



CPMS MAINSTREAMING CASE STUDIES SERIES

Child Protection and Economic Recovery

Supporting Syrian and Lebanese youth aged 15-18 years old living and working on the streets in Lebanon: An child protection and economic recovery collaboration

In emergencies, girls and boys face increased risk to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The way in which humanitarian aid is delivered can further increase these risks. Children may be exposed to harm during the chaos of a distribution or at water points or experience abuse in cramped evacuation centres. Sometimes harm is caused directly due to humanitarian workers' actions or non-actions. Many threats to the safety and wellbeing of children can be mitigated or even eradicated through timely and sensitive provision of humanitarian aid across all sectors. All humanitarian actors have an important contribution to make to the protection and recovery of children.

*To mainstream child protection means to ensure child protection considerations inform all aspects of humanitarian action. It also minimizes the risks of children being violated by programmes designed without proper consideration for children's safety or wellbeing. **Mainstreaming child protection is an essential part of compliance with the 'do no harm' principle that applies to all humanitarian action.**¹*

Going beyond mainstreaming, integrated programming allows for actions between two or more sectors to work together towards a common programme objective, based on an assessment of needs. Where integrated child protection programming is not possible, child protection mainstreaming is essential. This case studies series looks at both examples of integrated programming and mainstreaming and the CPMS mainstreaming standards are applicable for both.

Lebanon hosts the largest Syrian refugee population in the world with over a million in a country with a population of approximately 4 million.² The impact of the refugee influx has stretched child protection services and structures well beyond their capacity; and humanitarian responders have similarly struggled to meet some basic refugee needs.³ Prior to the refugee crisis, Lebanon had a significant challenge with child labour, directly affecting up to 10% of children.⁴ With the Syrian refugee influx, notwithstanding important legal protections enacted to address this problem in Lebanon⁵, these numbers increased dramatically.⁶ In early 2015, a total number of 1510 children were found to be living or working on the streets in Lebanon.⁷

¹ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Briefing note to ensure child protection mainstreaming*, "Standard 19: Economic Recovery and Child Protection", 15 December 2014, available at http://cpwg.net/minimum_standards-topics/mainstream.

² According to the least figures produced by UNHCR: UNHCR, *Syrian Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal*, available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>, [accessed 28 August 2016]

³ Harvard University, *Running out of Time: Survival of Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon*, January 2014, p. 2, available at: <https://fxb.harvard.edu/fxb-report-survival-syrian-refugee-children-lebanon/>

⁴ International Rescue Committee (IRC), *Street and Working Children Newsletter*, March 2016, shared by IRC Lebanon.



This case study describes how Child Protection and Economic Recovery and Development (ERD) staff working with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Lebanon developed an innovative and unique staged response to address child labour and exploitation in Lebanon. The program focuses on some of the most vulnerable of Syrian refugee youth aged 15-18 years old living and working on the streets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

The information in the case study is based on an interview with Sara Mabger, the Child Protection Coordinator within the Child Protection Team at IRC in Lebanon.⁸

The challenge: Child labour and exploitation in Lebanon

The dire humanitarian situation and lack of livelihood opportunities for Syrian refugees in Lebanon has resulted in many families desperately in financial need. As a recent Harvard FBX Center study describes: “Compelled to choose between sending their children to work in potentially dangerous environments or forgoing basic needs, many families rely on child labour.”⁹ Working on the street can provide lucrative and immediate income needed by families, child-headed households as well as children living on the street. Many of these children are the primary breadwinners.



Given children’s economic responsibilities, education often is deprioritised by caregivers to ensure the family’s basic needs are met.

Child labour presents a number of significant child protection risks and prevents children from accessing education.¹⁰ In particular, children working on the streets in urban areas of Lebanon are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and

abuse. Therefore in 2013, when IRC child protection staff began to receive evidence of a spike in

⁵ These are provided for in: Consultation and Research Institute with International Labour Organisation (ILO), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children International (SCI), *Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude*, 16 February 2015, p. 10, available at: http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_344799/lang-en/index.htm

⁶ Harvard University, op. cit., p. 34.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.12

⁸ Conducted on 29 June, 2016. Images and quotes provided by Sara Mabger.

⁹ Harvard University, op. cit.

¹⁰ For a full description and standards for response, see: Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2012), Standard 19: Economic Recovery and Child Protection*, p.173, available at <http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards/>



the numbers of street children, they were determined to initiate a basic intervention targeting this population. This consisted of outreach on the streets, psychosocial support (PSS) activities for identified children and case management.

However over the course of a year, child protection staff realized that the support they were providing was only ever going to be a temporary alleviation while the children were still working and living on the streets. And while vocational training could teach some technical skills, it did not provide viable economic alternatives and/or foster strong linkages with the private sector. The staff realised that the only way they could realistically encourage youth to decrease their working hours on the street was to incorporate an ERD component.

An initial decision: Child Protection programme with Economic Recovery and Development components

Child protection colleagues sat down with ERD staff in IRC to brainstorm potential solutions to the dilemma and challenges faced by street and working youth in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Their initial question was whether the intervention would be a child protection managed project or part of the ERD programme. They decided to place it under the overall responsibility of the child protection team for a number of reasons. Where economic recovery programs focus on supporting youth with the development of market based skills which contribute to economic empowerment , child protection interventions offer them individual support through case management and life skills sessions , the combination of the two interventions combined would aim to reduce the amount of time spent on the streets. In addition the youth served by IRC Livelihoods Centres are quite different from minors living and working on the street: they tended to have gone to school, had the support of their family and were looking for an opportunity to receive additional training. Sara explains, “That’s a lot less complex than the case of children who don’t have the support of their family, who might be sleeping rough, who have complex issues at home. We recognized that with this vulnerable target population it would take many attempts before certain children would feel comfortable in their placements. And it would also take time to get the buy-in of parents.”

As child protection staff were very much out of their area of expertise in determining the best economic interventions targeting the working youth, it was critical that they would work very closely with their ERD colleagues to design programming that supports the economic integration of street and working youth and their households. Initial brainstorming sessions involving the two teams led to discussions around ways to balance the need for pragmatism (in addressing the economic drivers for working on the street) with the need to respect child labour legal regimes, ethical considerations and child protection risks.

The solution was the design of an apprenticeship initiative for street and working youth. This approach had a number of benefits. As part of an apprenticeship, the youth are placed with employers that are carefully selected based on their ability to transfer marketable skills within a safe and supportive environment fully compliant with Lebanese law, which allows for youths aged



15 and above to engage in apprenticeships, and/or part-time work. The apprenticeship aims to provide the children with technical and transferable life skills, while offering a safer and more sustainable alternative to working on the streets. Participation in the scheme is expected to result in short-term small stipend, applied skill development and ultimately fewer hours working on the streets.

The initial phase: the Apprenticeship programme

The apprenticeship programme initially targeted 15 youth between 15 and 18 years old. IRC prioritized the highest risk cases: young people who may have been involved in gangs, were possibly sleeping on the streets and were engaging in highly destructive behaviour. The initial pilot also sought to target those who had younger siblings working on the streets. This was a strategy to encourage school attendance – the older sibling could join the programme if the younger sibling was able to attend school.



Crucial to the success of this programme was the selection of micro, small and medium sized enterprises where youth are placed. Employers were selected on the basis of their willingness to host and train youth on a trade or vocation, and offer a safe and supportive space. All IRC apprenticeship programs vet, train and monitor employers for compliance with codes of conduct, including exploitation and abuse. IRC staff were responsible for screening potential employers to ensure they understood the programme, the need for confidentiality and child labour laws and were able to comply with safety standards.

Collaboration with ERD staff

Child Protection and ERD colleagues developed the concept and guiding principles for the programme and adapted existing ERD apprenticeship procedures and guidance notes to fit the needs of the target population. ERD staff reviewed the contracts prepared for the youth participating in the programme, their caregivers and the employers. In addition ERD staff ran a



series of workshops and briefings for child protection staff to introduce them to basic concepts and approaches in the sector.

Staffing support

To ensure each youth was fully supported, a Case worker and an Apprenticeship Officer are assigned to each participant. Case workers are responsible for providing overall and ongoing support for the individual youth and their family, including connecting them with available services.¹¹ Apprenticeship Officers are assigned to a specific youth to manage and support them throughout the programme providing life skills sessions for a small group of youth participating in the program as well as conducting weekly monitoring visits to support the youth in their placement. With a background of working with at-risk youth, they were trained on child protection and ERD concepts and worked very closely with the relevant Case Manager to ensure information was regularly shared, issues were identified and joint solutions were found for each youth as appropriate.

Initial Challenges

Working with caregivers

Working with at-risk youth in an emergency context is always extremely challenging and the apprenticeship programme was no exception. IRC faced a number of challenges getting the caregivers on-board, a crucial aspect of the programme. One of the biggest challenges staff faced was resistance amongst participating youth and their caregivers with regards to the opportunity cost of participating in the programme. In exchange for three days of on-the-job training per week

for a period of four months, the IRC provides a small financial stipend for each youth, in line with local part-time labour rates. Working on the streets provides working youth with a daily income, whereas programme participants receive a monthly stipend linked to attendance and compliance with the rules of the programme.

While staff had conducted a number of briefings with youth to explain the programme, they recognized that more was needed to bring the caregivers on board. Staff increased their household visits and worked closely with caregivers and youth to address concerns.

Behavioural challenges

The initial phase of the Apprenticeship programme, while small, was extremely resource intensive. More than half of the youth needed to change their apprenticeship placements 2-3 times before

¹¹ See Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2012)*, Standard 15: Case Management, pp. 135-142, available at <http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards/>. See also Child Protection Working Group, *Interagency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection*, January 2014, available at: <http://cpwg.net/resource-topics/resources-by-minimum-standard/>
Photo credits @ IRC, 2016



completion. In many cases this was due to behavioural challenges in the workplace. Sara explains, “Children who are used to living and working on the streets get used to managing themselves. So it’s often very difficult for some of them to accept authority and to stick to work schedules.” Incidents such as failing to turn up or turning up too late and challenges around personal hygiene and following instructions were occurring on an almost daily basis. This revealed a need to build skills that would enable them to integrate into a workplace culture more successfully.

The next phase: Greater integration with ERD

While the first 6 months of the apprenticeship programme raised some serious challenges for IRC, things began to run more smoothly once the youth had finished a placement successfully. Trust and understanding had been developed amongst the youth and their caregivers and many youth expressed interest in participating further.

Transition into employment

Street and working youth who successfully complete their apprenticeship but need to further develop their work skills and opportunities off the streets, are referred to the IRC Livelihoods programme for additional services, while still being provided case management support. Market information, job counseling and additional livelihood services are provided to at risk youth to increase their chances of economic empowerment.

An additional component: Life skills sessions

To address the behavioural challenges that had arisen in the first phase, the child protection team recognized that notwithstanding psychosocial and case management support, more could be done to build transferable life skills that would assist the Syrian youth further. The team reviewed existing life-skills material and modified it to address the unique issues faced by youth living/working on the streets. This included sessions on topics such as managing emotions, particularly anger, dealing with bullying, experiencing violence and substance abuse and addressing other behavioural and emotional issues. It also included sessions on strengthening relationships with caregivers and peers.

Economic recovery colleagues provide sessions on financial literacy skills, goal setting and project planning. Facilitators ran the sessions in small groups of 5 participants which also enabled a space for peer-to-peer support. The relationships between the youth which were formed through their participation in these sessions came to be an important support network for them.

Lesson Learned: Integrated programming provides multiple avenues to better protect children

Enabling a deeper level of collaboration between sectors

IRC’s integrated approach to responding to the challenges of youth working on the streets ensures a deeper level of collaboration between child protection and Economic Recovery and Development staff. Several examples of reciprocal capacity building between the two teams,



including the attendance by ERD staff of the interagency training on the Minimum Standards for child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) in Lebanon, brought a shared understanding of each others' work, which ensured the identification of opportunities to collaborate.

This working relationship did not only strengthen the Apprenticeship programme, it has also led to other collaborative activities. For example, child protection staff provides early identification and safe referral training for child protection cases for ERD staff working in Livelihoods Centres. Sara emphasizes that working together is an ongoing process: "I think there are many opportunities for collaboration and we're continuously trying to think of ways to strengthen our collaboration."

Complex child protection issues require multi-sectoral approaches

This case study shows how critical it was that child protection and livelihood actors worked together to respond to the unique challenges IRC encountered to get at-risk Syrian and Lebanese youth off the streets. This was not a problem that could be addressed by one sector alone. As the evolution of the programme demonstrates, each stage revealed emerging, highly complex challenges that required joint solutions to provide a comprehensive system of support for these highly vulnerable youth. This required a strong willingness of all actors involved to work closely together to develop and adapt the programme, notwithstanding the significant obstacles that arose along the way. The success of this approach is a testament to their collective hard work.