



Comprehensive centre-based prevention and response to child labour in agriculture in Lebanon

Photo: BEYOND Association

This case study describes a pilot project to provide comprehensive services to children in agricultural child labour and their families in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon.

Background

Child labour in agriculture is highly prevalent, involving both Lebanese children and Syrian refugee children who often live and work in informal tented settlements on vast agricultural lands. Syrian refugee children in particular are found in exploitative, abusive and hazardous forms of child labour including bonded or forced labour. Many girls work at home as caregivers for their younger siblings. The national NGO BEYOND Association developed and implemented a comprehensive package of coordinated services for children in agricultural child labour. Following consultation with parents and children, a service package was developed to prevent, withdraw and rehabilitate children from (the worst forms of) child labour in agriculture and related supply chains in Lebanon. BEYOND Association established a Child Labour Centre through which these services were provided.

Comprehensive centre-based child labour pilot

Key steps of this project included:

- **Research** on child labour in the agricultural sector in Beqaa Valley provided a solid evidence base for the programme design. The research was carried out by BEYOND Association under the supervision of the American University of Beirut (AUB), the umbrella of the Lebanese Ministry of Labour and was technically and financially supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNICEF and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).
- **Capacity-building** on child labour targeted all staff in BEYOND Association in coordination with relevant ministries and trade unions. Training was provided on how to respond to child labour particularly in agriculture and on the streets. The project developed a toolkit for training social workers as well as teachers on how to identify, refer and support at-risk and working children in agriculture.

- **Comprehensive service package** for children in or at risk of child labour included: literacy and numeracy programmes, child protection case management, healthcare and awareness-raising activities on child rights, labour rights and occupational safety and health in the workplace. The centre also provided adapted activities for children with impairments and children with mental health problems as a result of significant levels of distress.
- **ILO SCREAM (Supporting Child Rights through Education, Arts and the Media) programme activities** were used to develop materials to support psychosocial rehabilitation and awareness-raising on the negative effects of child labour among at-risk and working children, policy makers and community members including the shaweesh (local landowners). Skilled and professional Syrians were recruited to lead various media and creative activities including a press club, choirs, drawing, painting, poetry and drama clubs, and were provided with training on child labour.
- **Livelihood activities** supporting both Lebanese and Syrian families were provided on the condition that they withdrew their children from hazardous forms of child labour. Unique in this approach was that the centre offered training and employment opportunities that were not only legal in Lebanon for refugees but that would also be relevant in Syria, which could thus support families' reintegration in Syria once it was safe to return. In the absence of many male breadwinners in refugee households, the centre provided employment to mothers. To avoid their children being forced into childcare duties, the centre offered childcare services to mothers while they attended classes or worked.
- **Coordination** with stakeholders involved continuous engagement with community members, municipalities, relevant ministries, NGOs, farmers' unions and local religious leaders. This helped to secure local socio-political support for the centre, its activities and the working children. Stakeholder coordination also targeted local employers and contractors who hired children, including the shaweesh. Engagement and negotiation was focused on the withdrawal of younger children from child labour, protection for older adolescents while working and promotion of their equal access to educational, social and health services.

Lessons learned

- **Gender considerations:** Initially it was difficult to engage girls in the activities as the centre and its programme were not (yet) seen as a trusted place in the community. To address this challenge, the project staff identified different ways to engage and build trust with parents and caregivers and to embed the centre activities more within the community. This was done in several ways: mothers of working children were employed to provide meals at the centre during activities and events, which served at the same time as a source of income. Mothers were invited to participate in drama activities alongside their children, which helped parents and children to connect to each other and establish their relationship with other community members through the centre. The involvement of mothers was important to increase the participation of girls – as a result of this approach, the number of girls participating in the centre and all its activities has rapidly increased.
- **Centre for Child Labour:** The comprehensive approach initially only targeted child labour in agriculture but as a result of its success, the approach was later expanded to tackle child labour in other sectors including industries, mechanics and children working on the streets.
- **Flexibility to respond to new emergencies:** During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the centre had to adapt quickly to the new risks and needs arising in vulnerable communities. New activities were implemented to raise awareness about COVID-19 risks and ongoing activities. For example, the literacy programmes were adapted to mobile phone-based modalities, enabling children to continue their learning from home.

More information and resources are available at:

<https://alliancecpha.org>

<https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-hub/child-labour-task-force>