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Rapid Assessment on Child Labour in North Lebanon (Tripoli and Akkar) and in the Bekaa Governorates

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This rapid assessment (RA), implemented over a period of six months (March to August 2011), was commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and carried out by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut. Its purpose is to study the working conditions of children in the governorates of the North and the Bekaa.

The study is based on interviews with 1,007 children aged 5 to 17 working in Lebanese territory and 174 household visits. It covers the following regions and sub-regions: the North (Tripoli, Mina, Beddawi and selected areas of Akkar) and the Bekaa (Baalbek, Zahleh -the industrial zone- Bar Elias, Dalhamieh). The sectors covered by the RA are: small shops; meat treatment; restaurants and snack bars; agriculture; construction; waste collection; handicraft manufacture (carpentry, painting, blacksmithing); automobile workshops; cleaning of market places, stalls and other premises; carrying goods (porter); shoe-repair / shining; begging.

The first chapter of this report deals with the legal aspects of child labour. It identifies the breaches of Lebanese law on child labour and the protection of children from hazardous work. It also underlines the hazy definition of child work and child labour in the national context.

Chapter two consists of a socio-economic overview of the two governorates, giving the official figures on the labour force and unemployment. Given the size of the sample on which this study is based and the fact that the official statistics are out-of-date, this chapter is a summary intended to give the rapid assessment approximate general context.

Chapter three details the methodology developed. Through the use of a quantitative technique, the aim is to collect data on some of the socio-demographic characteristics of the children interviewed -who perform various types of job- and on their work-related characteristics. Focus groups were also used to gain insight into the lives of working children.

The main findings are detailed in chapter four. A total of 823 child questionnaires were completed in the North: Tripoli (482 children, 58.6%), Mina (106 children, 12.9%), Beddawi (55 children, 6.7%) and Akkar (180 children, 2.9%). 29.5% of these children were under 13 years of age. 97.3% of the respondents in the North were boys, 2.7% girls. 702 children out of 823 (85.3%) were Lebanese. A total of 192 children were interviewed in the Bekaa. 140 of them were Syrians working in agriculture; 54 worked in various sectors in the regions of Zahleh (the industrial zone), Bar Elias, the outskirts of Dalhamieh and Baalbek. 36.5% of the working children in the Bekaa were under 13 years of age.

The main characteristics of the 174 households visited in the North and the Bekaa were the lack of sufficient living space and poor sanitary conditions. With an average of 5.4 children per household in the North and 5.5 in the Bekaa, almost all the families were crowded into a maximum of 2 rooms (including kitchen and bathroom).

School attendance and drop-out statistics are detailed in section 4.3: 33.1% of the children interviewed in the North cannot read or write. Of this, 33.1%, 6.4% said they were currently attending school and 89.5% of them had been to school for more than 3 years. Of the 798 children in the North, 77.2% were not currently attending school. Most of the 22.8% attending school had started their schooling at the age of 4 (56.7%). Most of the children who drop out of school in the North seem to do so between the ages of 10 and 16, with a peak at 13. In the Bekaa, 35.8% of the children interviewed cannot read or write. 75% of the illiterate children said they have attended school for at least two years. 67.9% of the children were not currently attending school. Of the 32.1% currently attending school, 41.3% started school at 4 years of age and 10.9% at 7. As in the North, most of the children who drop out of school do so after primary school.

Section 4.4, the report provides some information on the children's work environment, the hazards they are exposed to, as well as their employers' perception of their work. Oblivious of the perils surrounding them, most children dismissed questions on the characteristics of their workplace as irrelevant.

Working children in both governorates are paid on a weekly basis. The average weekly salary is 51,740 LL in the North and 50,000 LL in the Bekaa.

Chapter five gives a thematic account of the researchers' interactions with working children in focus groups organized in the regions visited. The recurrent themes revolve around the children's perception of adulthood and manhood, their relationship with their parents, cigarettes, drugs and especially their work.

Finally, some pointers for action are suggested. Any long-term plan aimed at reducing child labour and/or improving the working conditions of children should include the following: raising awareness; coordinating efforts between relevant Lebanese public authorities;

reforming education; raising the minimum age for labour market entry from 13 to 15; reinforcing the capacity of the Unit to Combat Child Labour; empowering the Labour Inspection Department; and making provision for a special and highly protective social security system for working children.
