Child Poverty and Youth Unemployment in Lebanon

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Lebanon is a small country whose citizens are religiously diverse. It is accommodating 1.5 million refugees from Arab countries. Child poverty is a serious social problem, for it affects child development and has negative outcomes for all children affected. Youth poverty constrains youth achievements. Some 1.35 million Lebanese are living below the poverty line, and there are more than 1,500 street children, most of whom are Syrian refugees. High unemployment is another serious social problem, with an estimated 18.7 percent of males and 24.7 percent of females being unemployed. Unemployment among youth leads to lower levels of happiness and well-being and to feelings of not being accepted in society. Youth unemployment is also associated with drug and alcohol use as well as higher incidences of criminal and antisocial behaviors. The problem of youth is worsening in Lebanon because of Arab youth refugees, but, at the same time, the Lebanese government has not set out any comprehensive and appropriately designed policies that meet Lebanon’s specific social, economic, and political problems being experienced.

KEY WORDS: Lebanon, children, youth, unemployment, poverty

黎巴嫩儿童贫困和青年失业

黎巴嫩这一小国的公民拥有不同宗教信仰。该国为来自阿拉伯国家的150万难民提供了住处。儿童贫困是一个严重的问题，因为它影响儿童发展，并对所有受影响的儿童带来消极结果。青年贫困限制了青年发展。135万黎巴嫩人正生活在贫困线以下，同时流浪儿童超过1500名——他们大多数都是叙利亚难民。高失业率则是另一个严重问题。据估计，18.7%的男性和24.7%的女性处于失业状态。青年失业会导致幸福感和健康质量降低，同时产生不被社会所接纳的感受。青年失业同时还和吸毒、酗酒、犯罪率升高、以及反社会行为有关。黎巴嫩地区的青年问题正在恶化，这是因为阿拉伯青年难民的介入，但同时也和黎巴嫩政府有关。后者还未设定出任何全面且适宜的政策来解决该国正经历的特定社会问题、经济问题和政治问题。

关键词：黎巴嫩，儿童，青年，失业，贫困，就业

Pobreza infantil y desempleo juvenil en el Líbano

Libano es un país pequeño cuyos ciudadanos son de diversas religiones. Acoge a 1,5 millones de refugiados de países árabes. La pobreza infantil es un problema social grave, ya que afecta el
Introduction

Lebanon today [2009] presents a paradox. On the one hand, it boasts a vibrant multicultural society, an active private sector, and a liberal and democratic political system. On the other, in the last three decades, it has been plagued with civil wars, external wars, military occupations and acute political uncertainty. More recently, its citizens have come together to achieve dramatic and relatively peaceful political change. Yet the country has also seen a rise in sectarian divisions and animosities, which have manifested themselves in periodic street clashes in Beirut and around the country. These have brought Lebanon to the verge of renewed sectarian strife. (UNDP & CDR, 2009, p. 10)

Lebanon is still a paradoxical country. Being an intersection point between East and West, Lebanon is located at the crossroads of the Mediterranean basin and the Arabian hinterland. It is a geographically small country (10,452 km²) bounded on the north and east by Syria and on the south by Israel. This has shaped its cultural identity, denoted by its religious and ethnic diversity, which distinguishes Lebanon as a unique country in the Middle East. Historically, Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire (1516–1918). After the First World War it was under French rule (1920–1943), in accord with a League of Nations mandate. It became an independent parliamentary republic on November 22, 1943. Lebanon’s parliamentary democracy is, however, quite distinctive, reflecting its religious diversity. The constitution requires that particular high-ranking public offices be reserved for members of particular religious groups: the President (must be a Maronite Christian), the Prime Minister (a Sunni Muslim), the Speaker of the Parliament (a Shia Muslim), and the Deputy Prime Minister and the Deputy Speaker of Parliament (an Eastern Orthodox Christian).

Lebanon, which has not conducted an official census since 1932 (reflecting the political sensitivity over the confessional—religious—balance of power) has a population estimated to be some 6.2 million people (as of July 2016; United States
Central Intelligence Agency [U.S. CIA], 2017). Its population is young, with a median age of 29.9 years (2016 estimate), reflecting that 24.65 percent are in the 0–14 age group (786,842 males and 750,449 females), and 16.73 percent are in the 15–24 age group (534,040 males and 509,663 females). Ethnically, it is overwhelmingly Arab. Muslims constitute some 54 percent (equally Sunni and Shia), and most of the rest are Christian (mainly Maronite Christian and Greek Orthodox), although there is a small Armenian community. The Maronite Christians do not consider themselves to be Arab but rather Phoenicians, as descendants of the ancient Canaanites. Lebanon is overwhelmingly an urbanized country (88 percent of the population live in urban areas). Conservatively, an estimated 1.6 million Lebanese people are employed (2013 estimate), to which an estimated 1 million foreign workers or refugees must be added.

Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, and Stateless Persons

Lebanon’s population is significantly enlarged by aliens (U.S. CIA, 2017). It accommodates some 1.5 million registered refugees (2016 estimate), inclusive of some 450,000 Palestinians, some 7,200 Iraqis, and some 1 million Syrians, although the actual number may well be over 2 million (Mazloum, 2016). In addition, some 12,000 Palestinians (2015 estimate) are internally displaced persons as a result of the destruction of Palestinian refugee camps by Lebanese security forces. There are an unknown number of stateless persons, estimated to be in the tens of thousands (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2014b). These include mainly Palestinian refugees and their descendants, but also Syrian Kurds who were denaturalized in Syria in 1962, children born to Lebanese women married to foreign or stateless men or to Syrian refugees, and Lebanese children whose births remain unregistered.

One of the Lebanese government’s responses to the influx of Syrian refugees from 2011 was made clear in December 2014, when it limited Syrians’ access to some elements of the Lebanese labor market:

Minister of Labor, Sejaan Azzi, issued yesterday [December 16] a memorandum in which he defined professions which are exclusive to Lebanese citizens but with some exceptions. Azzi clarified in a statement that his memorandum comes at a time when the Lebanese labor is facing a fierce competition and it is the duty of the Ministry to protect Lebanese labor as well as employers. He added that this memorandum is in line with considerations related to national interest and the principle of reciprocity, the needs of the job market as well as humanitarian consideration. The memorandum noted that all professions including administrative, banking, insurance and educational jobs would be exclusive to the Lebanese citizens, while professions in commerce, banking, accounting, engineering, and liberal professions to be exclusive to Lebanese employers. (WEEP, 2014)
Poverty and Inequality in Lebanon

Over the 15 years after the cessation of Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), the poverty situation in Lebanon has been characterized as follows: “growing poverty in terms of money, leading to increased regional and interregional disparities as well as an increase in urban poverty pockets” (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] & Council for Development and Reconstruction [CDR], 2009, p. 57; see also UNDP, 2008). The World Bank (2017c) estimated that the poverty rate in 2012 (latest available data) was 27.4 percent, implying, conservatively, that some 1.35 million Lebanese residents were living in a state of poverty, of whom some 250,000 were judged to be living in extreme poverty.

Income and expenditure inequality is also significant. Ten years ago (latest available data), households in the top 20 percent of the income distribution received some 7.8 times the income of those in the bottom 20 percent; and the bottom 20 percent accounted for only 7 percent of total expenditures while the top 20 percent accounted for 43 percent (UNDP, 2008). Wealth distribution in Lebanon is also very unequal. A more recent study suggests that a mere 0.3 percent of the estimated workforce—some 8,000 people—own 48 percent of the country’s wealth (Credit Suisse, 2014).

The contemporary living standards of many Lebanese residents find them not only below the income threshold for meeting very basic needs, but also lacking clean water, electricity, medical care, and housing (World Bank, 2017c). Everyone in poverty suffers, but children suffer most. This poverty situation can be linked to the impact of the Syrian civil war (since 2011) and to Lebanon’s overall macroeconomic performance since the global financial crisis (2008–2009), when Lebanon experienced declining and then stagnant economic growth rates (World Bank, 2017c). The economic distortions that then became apparent (associated with poorly performing state enterprises, the ineffective regulatory and judicial systems, and indebted public finances) have seriously restricted economic recovery and limited job creation. Many households in urban areas, most of which depend on employment as their main source of income, have been adversely affected by growing unemployment, particularly households that have migrated to the cities in search of a better standard of living.

Recent refugees escaping from the Syrian civil war have had a substantial social, economic, and environmental impact on Lebanese society. This has exacerbated Lebanon’s already serious poverty situation (World Bank, 2015; see also Norwegian Church Aid, 2015), particularly since most of the registered refugees in 2016 were children (aged 0–11; 41.5 percent, or some 420,000 children) or adolescent youth (aged 12–17; 13.3 percent, or some 135,000 adolescents; UNHCR, 2017).

The capacity of the Lebanese state to support its poorer citizens—not to mention its poor alien residents—has been constrained by the burden of public debt, which reached 144 percent of GDP at the end of December 2016. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has made a very recent judgment on Lebanon’s plight:
The protracted conflict in Syria continues to dominate Lebanon’s outlook, with registered refugees now comprising over one-quarter of the population. The refugee presence is straining local communities, adding to poverty and unemployment, and placing further pressure on the economy’s already-weak public finances and infrastructure. (IMF, 2017)

One of the first and most important roles of the government is to assist legally present residents who have been denied opportunities, and who cannot use their capabilities to control their life chances. The absence of the necessary state support to those most in need inevitably has its psychological implications. According to Jawad (2014, p. 1): “Lebanon’s reliance on powerful donor bodies to support its poorest citizens further dispossesses those citizens of agency of their own future.”

Exacerbating this situation is the proclivity of the Lebanese political system to set policies in a way that serves the interests of politicians, often at the expense of others. Whoever is involved in decision making tends to make policies reflecting their own benefits and supporting their own beliefs. So, the political system presses for social policies that are designed to prevent particular special interests from becoming the dominant public interest, at the expense of other contending special interests, and to restore a more level and competitive playing field for business. The Lebanese, when attempting to influence policy, must, therefore, struggle to appeal to the sensibilities of elected public officials and to build the commitment of such officials to the higher public good of citizens. A youth policy statement endorsed by the Lebanese Council of Ministers (Youth Forum of Youth Policy [YFYP], 2012, p. 22) illustrates the implications of this:

Young people consider that confessional and sectarian divisions constitute an essential obstacle that prevents their active participation in the various life aspects, which is crucial in their practice of their full citizenship rights. Hence, it is necessary to work on encouraging social integration and eliminating all legal and administrative obstacles that marginalize the role of youth in life.

So, citizens are reduced to capturing their political representatives’ attention—in order to urge them to act according to their preferences—by any way possible. They express their frustration and discontent via demonstrations, picketing, and marches; but all this is in vain. Politicians regularly ignore the Lebanese citizens’ socioeconomic rights and are disinterested in their needs. Harb (2016, p. 1) highlights this point by suggesting that “Lebanese youth are constructed through fragment lenses” and that youth policies “lack an interdisciplinary and integrated understanding of their complex, dynamic, and highly differentiated livelihoods.” So, young people are excluded from politics, economics, society, and the built environment through policies that ignored their interests.
People need to be able to shape the decisions and control the resources needed to protect the children and young people who are at risk of poverty or worse.

**Human Trafficking**

Lebanon does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of [human] trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so ... its government has a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. (U.S. CIA, 2017)

Lebanon is both a source and a destination country for the forced labor and sex trafficking of women and children. It is a transit point for women and children from Eastern Europe, South and Southeast Asia, and East and West Africa, who are recruited to work in domestic service but are subject to conditions of forced labor. Lebanon's artiste visa program permits women to enter Lebanon in order to work in the adult entertainment industry, but they are often forced into the sex trade. "Lebanese children are reportedly forced into street begging and commercial sexual exploitation, with small numbers of Lebanese girls sex trafficked in other Arab countries; Syrian refugees are vulnerable to forced labor and prostitution" (U.S. CIA, 2017)

**Child Poverty**

It has been estimated that Lebanon has 1.53 million children aged under 15, which constitutes a child dependency ratio of 35 percent. Conservatively, at least 420,000 of them are living in poverty.

**Child Poverty and Child Rights**

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2004, p. 17) has declared:

Children have the right to grow up in an environment that protects them. Successful protection increases children's chances of growing up physically and mentally healthy, confident and self-respecting, and less likely to abuse or exploit others, including their own children.

Living in a state of poverty denies children their rights under the 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This Convention created two imperatives on all signatory states: to protect children against threats of harm, and to advance their welfare (Dixon & Welbourne, 2016). According to the Realization of Children's Rights Index compiled by Humanium, an international
child sponsorship NGO, there are "noticeable problems" in the realization of children's rights in Lebanon (Humanium, 2017a, 2017b).

Children are being denied the right to education—10 percent of school-age children do not attend school. Children can be required to work to help out their families—7 percent of them do so—perhaps finding themselves in jobs where working conditions are harsh and inhumane, and where they work themselves to death for a paltry salary. Indeed, child labor is a reemerging phenomenon following the large influx of Syrian refugees. A recent survey of 1,500 street children found that most were Syrians engaging in petty trade (YFYP, 2012; see also International Labor Office, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, & Save the Children International, 2015). Moreover, Ajluni and Kawar (2015, p. 29) found that:

Younger children were more likely to engage in begging activities with a small number engaged in illicit activities such as prostitution. On average they work 8.5 hours per day over 6 days a week and are subject to various occupational hazards, with only a few of them having recourse to report abuse. Begging generated the lowest level of income whereas illicit activities, especially prostitution, generated the highest income levels.

Children are being denied the right to drinkable water in some remote villages. Children are the victims of conflict, even when people express their anger toward government by means of street violence. In these circumstances, there is little protection of children's safety and security, and it may well be that family members are separated, perhaps leaving children alone, without knowledge of their relatives' whereabouts. The plight of refugee children is particularly worrisome. Humanium (2017b) describes the situation facing children in Lebanon as follows:

Lebanon has been rebuilding itself since the violent conflicts that erupted there at the end of the 20th century. The wellbeing of children has largely been undermined by these geopolitical circumstances, although it is slowly improving. Lebanon still has a long way to go to reach an ideal situation, with full protection of the rights of children.

In Lebanon, which has not ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the rights of refugee children are not very well protected. Most live in extreme poverty in refugee camps, and many are forced to work in poor conditions for low wages. Most suffer from serious psychological traumas because of what they have experienced and witnessed. They receive little or no health care and only limited education, and there is also a severe lack of hygiene.

**The Effects of Poverty on Children**

The devastating consequences for children living in a state of poverty can take years—even decades—to manifest. Maslow's (1943, 1954) classic Hierarchy
of Needs provides a simple, clear, and resonant framework to understand the essential needs of children at different stages of their development and the possible consequences if those needs are not met.

The human body—the body of a child—cannot function properly without having its needs satisfied.

- Their *physiological needs* are for breathable air, clean water, adequate nourishment, good health, safe activity, adequate rest, and avoidance of pain; otherwise, they cannot move on to a higher stage of development without a sense of inadequacy and inferiority.
- Their *safety and security needs* are for safe surroundings, relational stability, and protection from harm, in order to meet their emergent need for structure, order, and limits; otherwise, fears and anxieties can develop.
- Their *love and belonging needs* are for others to love and to provide them with a sense of belonging, which comes with family stability and the granting of lasting personal commitments; otherwise, they may become unable to love anyone themselves, and so social anxieties related to loneliness can manifest.
- Their *esteem needs* are for feelings of self-worth garnered from the respect gained from others (Maslow’s lower esteem need) and from respecting one’s self (his important esteem need); otherwise, low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority may manifest, giving rise to psychological problems in adulthood.

Maslow considered all these to be needs, the deficiency of which instinctively compels children to seek their fulfillment by whatever means they consider possible—including child labor and criminal activities—regardless of psychological, physiological, and social risk involved, which they may very well not understand or appreciate.

Maslow’s remaining higher needs can only be acted upon in adolescents and adulthood if these deficiency needs are fully met during childhood. These needs are their *growth needs*, being able to build their personal identity—a sense of who they are—and their social identity—a sense of belonging to, and identifying with, particular social groups, the membership of which becomes an essential aspect of their personal identity (Dixon, Dogan, & Sanderson, 2009, pp. 12–13)—so as to be able to develop their cognitive potential and their aesthetic appreciations, thereby becoming fully functional individuals responsible for their own life.

The common goal for children in the Lebanese community must be to facilitate their growth and development in a safe, hygienic, and caring home environment, thereby enabling them to acquire an essential education in schools with adequate resources, so that they can become productive and responsible members of the community. In addition to this educational goal, schools should have the opportunity to engage able parents and young people in practice roles that can improve the capacities of the young people of the future.
Youth Unemployment and Poverty

Although Lebanon has made progress towards human development in the past decades, major obstacles remain in creating enough job opportunities for youth. At least a third of them, the most highly educated, are looking to emigrate. (Lazzarini, 2016, p. 3)

It has been estimated that there are 1.04 million young people in Lebanon between the ages of 15 and 24, which constitutes 17 percent of the Lebanese population. Conservatively, youth unemployment is judged by the International Labor Office to be 18.7 percent for males and 24.7 percent for females (2014 estimates; World Bank, 2017a, 2017b). Ghassan Ghosn, head of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, however, estimated in 2013 that youth unemployment had reached 38 percent and that 14 percent of young people are living in a state of poverty (Women Economic Empowerment Portal [WEEP], 2013). Indeed, the pressures of earning enough income to enable a young person to gain self-sufficiency and personal independence as they enter adulthood are such that most do not leave home until they are preparing to start their own families. The youth population, however, swells by as much as 40 percent with the inclusion of refugee youth, for whom the unemployment rate is over 50 percent.

Refugee Youth Unemployment and Poverty

Lebanon’s alien youth population (those aged 15–24) comprises a conservatively estimated (in 2014) 86,000 Palestinians (Chaaban et al., 2016) and 295,000 Syrians (United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination [UNI-AC], 2015; see also Oxfam, Lebanese Center for Studies and Research, & Beirut Research and Innovation Center, 2013), most of whom are female. Youth unemployment is staggeringly high. For Syrians, it is conservatively estimated (in 2014) to be 52 percent mostly first-time job seekers searching for work, on average, for six months (United Nations Fund for Population Activities [UNFPA], United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Save the Children International, & United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2014). For Palestinians, it is estimated to be even higher at 54 percent (in 2014), with average unemployed youth also searching six months for work (Chaaban & el Khoury, 2016, p. 33). The workforce participation by alien young people is, thus, challenging for them:

The heavily connection-based employment system would expectedly be more difficult for these youth to navigate, considering the extent to which their communities are socially isolated and the smaller number of Syrians and Palestinians in high ranking positions within Lebanon. (Chaaban & el Khoury, 2016, p. 29)
In late 2014, the Lebanese government limited refugees’ access to some elements of the labor market. Syrians were required to pledge not to seek work, while Palestinians were denied the right to employment in liberal occupations. Poverty among alien youth is chronic because of widespread unemployment and because even if jobs are found, they are typically in the informal sector and pay well under the legal minimum wage (Chaaban & El Khoury, 2016, p. 33; see also UNHCR, 2014a).

**The Nature of the Labor Market Confronting Lebanese Youth**

The characteristics of the Lebanon labor market from a youth perspective are stark (Ajluni & Kawar, 2015):

- The demand for youth labor is to fill low-skilled jobs in trade, public services, and private personal services (see also Kawar & Tzannatos, 2012).
- The supply of youth labor has been fueled by the refugee intake, the growth in the youth age cohort, and growing employment participation rates (especially among women). This has resulted in a deficit in the demand for youth labor, so youth unemployment is chronic, the job search process is long and hard, and many young people are disillusioned.
- Young Lebanese are discouraged from seeking work and aspire to leave Lebanon. Their labor market inactivity rate is high (estimated to be 70 percent in 2013), driven by an array of work disincentives: the lack of demand for a skilled educated workforce, low wages, and poor working conditions.
- Those young Lebanese who gain employment do so in insecure jobs (lacking formal work contracts) with poor working conditions (lacking labor law and social protection) in the informal sector (as self-employed; casual employees paid hourly, daily, weekly, or on a commission basis; or in paid or unpaid family employment), receiving a wage below the statutory minimum wage.
- The Lebanese labor market has, historically, been open to migrant workers, mostly in low-skilled jobs in the personal and domestic services and the construction sectors. The significant refugee population, who only have constrained or even no legal right to access the labor market, can face hardships and exploitation in the informal sector.

**First-Time Lebanese Job Seekers**

Lebanese adolescents and young people, whether skilled or unskilled, struggle in the transition from school to work in Lebanon’s congested labor market. It takes them, on average, 10 and 16 months, respectively, to find their first job (The Daily Star, 2011). The Center for Development Studies and Projects found that during the job search process, many young people are actively seeking to emigrate: Indeed, “migration is the valve that has been put on unemployment. If it were not for migration, we would have much more unemployment” (The Daily Star, 2011).
The Needs of Lebanese Youth

Youth exclusion from mainstream Lebanese society has been a problem facing Lebanon since the time of Lebanese civil war, when an estimated 22 percent of young people sought immigration in order to improve their living conditions and to build their future in another society, one that is stable and secure. The sense of social exclusion is the product of the young being unemployed and living in or near a state of poverty, particularly those having a limited education, those suffering religious discrimination, and those being internal migrants or juvenile delinquents. This highlights that young people (YFYP, 2012)

- confront the prospects of extended unemployment, constraining their transition to adulthood independence;
- live in poor conditions because they are unable to meet even their basic needs, giving rise to serious health conditions the treatment for which is problematic; and
- are unable to participate in political, social, and community life, such as being unable to join recreational and cultural activities, especially females, giving rise to a psychological sense of exclusion and isolation.

Young people seeking to participate in the labor market face many challenges, the most important of which are as follows (Chaaban & el Khoury, 2016, pp. 52-55):

- A deficiency in job opportunities to meet the employment demand of those seeking work, particularly first-time job seekers.
- An information deficit in relation to the job opportunities available and the skills sought by employers.
- An education system that does not prepare them for employment or a future career.
- A lack of knowledge of their labor rights and obligations.

Solutions to Youth Unemployment

The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (2013) recommended the following two-pronged strategy to address youth unemployment:

- expand public expenditures on education, so as to raise the quality of education and improve the linkage between education and the vocational skills required and valued in the labor market; and
- control migration, increase government accountability, and improve public services and infrastructure.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) endorses a more specific array of policy solutions (Chaaban & el Khoury, 2016, pp. 52-55):
Training for the Needs of the Economy: To address actively the skills mismatch present in the Lebanese economy by training school and university graduates so that they can meet the contemporary needs of employers and make better career choices.

Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship and Strategic Sector Growth: To expand business incubators and micro-financial support for the entrepreneurial and innovative ambitions of young people.

Improving Employment Information Availability: To address the lack of information available to youth about job opportunities and the labor market skills most in demand.

Increasing Public Employment: To reduce regional employment disparities and provide more skilled public sector jobs through administrative decentralization and infrastructure investments that would promote a more balanced development in all regions.

Encouraging Private Sector Hiring while Protecting Workers: To address the need to modernize labor relations, under the Labor Laws, in ways that benefit young workers (by introducing a payroll-tax finance unemployment scheme) while minimizing obstructions to the hiring and termination processes (by allowing businesses more flexibility when terminating employment in times of financial distress).

Ensuring Workplace Rights and Protections: To provide young people in part-time or unregulated jobs with protection under the Labor Laws, and to ensure that non-compliant employers are held accountable for any deficiencies in their workplace health and safety provisions and for workplace discrimination practices, especially in relation to young female workers, particularly those in the unregulated sector, and to young workers with disabilities.

Removing Work Restrictions on Syrian and Palestinian Young People: To stop the marginalization and alienation of these large population groups. In reality, they do not compete for jobs with Lebanese young people, because they have different skill-sets and are willing to work for lower wages in the informal sector where workplace protections (health and safety, minimum wages) are weak. These discriminatory policies also heightening antagonist relationships between different ethnic groups present in Lebanon.

In dealing with youth's unemployment, the need is to concentrate on the individual work incentives—by enforcing minimum wages and removing any work disincentives—and on realigning Lebanon's social policy programs, so as to ensure that young people are adequately supported in terms of health care and education, and are given the skills they need to access the labor market.

A Vision for the Future

Addressing child poverty and youth unemployment requires supporting Lebanese community development. Needed are practical community initiatives, such as housing development, job creation, and provision of micro-financial
products (e.g., small business start-up loans), by means of a community
development corporation. This would enable people in local communities to take
charge of their lives. This can only begin, however, when people in those
communities reject the negative image of themselves, often imposed by a
developmental mentality grounded in perceptions that their impoverishment is
due to their inability, laziness, or lack of intelligence, or to their latent desire to be
dependent on others. Community members need to understand the forces and
processes that have put them—and keeps them—in a state of poverty and
dependency. In addition, they must realize they have to participate in addressing
their own dependency and powerlessness, achieved by mobilizing and organizing
their internal strength, so as to be able to develop new approaches to the
protection of their children—indeed, any and all children—and to advance their
well-being, thereby securing their future development.

Community members need to feel that they are able to efficiently actualize
their hopes and dreams. To facilitate this, social work organizations need to
activate people’s political and social consciousness—by making politics less
intimidating—so as to reverse the current top-down approach to politics and
policymaking. This would stimulate their critical consciousness. They need to
become the building blocks of wider social movements, achieved by social work
organizations’ providing an infrastructure of organizational coalitions that
combine their strength to press for policy changes. Such acts would unify and
motivate the Lebanese citizens to demand a better future life for everyone. The
cumulative effect of direct political action needs to begin by seeking changes to
the political system.

Community members need to participate in the policymaking process in
order to feel that they belong to their community and, indeed, their country. They
need to get involved with lobbying for policy alternatives that give them power
over developmental decisions in their neighborhoods. They need to engage with
government on the formulation of neighborhood policies and programs, budget
preparations, and strategic planning. Such engagement will strengthen their sense
of belonging to their community and their commitment to its improvement.

Communities must begin to think about alternative ways of living. One of
these ways is through sustainable human development. The cure to poverty will
not come by converting local economics into high-powered market systems or by
pressuring people to accept the neoliberal premises on which modern market
economies are based (individualism, self-interest, and personal responsibility; Dixon, 2016). Social movements must develop and mobilize around a vision of
people-centered development policy and political reforms. They must raise
special questions of human development for everyone. There is, of course, no
easy or quick solution to the child poverty and youth unemployment problems.
But meeting the needs of children and youth must take the lead.
Conclusion

Public concern about juvenile delinquency, youth radicalization, youth unemployment, child labor, child and youth trafficking, and other social problems continues to grow as a result of perceived increases in substance abuse, theft, assault, violence, crime, and other antisocial and illegal behaviors by Lebanese and refugee children and youth. Children who are economically deprived and living in dangerous conditions, facing limited opportunities for social, economic, and educational advancement, are victims of a failing sociopolitical market system. So, what can be realistically expected from a nation whose children live in poverty and insecurity and whose women are threatened and abused? Developing a realistic plan to address these social problems, and providing the necessary resources and implementation capacity, must be a priority. What is needed, then, are political leaders of society who are willing to champion the rights of children and youth, particularly those at risk, regardless of their ethnic origins or the religious traditions into which they were born.

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