-2020) Annual Report 2018. UNDP

Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation (IAWGCP) (2007) Operations Manual on Children's Participation in Consultations. Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation (IAWGCP).

Jamieson, L., Feinstein, J.L., C., Kapell, A., & Dulieu, N. (2021). Working together: Including children in research on violence against children. A resource pack for research practitioners. End Violence Partnership Knowledge Network, End Violence Lab, and Save the Children.

Kellet, M. (2005) Children as active researchers: a new research paradigm for the 21st century? Centre for Economic and Social Research Council National Centre for Research Methods.

Kendrick, A. (2012) Relations, relationships and relatedness: residential child care and the family metaphor. Child and Family Social Work, Vol18, pp77–86.

Kesby, M. (2000). Participatory diagramming: Deploying qualitative methods through an action research epistemology. Area, \Vol 32(4), pp. 423–435.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

Kirby, C. (2004) A Guide to Actively Involving Young People in Research: For Researchers, research commissioners, and managers. INVOLVE Support Unit.

Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin, K. & Sinclair, R. (2003) Building a Culture of Participation, Handbook: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation. National Children's Bureau on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills.

Lake, D., & Wendland, J. (2018). Practical, epistemological, and ethical challenges of participatory action research: A cross-disciplinary review of the literature. Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, Vol 22(3), pp. 11-42.

Larkins, C., Nowland, R., Robertson, L., Farrelly, N., Sharpe, D., Roy, A., Morocza, N. & Bernardo de Lemos, J. (2021) Peer Research by Children and Young People and their allies: Rapid Evidence Review of best practices in health and social science literature. The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation.

Laumann, L. (2015) Household Economic Strengthening in Support of Prevention of Child Separation and Children's Reintegration in Family Care. ASPIRES.

Law Action Worldwide (2021) Ba'adon The Legal, Medical and Psychological Needs of the Families of the Disappeared. Law Action Worldwide.

Laws, S. & Mann, G. (2004) So You Want to Involve Children in Research? A toolkit supporting children's meaningful and ethical participation in research relating to violence against children. Save the Children.

Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group (2023) Gender Based Violence Lebanon Secondary Data Review: 2018 – 2022. Lebanon Inter-Agency Gender Based Violence Working Group.

Lodder, A., Mehay, A., Pavlickova, H., Hoare, J., Box, L., Butt, J., Weaver, T, Crawford, M.J., Clutterbuck, D., Westbrook, N., Manning, K., Karlsen, S., Morris, S., Brand, A., Ramchandani, R., Kelly, Y., Heilmann, J. & Watt, R.G. (2021) Evaluating the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of the 'strengthening families, strengthening communities' group-based parenting programme: study protocol and initial insights. British Medical Journal of Public Health, Vol 20, pp1-13

Löhr, K., Weinhardt, M., & Sieber, S. (2020). The "world café" as a participatory method for collecting qualitative data. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19. Advance online publication.



**Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation**  
Lebanon

Lundy, L., McEvoy, L. & Byrne, B. (2011): Working with Young Children as Co-Researchers: An Approach Informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Early Education & Development*, Vol 22(5), pp.714-736.

Ludwig, S. & Rostain, A. (2009) Family Function and Dysfunction. In Carey, W.B., Coleman, W., Crocker, A.C., Elias, E. & Feldman, H. (Eds.), Developmental-Behavioral Paediatrics (Fourth Edition). Elsevier Inc.

Mackie, G., Moneti, F., Shakya, H., & Denny, E. (2015). What are social norms? How are they measured? UNICEF.

Malaeb, D., Awad, E., Haddad, C., Salameh, P., Sacre, H., Akel, M. Soufia, M., Halli, R., Obeid, S. & Hallit, S. (2020) Bullying victimization among Lebanese adolescents: The role of child abuse, Internet addiction, social phobia and depression and validation of the Illinois Bully Scale. *BMC Pediatrics*, Vol. 20.

Manou Anselma, M., Altenburg, T.M., Emke, H., van Nassau, F., Jurg, M., Ruite, R. A. C., Jurkowski, J.M. & Chinapaw, M. J. M. (2019) Co-designing obesity prevention interventions together with children: intervention mapping meets youth-led participatory action research. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, Vol 16 (130).

Marcus, R., Khan, A., Leon-Himmelstine, C. & Rivett, J. (2020) What works to protect children on the move. UNICEF

Martin, F.S. & Zulaika, G. (2016) Who Cares for Children? A Descriptive Study of Care-Related Data Available Through Global Household Surveys and How These Could Be Better Mined to Inform Policies and Services to Strengthen Family Care. *Global Social Welfare*, Vol. 3, pp. 51–74.

Ministry of Social Affairs (2020) The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs On the protection of Women and children 2020-2027. Ministry of Social Affairs

Ministry of Social Affairs, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), University of Saint Joseph- Lebanese School for Social Work (2015) Juvenile's Protection Standing Operating Procedures in Lebanon - Operational Toolkit. The ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF, University of Saint Joseph.

Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF, University of Saint Joseph- Lebanese School for Social Work, Beirut (2015) Standard Operating Procedures for the Protection of Juveniles in Lebanon (Operational toolkit). Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF, University of Saint Joseph- Lebanese School for Social Work.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Moylan, C.A., Herrenkohl, T.I., Sousa, C., Tajima, E.A., Herrenkohl, R.C. & Russe, M.J. (2010) The Effects of Child Abuse and Exposure to Domestic Violence on Adolescent Internalizing and Externalizing Behavior Problems. *Journal of Family Violence*, Vol. 25(1), pp. 53–63.

Namey, E.H. & Brown, A.N. (2018) Learning About Integrated Development Using Longitudinal Mixed Methods Programme Evaluation. *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 49(4), pp. 97–114.

Nankervis, K., Rosewarne, A. Vassos, M. (2011) Why do families relinquish care? An investigation of the factors that lead to relinquishment into out-of-home respite care. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, Vol.4, pp.422-433.

Nash, C.J. (2020) Patriarchy. *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* (Second Edition), pp 43-4.

Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780081022955102069>

NGO Working Group on Children Without Parental Care (2013) Identifying Basic Characteristics of Formal Alternative Care Settings for Children: A Discussion Paper'. NGO Working Group on Children Without Parental.

Pain, R., & Francis, P. (2003). Reflections on participatory research. *Area*, 35(1), 46–54

OCHA (2021) Emergency Response Plan Lebanon 2021-2022. OCHA.

Pain, R., & Francis, P. (2003). Reflections on participatory research. *Area*, 35(1), 46–54

Palm, S. and Colombo, F. (eds.) (2019). 'Scoping Study on Faith actors' involvement in the prevention, elimination and perpetuation of violence against children. Case Studies.' Washington DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities. Ending Violence Against Children Hub.

Petrowski, N; Cappa, C., Gross, P (2017): Estimating the number of children in formal alternative care: Challenges and results. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol 70, pp. 388-398.

Pinto L.M. (Ed.), Bird, D., Hagger-Vaughan, A., O'Toole, L., Ros-Steinsdottir, T. & Schuurman, M. (2020). *We Are Here. A Child Participation Toolbox*. Brussels: Eurochild & Learning for Well-being Foundation.

Plan International & War Child (2018) Adolescent Girls and Boys Needs Assessment: Focus on child labour and child marriage. Full Report Lebanon 2018. Plan International.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

IRC & UNHCR Lebanon (May 2015) PPT Presented by Interagency Child Protection Case Management Coaching Project

Queens University Belfast Centre for Children's Rights (undated) Facilitators' Pack- Participation for Protection. Queens University Belfast.

Ritchie J., Lewis, J. and Elam, G. (2006) Designing and Selecting Samples. In: Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds.) Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers. London: Sage Publications.

Robson, C. (2002) Real World Research (2nd edition). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

REACH (2022) 2021 Multi-Sector Needs Analysis April 2021. REACH.

Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Public Health (2017) National Report on Drug Situation in Lebanon 2017. Ministry of Public Health, Beirut: Lebanon.

Ritchie J., Lewis, J. and Elam, G. (2006) Designing and Selecting Samples. In: Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (eds.) (2006) Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers. London: Sage Publications.

Robson, C. (2002) Real World Research (2nd edition). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Rogers, R., Karunan, V., Ketnim, P. & Saelo, A. (2021) Sharing their narratives: A research project exploring children and families' experience of alternative care in Thailand. University of Bath, Thamassat University, The Open University.

Saab, C., Al-Hroub, A. & Vlaardingerbroek, B. (2019) Developing a Policy to Meet the Educational Needs of Street Children in Lebanon: Policy Brief No.7. October 2019. Issam Fares Institute for Policy and International Affairs. Beirut: Lebanon.

Available at: [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20191008\\_developing\\_policy\\_educational\\_needs\\_street\\_children\\_lebanon.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20191008_developing_policy_educational_needs_street_children_lebanon.pdf)

Sabo, K. (2001) The benefits of participatory evaluation for children and youth, Participatory Learning and Action Notes Issue 42. International Institute for Environment and Development London.

Save the Children (undated) Participatory Learning and Action Toolkit: For Application in BSR's Global Programs. Save the Children.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

Save the Children (2004) Young People as Researchers. The Save the Children Fund.

Save the Children (2018) Youth Voices, Participatory action research with adolescents affected by the Syria crisis in Egypt and Lebanon, Lessons Learned Report and 'How To' Guide. Save the Children.

Save the Children (2019) Bullying in Lebanon. Save the Children

Save the Children (2022) Training for Child Researchers, Training Guidebook: Empowering children and young people with skills to carry out a child-led research study. Save the Children International.

Shamji, Y. (2007). "'Our Voice' - A Project by Children and Youth with Additional Needs: A Children's Participation Case Study from Lebanon." *Children, Youth and Environments*, Vol 17(3), pp.66-83.

Simkiss, D. (2019) The needs of looked after children from an adverse childhood experience perspective. *Paediatrics and Child Health*, Vol 29(1), pp 25-33.

Smith, R., Monaghan, M., & Broad, B. (2002) Involving Young People as Co-Researchers: Facing up to the Methodological Issues. *Qualitative Social Work*, Vol.1(2), pp.191-207.

Social Research Association (2021) Research Ethics Guidance. Social Research Association.

Available at:

<https://the-sra.org.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Resources/SRA%20Research%20Ethics%20guidance%202021.pdf>

SOS Children's Villages International (2015). The world's most vulnerable children: who they are, where they live, and what puts them at risk. SOS Children's Villages International

Available at: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/384bc38a-62aa-4c2a-9563-a5ecc61b6a77/SOS-Child-at-risk-report-web.pdf>

SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde (2021) Safe Places, Thriving Children: Embedding Trauma-Informed Practices into Alternative Care Settings. SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland.

SOS Children's Villages International (2020) Consultation Conducted with Children: Receiving Family Strengthening Services and Residential Care, A summary of findings. SOS Children's Villages International.

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

Stein, M. (2005) *Resilience and young people leaving care: overcoming the odds*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Stein, M. (2012) Young People Leaving Care: Supporting Pathways to Adulthood. London: Jessica Kinglsey Publishers.

Stuart, K., Robson, I., Henderson, E. & Browning, R. (2021) Youth Participatory Research Resources. NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) North East and North Cumbria.

Tarabah, A., Badr, L.K., Usta, J. & Doyle, J. (2015) Exposure to Violence and Children's Desensitization Attitudes in Lebanon. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol 31(18), pp. 1–22.

Tolfree, D. (2004), "Child Protection and Participation in Refugee Emergencies", *Refugee Studies Quarterly*, Vol 23(2), pp. 89–96.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and UN Women (the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) (2023) *The Paths to Equal: Two indices on women's empowerment and gender equality*. UNDP and UN Women.

UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR and Save the Children International (2014) Situation of Youth in Lebanon Affected by the Syrian Crisis. UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR and Save the Children International

UNHCR (2019) Operational Update. Lebanon January to December 2019. UNHCR.

UNICEF (2015) UNICEF Written contribution on Child Rights for UPR documentation of Lebanon - March 2015. UNICEF Lebanon Od.

UNICEF (2016) Baseline survey Power Point Presentation. June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016. UNICEF Lebanon

UNICEF (2017) Cross Sectoral Formative Research: Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Study. UNICEF

UNICEF (2017) Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa – Lebanon Country Brief'. UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (IRCW)

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation Lebanon

UNICEF (2020a) White Paper: The role of small-scale residential care for children in the transition from institutional to community-based care and in the continuum of care in the Europe and Central Asia Region. UNICEF ECARO Office.

UNICEF (2020b) Underneath the Surface: Understanding the root causes of violence against children and women in Lebanon. UNICEF Lebanon.

UNICEF Lebanon (2021a) UNICEF Lebanon 2020 Situational Analysis Alpha, The situation of children and young people in the Lebanese crisis, Development Pathways 2021. UNICEF Lebanon.

UNICEF (2021b) Violence Beginnings, Children growing up in Lebanon's crisis. UNICEF Lebanon.

UNICEF (2021c) Lebanon: Children's Future on the Line. UNICEF Lebanon

UNICEF (2021d) Surviving without the basics: The ever-worsening impact of Lebanon's crisis on children. UNICEF Lebanon.

UNICEF (2022a) Deprived Childhoods: Child poverty in crisis-wracked Lebanon, August 2021. UNICEF Lebanon

UNICEF (2022b) Humanitarian Action for Children. UNICEF Lebanon

UNICEF (2023) Future on Hold: Lebanon's worsening crisis is breaking children's spirits. UNICEF.

UNICEF (2023) Future on Hold: Lebanon's worsening crisis is breaking children's spirits. UNICEF Lebanon.

UNICEF Office for South Asia (2017) Gender Equality, Glossary of Terms and Concepts. UNICEF Office for South Asia.

UNICEF & Université Saint-Joseph & Government of Lebanon Ministry of Social Affairs (2012) Strengthening the Child Protection System in Lebanon: Opportunities and Challenges. Child Frontiers & Université Saint-Joseph.

UNRWA (2014) Child Protection Mapping Report. UNRWA

UNRWA (2016) UNRWA child protection framework. UNRWA

United Nations (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Treaty Series, 2515, 3.



## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

### Lebanon

United Nations Children's Fund and Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and Maestral International. (2019) Multi- Country Review of the State of the Social Service Workforce in the Middle East and North Africa Region. UNICEF Jordan.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) General Comment No. 6, Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, UN document CRC/GC/2005/6 of 1 September 2005

United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577

United Nations General Assembly. (2009). Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Resolution A/RES/64/142.

United Nations General Assembly (2019) '*Promotion and protection of the rights of children*' adopted by the General Assembly at its 74th session, 19 November 2019, A/74/395.

United Nations Secretary General (1981) Report to the United Nations to the General Assembly on International Youth Year (A/36/215) para. 8 of the Annex.

US Department of Labor (2019) Findings on the worst forms of child labour, Lebanon. US Department of Labor.

Welty, E. & Lundy, L. (2013) A children's rights-based approach to involving children in decision making. Journal of Science Communication, Vol. 12(03), CO2.

Willi, R., Reed, D. & Houedenou, G. (2020) An evaluation methodology for measuring the long-term impact of family strengthening and alternative child care services: the case of SOS Children's Villages. International Journal of Child, Youth and Family, Vol 11(4.1) pp. 7-28.

World Food Programme (WFP) (2020) Assessing the Impact of the Economic and COVID-19 Crises in Lebanon June 2020. World Food Programme.

World Vision (2016) Children and Young People-Led Research Methodology: An Easy Guidance for Young Researchers. World Vision

## Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Lebanon

Zamenopoulos, T. and Alexiou, K. (2018) 'Co-Design as Collaborative Research' in Facer, K and Dunleavy, K. (Eds.), Connected Communities Foundation Series. Bristol: University of Bristol/ AHRC Connected Communities Programme.  
video