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Delivering on the urgent need for a national social assistance system:

Putting in place social grants

During the worst economic crisis Lebanon has experienced in decades, leading to rapidly rising vulnerability and exacerbating inequality, there is an urgent need to develop the national social protection system. Recent analysis and strategy documents have highlighted the important challenges and weaknesses that the system faces, including major gaps to be addressed. Beyond a national vision to develop the social protection system for the long-term, a rapid scale-up of national social assistance is immediately necessary. This urgency will only increase as universal price subsidies come to an end.

While we estimate that nearly three-quarters of Lebanese and over 90% of Syrians are now

income vulnerable, the effects of the crises are most keenly felt by specific vulnerable groups who face pre-existing lifecycle vulnerabilities, structural barriers, and higher costs, including households with children, people with disabilities, older persons and others. As such, the most glaring gap in the national system today is the total lack of Social Grants to address such lifecycle vulnerabilities. While an anti-poverty programme exists and is gradually being scaled-up, Lebanon does not have in place a national Child Grant, a Disability Allowance, nor a Social Pension. Evidence from the last Labour Force and Living Conditions Survey shows how highly vulnerable households with children and people with disabilities are¹.

The national social protection vision

A national vision for development of Lebanon's social protection system is vital. While the National Social Protection Strategy enters its final stage of development for wide consultation, we can find the national vision outlined in other documents. The 3RF Sector Plan for Social Protection, developed by the World Bank, UN and EU, emphasizes the main priority of expanding social assistance

both through a poverty programme as well as through the introduction of social grants to address lifecycle vulnerabilities². The United Nations in Lebanon position paper on social protection makes the same point³. Civil society groups have also underlined the importance of establishing Social Grants so that excluded, vulnerable groups can access social assistance^{4 5 6}.



Developing the national social assistance system

Globally, many countries use a combination of social assistance initiatives to make up the social assistance system. In Lebanon, this system currently comprises just a single programme – the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP), reaching 15,000 extreme poor households with food vouchers and potential waivers against health and education services. However, while the NPTP still needs to be significantly scaled up to reach all households in extreme poverty (particularly through the forthcoming Emergency Social Safety Net loan programme of the World Bank), and benefits from contributory programmes (such as the NSSF) are inadequate, a very large number of people facing vulnerabilities - raising children, living with a disability or in old age - fall between the two with no access to social protection whatsoever. Likewise, there are no programmes in place to address these lifecycle vulnerabilities for refugees.

As a result, with children and people with disabilities significantly more likely to live in poverty and face other barriers and higher costs as well as general discrimination and exclusion, the introduction of Social Grant to support these groups is urgently needed. Even during – and especially during – a crisis, it is vital to build the system for the longer-term, in place of short-term, reactive measures. In addition to providing vulnerable groups with urgently needed cash assistance, Social Grants can provide an integrated approach, linking vulnerable households to complementary services, as well as supporting the development of national databases and registries. While additional funding is urgently necessary, UNICEF and the ILO have already begun working with the support of key donors - particularly the EU/MADAD as well as the UK - to establish the Social Grants model as part of the national system.

Establishing Social Grants

A Child Grant: UNICEF's new "Haddi" programme

Childhood is an innately vulnerable period, given the additional needs and risks that they face; from birth, through 0-5, through schooling, and then later as an adolescent and youth. Families can struggle to adequately meet the healthcare, nutrition, protection, and education needs of children, resulting in multiple, cumulative deprivations that can have long-term, irreversible negative impacts on a child's life as well as on society as a whole.

In the absence of a national child grant to support households in raising their children, UNICEF is launching a new initiative to plug the gap, known as "Haddi", meaning "next to me". Haddi aims to support households and children to cope, limit cuts in spending on children and stem the rise in negative-coping strategies. As such, it goes well beyond more basic needs such as food. The initiative is planned to reach 60,000-90,000 vulnerable children supported through UNICEF's service provision and partners, particularly girls and boys involved in child labour, those at risk of child marriage, those excluded from learning and those with disabilities, as well as a small number of female heads of households (mostly migrant domestic workers). Following

discussions with state and non-state actors, the initiative will aim to commence provision of monthly cash grants for at least 6 to 12 months beginning in mid-2021. Children will continue to receive complementary services while also being referred to additional ones as necessary with follow-up. The recipient children are all those identified as receiving high-priority UNICEF complementary services for highly vulnerable children and include primarily Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian children living across the country.

Following review and analysis by the Cash Taskforce as well as by LOUISE agencies that oversee Lebanon's common cash delivery system, the cash grants will be provided directly to each recipient in USD over the counter, and based on analysis of transfer values. The identified risks and mitigation measures – particularly protection measures – will be carefully monitored and documented during implementation. Grievance and redress mechanisms, including a full-time call centre, as well as a communication plan will accompany "Haddi". The initiative will be accompanied by monitoring and an outcome assessment to ensure the programme is on track throughout as well as to determine its impact.



A National Disability Allowance

In addition, extensive discussions have occurred in recent months to move toward the design of a National Disability Allowance led with the Government of Lebanon through the technical capacity of UNICEF and the ILO. As highlighted by a large number of organisations in Lebanon representing people with disabilities (PwD), PwD – particularly girls and women – face substantial extra costs as well as discrimination and abuse and lower access to education and employment. Income support can help to meet these additional costs, compensate for lost or foregone earnings, and reduce the stigma often associated with disability, thereby supporting people with disabilities to live in dignity.

UNICEF and the ILO are working with key development partners, civil society actors and the Government of Lebanon to design and implement a National Disability Allowance, building on existing analysis of vulnerabilities, programmes and the gaps in the national social protection system. The initiative will be led with the Government of Lebanon through a Steering Committee linking into the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Social Policy chaired by the Prime Minister. Its design will build on inputs from previous consultations and aim to support civil society to engage in its implementation. As a new national social assistance programme, it will be established with clear alignment with the NPTP as well as linkages to complementary services through integrated referral and follow-up, and a solid database.

Beginning in late 2021/early 2022, the initiative aims to initially reach at least 20,000 people with disabilities, including Lebanese and Syrians, who could be identified from existing databases as well as future applications across the country. Given the universal principle of access to Social Grants, the objective of targeting under the social grants model is not one of attempting to assess and select only those in extreme poverty – as for the NPTP - but rather of identifying people with disabilities while

excluding those who are well-off, through a form of easily-administered affluence testing. Women and men would be equally targeted, with measures identified to address gender specific barriers. Monthly cash grants would be provided directly to recipients, and the risks and mitigation measures of providing cash grants in USD to PwD would be carefully reviewed and informed by the experience with Haddi. Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse will be a specific measure of both Haddi and the Disability Allowance, with training, awareness raising, redressal and monitoring.



Towards a Social Pension for Lebanon

With the highest proportion of older people among Arab states, Lebanon is the only MENA country which has not yet established a pension scheme for workers in the private sector. As people grow older, earning an income becomes increasingly difficult and many, particularly women, are increasingly vulnerable to poverty. The lack of social security for older people is reflected in the high and currently increasing levels of vulnerability in older age. Civil society in Lebanon has been long advocating for the introduction of a non-contributory, tax-financed social pension to complement the contributory social security system to result in a system that could ensure income security for all Lebanese in older age. A new collaboration between the ILO, HelpAge and

other state and non-state actors is now beginning in Lebanon to build the foundations for establishment of an inclusive social pension model.

At a time when Lebanon's social protection system needs reform and development that will be taken forward under the forthcoming National Social Protection Strategy, it is now clearly very urgent to scale-up social assistance and to address the glaring gaps in the system as soon as possible given the ongoing and worsening economic crisis. These two new initiatives of Haddi and the national Disability Allowance, as well as building the foundations of a social pension, take necessary and urgent steps in that direction.



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1 ILO/UNICEF. Towards a Social Protection Floor for Lebanon: Policy Options and Costs for Core Lifecycle Social Grants.

https://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_791113/lang-en/index.htm

2 Lebanon's Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF).

<https://lebanon.un.org/en/105259-lebanon-reform-recovery-reconstruction-framework-3rf-full-report>

3 <https://lebanon.un.org/en/105260-social-protection-lebanon-un-position-paper>

4 <https://daleel-madani.org/ar/press-releases/position-social-protection-expert-group-lebanese-governments-financial-recovery-plan>

5 <https://lebanesestudies.com/papers/towards-a-rights-based-social-protection-system-for-lebanon/>

6 https://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_765094/lang-en/index.htm