



MORE THAN HALF A MILLION CHILDREN IN BEIRUT ARE STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

Beirut, 29 July - The collapsing Lebanese economy has pushed more than half a million children in Beirut into a struggle for survival or even hunger, a new analysis by Save the Children showed today. Their families cannot afford the basic food, electricity, cooking fuel, hygiene and water needed to survive.

In the Greater Beirut area, 910,000 people, including 564,000 children do not have enough money to buy the basic essentials⁽ⁱ⁾, including sufficient food. Save the Children said these numbers were likely to be just the tip of the iceberg as families across Lebanon struggle to cope with the soaring prices of food, rent and other necessities.

"This crisis hits everybody - Lebanese families, Palestinian and Syrian refugees alike. We will start seeing children dying from hunger before the end of the year," said Jad Sakr, acting Country Director of Save the Children in Lebanon.

Lama*, 27, is a pregnant Syrian mother of three daughters, living in a collective shelter in south Lebanon. Her husband lost his job because of the Coronavirus outbreak.

She said: "If we have something to eat, we eat. If we don't have [food], then we don't eat. There are times when we borrow money just to eat. What can we do? There are days my daughters cry themselves to sleep. Sometimes from hunger, sometimes [because of] the Coronavirus. This crisis has deeply affected them."

"My nine-year-old daughter is asking us [if she can] start to work - sell tissues on the highway. I couldn't handle it and broke down in tears. My daughter wants to work just to carry some of the burden with us. Just to help us so her siblings don't starve. I fear such a fate for my daughters."

Nine-year-old Sarah* said: *"Because of the Coronavirus, my father is not working and we are not eating. I want to work so I can help my parents and feed my sisters. My sister cries all the time because she wants milk and we can't buy it for her because now it costs 10,000 LBP [approximately 7 dollars at the current official exchange rate]."*

Lebanon is going through an economic crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since September last year, prices for basic items such as food and shelter have soared by 169 percent⁽ⁱⁱ⁾, while unemployment has risen by 35 percent in the formal sector, and up to 45 percent in the informal sector. Inflation further decreased the purchasing power of families, which plummeted by 85 percent.



“Children, even those from Lebanese middle-income families, are increasingly eating less or nothing at all for a whole day just to make ends meet. In some cases, children are working to help with the family income, keeping them away from their education”, continued Sakr.

Only last month, [a World Food Program-survey showed](#) that two-thirds of households in Lebanon faced a loss of income during the crisis, forcing many to spend less on food, go into debt, or dig into their savings. One in five Lebanese families and 33 percent of the Syrian families skipped meals or went without food for a whole day and an astonishing 50 percent of Lebanese, 63 percent of Palestinians and 75 percent of Syrians were worried they would not have enough to eat.

To help families cope with the crisis, Save the Children is urging the Government of Lebanon immediately to implement a transparently distributed and financially adequate social assistance package for the most vulnerable Lebanese families, to cover minimum basic needs and help offset the loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the longer term, it should set up a social protection system to address future economic shocks to poor populations and introduce insurance and pension systems to cover workers who are self-employed or work in the informal economy.

Note to editors:

To help families cope with the economic and food crisis in Lebanon, Save the Children has started distributing food parcels. With the support of local partners and distribution teams, 1,554 food parcels will be distributed to Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian households. The food parcels cover 80% of the nutritional needs of a family of five people for one month. Save the Children and its partners are also distributing multi-purpose cash assistance to just over 1,000 vulnerable families, as well as ensuring continued provision of education and child protection services to the most vulnerable girls and boys.

^[i] The survival threshold is \$3.21 USD per person per day – this is the calculated minimum income needed to afford basic food (2100 calories per day), electricity, cooking fuel, basic hygiene goods and water.

^[ii] Inflation rose by 169 % between September 2019 and July 2020. WFP Price monitoring report, 17 July 2020