



Protection Monitoring - Child Labour Report – Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

February 2016

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1. Summary

Through its protection monitoring program in 2015, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Lebanon, monitored child protection concerns in North Lebanon and the Bekaa. Chief among these concerns has been child labour. As a direct result of the financial difficulties faced by their families, a significant proportion of Syrian refugee children in households monitored by DRC have been involved in child labour, exposing them to a number of risks, including physical harm, sexual abuse, long working hours, school non-attendance, and exploitation.

This report presents child labour as part of a larger problem faced by Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Between limited economic opportunities and reduced humanitarian aid, many Syrian households in the country are finding themselves forced to send their children to work in order to meet basic needs. Some children have become the primary breadwinners for their families, especially in cases where men are unable to access work opportunities due to fear of arrest arising from their lack of residency in Lebanon. Syrian children are facing mounting challenges and pressure. Syrian refugee households monitored by DRC report shrinking options for survival and have a bleak outlook for future for their children. The immediate need for survival has reportedly superseded all others given the increasingly challenging living environment for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

2. Introduction

As of February 2016, the crisis in Syria has resulted in the displacement of over 11 million individuals, both inside and outside of Syria¹. According to UNHCR, over 1 million Syrian refugees were registered in Lebanon by the end of 2015². According to the LCRP³ 2016, the planning figures estimate about 1.5 million registered and unregistered Syrian refugees will be displaced in Lebanon in 2016, which represents over 1/3rd of the Lebanese population.

The prolonged displacement of refugees, together with reduced humanitarian assistance and the limited job opportunities⁴ for Syrian refugees due to both legal restrictions and a general lack of available job opportunities in Lebanon, has severely affected the financial stability of many Syrian households and their ability to reliably meet basic needs. As of November 2015, 70% of Syrian refugees are now estimated to live under Lebanese national poverty line, and almost 90% are in debt⁵.

UNICEF reports child labour as a rising coping mechanism for many displaced Syrian refugee households looking to meet basic needs given the harsh conditions of their displacement, especially in Lebanon and Jordan⁶. In Lebanon, where child labour presented a pre-existing problem prior to the Syrian crisis, the International Labour Organization reports that the influx of refugees has led to a rise in child labour rates in the country⁷. The United States Department of Labor reports that children in Lebanon may be working in dangerous conditions and that many may be involved in worst forms of child labour (WFCL), exposing them to a variety of significant protection risks not limited to street work and sexual exploitation⁸.

The Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) protection monitoring program has allowed the organization to access a number of Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon (North Lebanon and the Bekaa) to continually monitor trends in protection risks and concerns. Chief among these have been child protection concerns, which have been a major focus of DRC's protection monitoring reports throughout the second half of 2015. This report summarizes DRC's findings on child⁹ labour in 2015.

¹ UNOCHA - <http://www.unocha.org/syria>

² UNHCR - <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>

³ LCRP: Lebanon Crisis Response Plan.

⁴ ILO: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_240134.pdf

⁵ VaSyR-2015: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9645>

⁶ UNICEF - http://www.unicef.org/media/media_82462.html

⁷ ILO - <http://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/lebanon/lang--en/index.htm>

⁸ US DoL - <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/lebanon.htm>

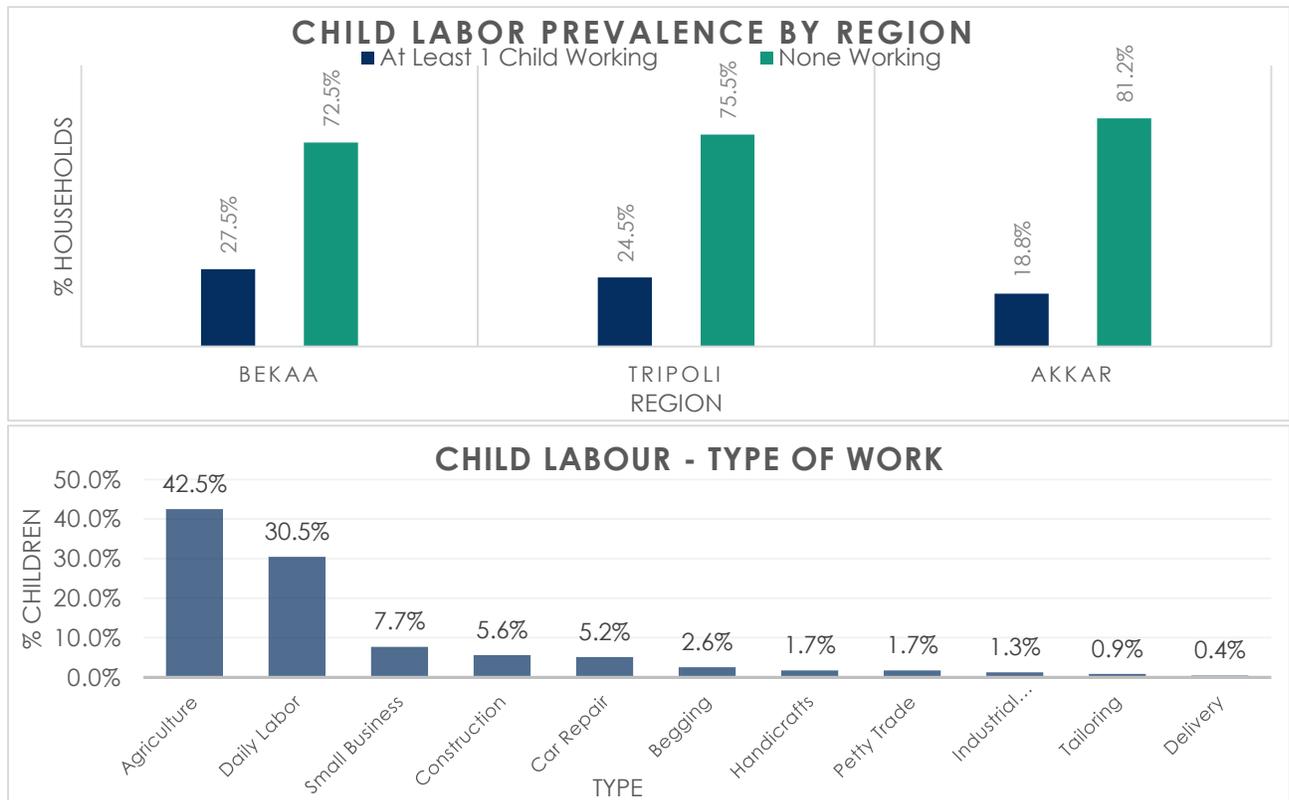
⁹ "Child" as used in this report refers to all individuals under 18 years of age.

3. Prevalence of Child labour

i. Prevalence:

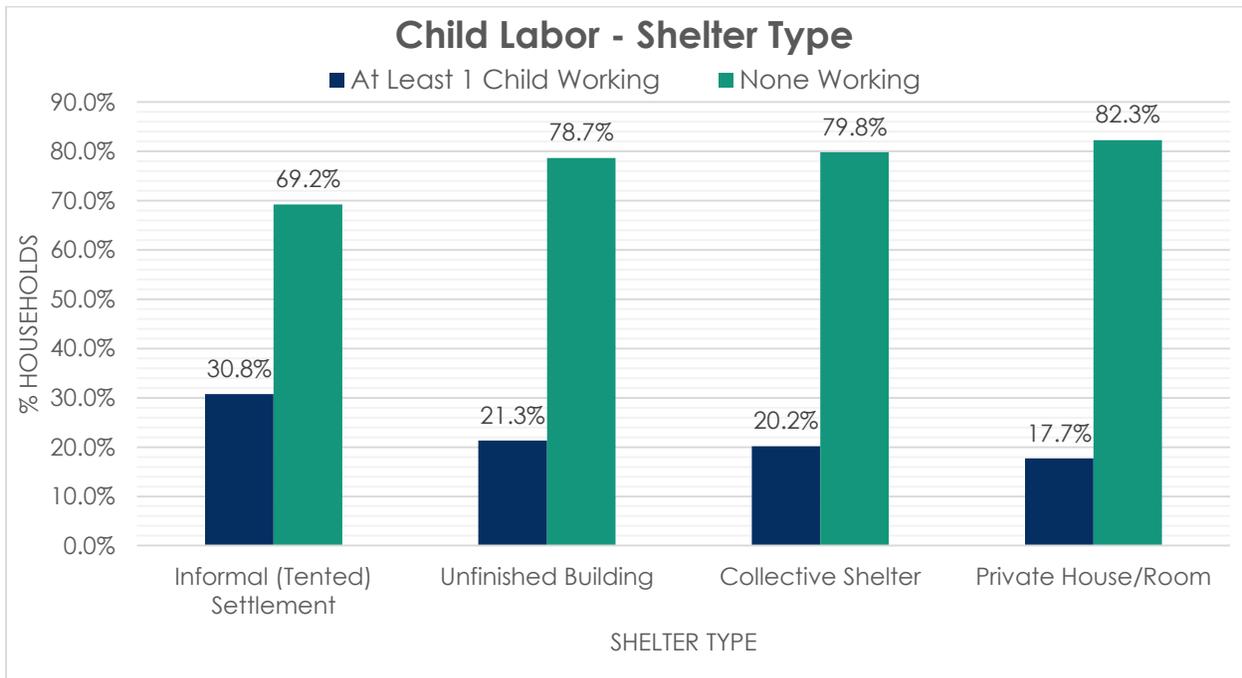
DRC’s protection monitoring program relies on household visits and focus group discussions to monitor protection risks among vulnerable communities in North Lebanon and the Bekaa. Protection monitors visited 1396 households and conducted 332 focus groups between September and December 2015. Findings show that almost a quarter (23%) of monitored Syrian refugee households with school-aged children report that they have at least one child engaged in labour. These children mainly work in agriculture (42.5%), daily labour (30.5%), small businesses such as cafes (7.7%), construction (5.6%), and car repair (5.2%), among other fields of work. Higher rates of child labour have been reported in the Bekaa (27.5%) and Tripoli (24.5%) in comparison to Akkar (18.8%). This is likely due to the accessibility of work opportunities for children in the Bekaa, where children are more likely to find work in agriculture, and in urban Tripoli, where jobs may be more readily available throughout the year.

Focus groups elaborate the issue of child labour, with many communities reporting that households have no choice but to send children to work in order to ensure their survival. Of the working conditions of child labour, focus groups often report danger and fear for children. Children may be asked to perform difficult tasks that involve heavy lifting or long hours in the sun or rain with unfair payment. Regarding street children, a participant in a women’s focus group reports, *“There are kids selling tissues or cotton candy on the street because their families are so poor now. Some kids have to live among garbage and eat out of trash cans.”*



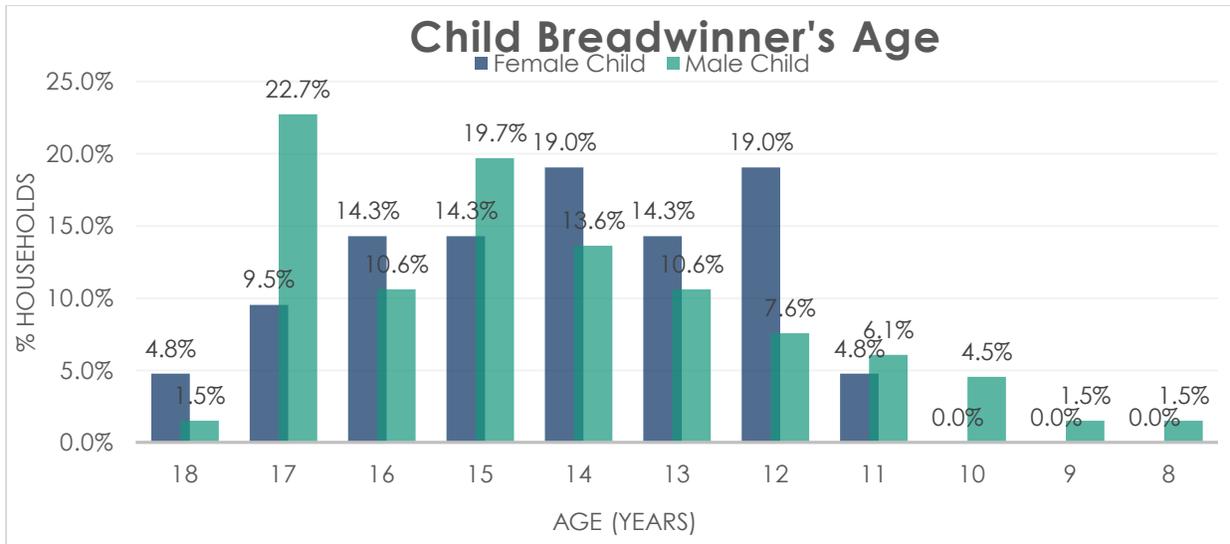
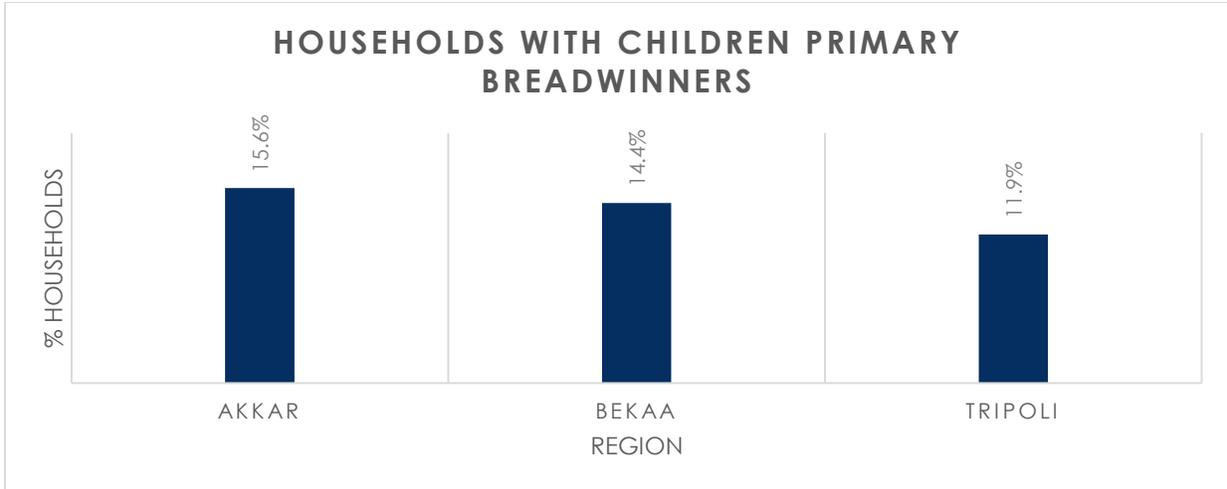
ii. Child Labour and Shelter Type:

Further, findings suggest a link between shelter type and child labour prevalence. Among monitored households, those residing in informal tented settlements reported the highest rate of child labor (30.8%) when compared to those living in unfinished buildings (21.3%), collective shelters (20.2%), and privately rented homes (17.7%). The difference in child labour rates may be linked to the more critical financial conditions of families living in informal settlements when compared to those residing in or able to access other forms of accommodation.



iii. Children as Primary Breadwinners:

Findings suggest that some children are not only working but have also taken up the role of primary breadwinner in their households. Of the monitored households with at least one working member between September and December 2015, 15.6% in Akkar, 14.4% in the Bekaa, and 11.9% in Tripoli report that a child is their primary breadwinner. The age distributions of these child breadwinners appear to vary between genders, with girl breadwinners almost universally reported as adolescents and boys falling between ages 8 and 18.

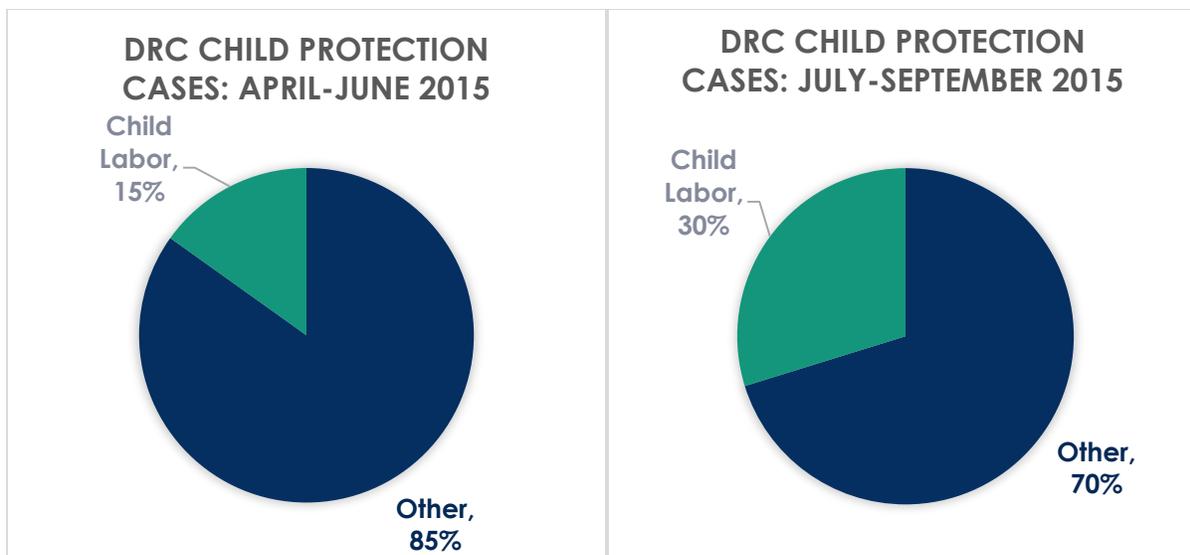


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iv. Case Management:

Trends in DRC's child protection case management support protection monitoring findings by revealing an increase in the proportion of child labour cases identified and managed between the second and third quarters of 2015. While child labour represented a substantial 15% of child protection cases undergoing case management between April and June, the figure rose to around 30% of cases between July and September of the same year, as shown in the figures below.

¹⁰ This graph shows the distribution of primary breadwinner ages for girls alone and boys alone, each adding up to 100%.



DRC’s protection monitoring and child protection observations listed above are supported by a variety of external sources. Among these sources is the VaSyR-2015¹¹ report, which found that a substantial number of children are not in school because they are working, and that children are sent to work in order to cover shelter and food costs for their families.

Assessments^{12,13} conducted by REACH in conjunction with UNICEF and OCHA revealed a rise in the proportion of male and female adolescents involved in informal work. These assessments reported a prevalence of out-of-school children, especially in 2014-2015, with the observation that a large proportion of out-of-school adolescents, especially boys, tended to be involved in informal work. Further, these assessments concluded that for a significant number of communities across North Lebanon and the Bekaa (areas also monitored by DRC), adolescent boys had come to supersede women in 2014-2015 as the second largest demographic group contributing to Syrian households income, right behind men. This falls in line with DRC’s findings which suggest a continuation of this trend and a prevalence of working adolescent boys.

4. Influencers of Child labour

Protection monitoring reveals that child labour among Syrian refugee children has been exacerbated by several factors. Focus groups unanimously link child labour to the financial difficulties faced by Syrian refugee families living in their communities. These same participants tend to view child labour in a negative light, often reporting it as a last resort for families in

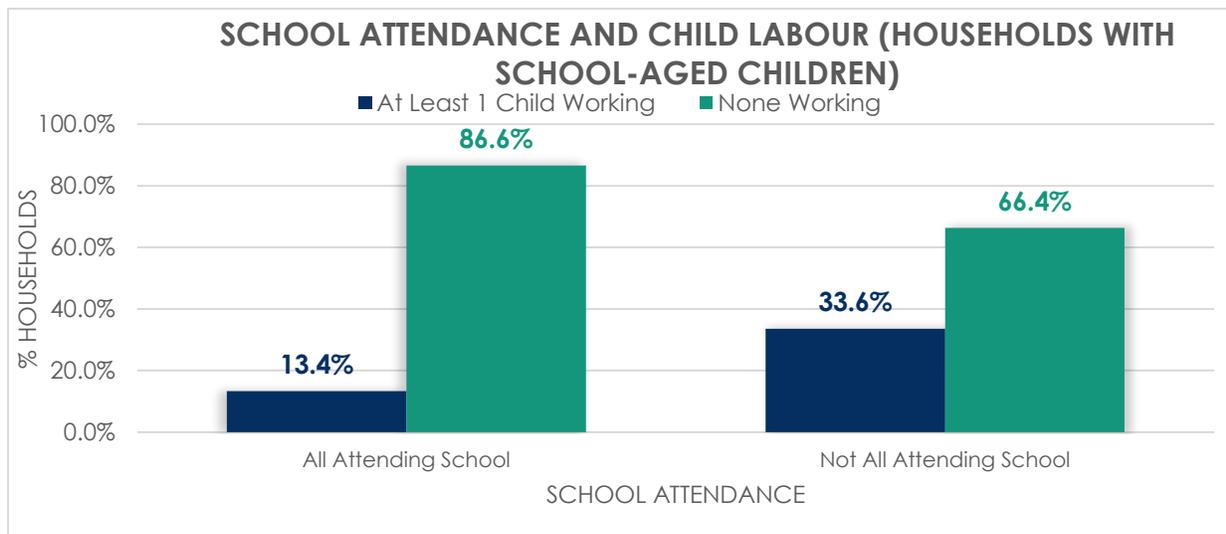
¹¹ The vulnerability assessment for Syrian refugees in Lebanon (VASyR-2015) is an annual study conducted jointly by the World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

¹²http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_lbn_report_defining_community_vulnerabilities_cc_0.pdf

¹³http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_lbn_allprofiles_hcv_lebanon_jul2015.pdf

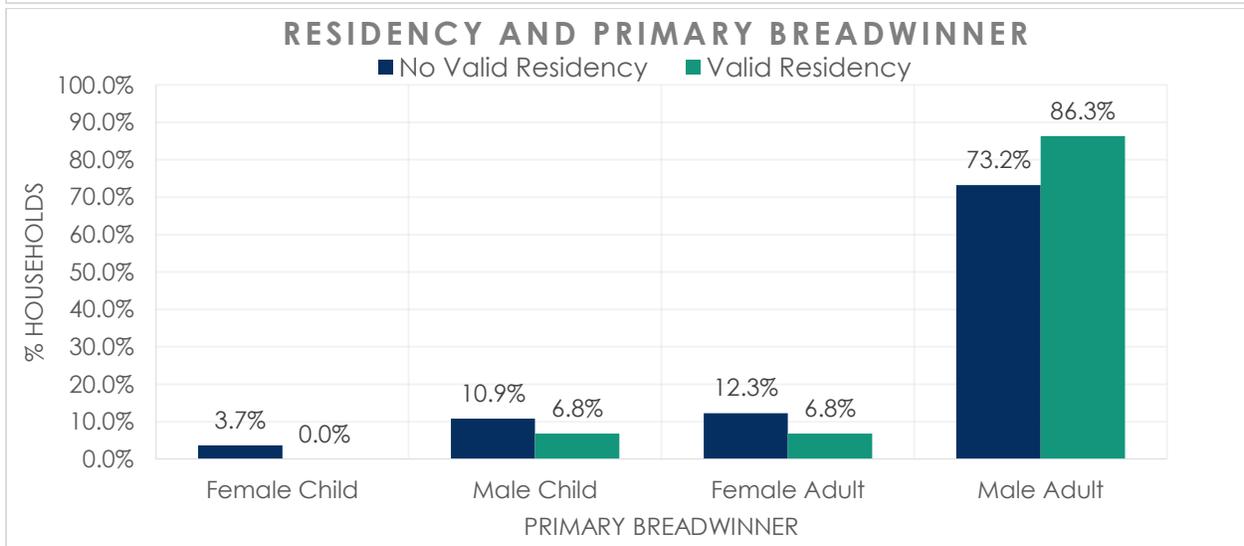
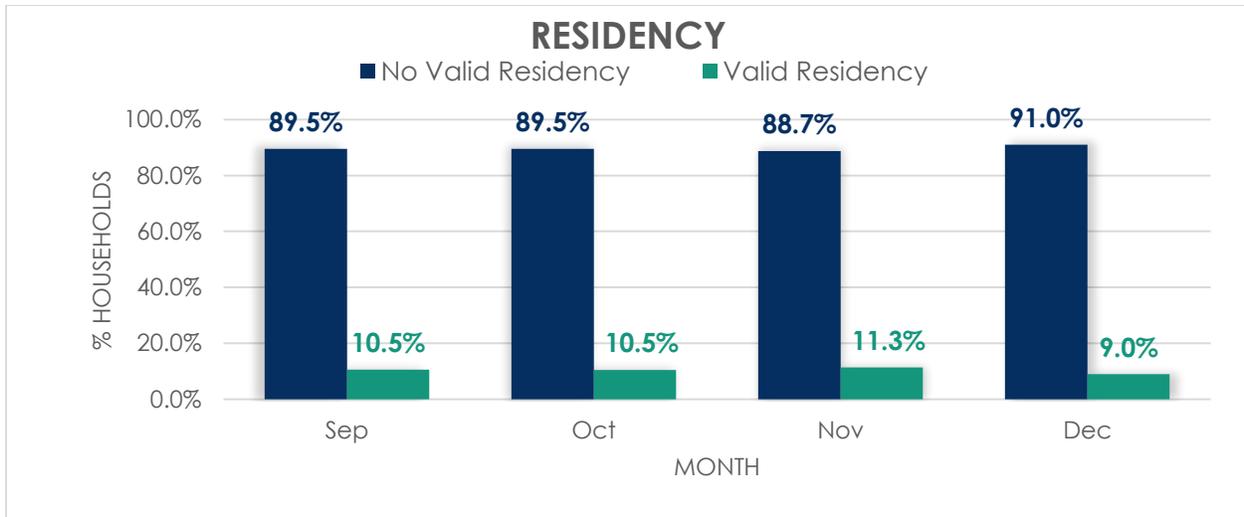
desperate need of survival. One Syrian mother living near Tripoli says, *“In Syria, my son wouldn’t be asked to lift a finger until he turned 20. If we could, we would spoil our kids. But I’m forced to send mine to work now. Otherwise, we can’t even buy food.”* Reductions in humanitarian aid, especially food assistance, have also contributed to child labour, according to focus groups. The exclusion of many families from WFP food assistance and the reduction of the food assistance package have meant that families have had to rely increasingly on personal income to cover food expenditures.

Findings also show that school attendance is a key influencing factor of child labor. Children who are not attending school are more likely to be expected to work, as has been revealed by focus groups throughout Lebanon. Adolescents are especially at risk of this expectation because they are unlikely to have access to schooling – due to unavailability, expense, inability to follow Lebanese curricula, etc. – and because families and communities are more likely to see work as an appropriate use of time for this age group. Indeed, a comparison of child labour rates between households whose children are attending school and those whose children are not all attending school supports these findings. For households whose children are not all attending school, the overall child labour rate is reported as 33.6% compared to only 13.4% for those whose children are all attending school. This establishes a correlation between education and child labour.



Another factor potentially contributing to the prominence of child labour is lack of residency among Syrian refugees. DRC’s reports reveal that almost 90% of refugee households monitored by DRC in 2015 do not have residency in Lebanon. Syrian men particularly tend to fear arrest and detention when crossing checkpoints or when otherwise confronting Lebanese security forces. This fear has led to restrictions of movement to avoid arrest, and this has meant a decline in work opportunities for men in recent months. Children and adolescents, according to focus groups, are much less likely to be asked for paperwork or to be arrested and, subsequently, have greater opportunities to find work when compared to men. As such, families have come to rely increasingly on child labour as a means of financial support.

Indeed, protection monitoring findings suggest a clear link between lack of residency and an increased prevalence of children as primary breadwinners for their families. Of the households interviewed between September and December 2015, 14.6% without valid residency report having a child primary breadwinner, compared to only 6.8% of households with residency. One participant in a women’s focus group in Akkar describes, “Kids at 13 or 14 are becoming the cornerstones of their families. They have to work because their fathers can’t.” Together with reduced humanitarian aid referenced earlier, this has led to an increased reliance of Syrian refugee families on child labour to secure food and other basic needs.

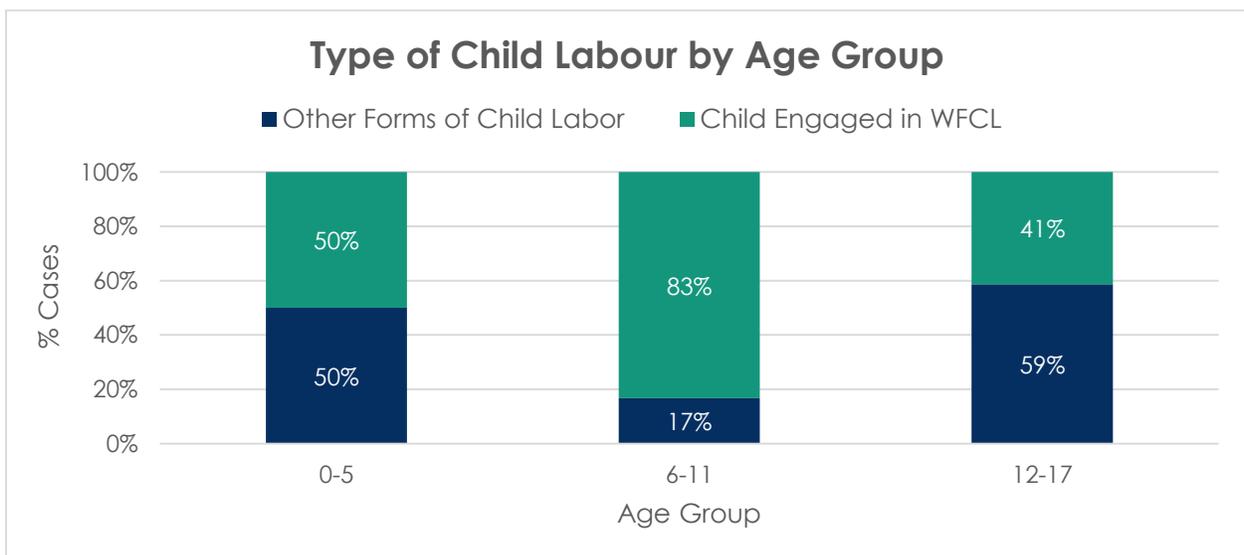


5. Consequences of Child labour

Participants in DRC’s focus group observe that most children tend not to be compensated for their work fairly and that some are exposed to exploitation and abuse at work. Some children may be expected to take up physically challenging or dangerous tasks such as car repair or jobs that involve heavy lifting. Meanwhile, others may be subjected to humiliation and other forms of emotional abuse by employers, customers, or onlookers at work. Focus group participants recounted several stories of abuse, with one person in Tripoli stating, *“I went down to buy vegetables from the store and I saw a boy dragging a cart [of goods]. A group of men were gathered around him and laughing at him. I wished I’d died rather than see that sight. We can’t even report the abuse to anyone.”*

Children who are working, according to focus groups, are less likely to attend school. While participants almost universally express the preference that children attend school rather than work, many families have evidently come to accept that the need for survival comes before school attendance. One mother participating in a focus group says, *“We don’t need education right now. We need food, water, and beds. We need to live first!”* This sentiment has been echoed by other focus group participants, many of whom see no choice but to forgo their children’s education in favor of making ends meet.

Further, DRC case management data from July to September 2015 shows that 83% of child labour cases of children aged 6-11 were managed for worst forms of child labour (WFCL). Meanwhile, WFCL represented 41% of cases aged 12-17 and 50% of cases aged 0-5. The prevalence of WFCL among these child protection cases further emphasizes the difficult working conditions experienced by working children. Evidence from DRC’s child protection case management reveals that all cases managed for child labour showed psychosocial distress and required psychosocial support to address this secondary vulnerability. This suggests that child labour is usually linked to other forms of abuse.



This is in line with the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) fact sheet "Lebanon: Street and Working Children Program" disseminated in June 2015, which reveals information on the worst forms of child labour (WFCL). Among the information disclosed is that 86% of Syrian children involved in street work in Lebanon are under the age of 15. Further, it reports that these children are at significant risk of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse.

6. Conclusion

The prominence of child labour as a coping mechanism among Syrian refugees in Lebanon presents it as one of the primary protection concerns facing these communities. As a result of the financial challenges faced by their families, many children are sent to work in order to ensure that their households are able to secure their basic needs. As evidenced by DRC's protection monitoring reports, these financial challenges have been exacerbated by rising legal, social, and economic pressure on Syrian families in Lebanon.

Working children may be faced with difficult or dangerous working conditions, and many appear to be undercompensated for their time and effort. Some children, especially in households where parents are unable to work due to medical or legal conditions, have become the primary breadwinners for their families. This places an exceptional burden on their shoulders. Evidence shows that working children tend to suffer from psychosocial distress, exploitation, and physical harm, particularly in cases of worst forms of child labour. Further, working children are at risk of not attending school.

Child labour among Syrian refugees in Lebanon must be treated as a symptom of the difficult environment in which these individuals live. As demonstrated in this report, Syrian families are highly reluctant to send their children to work. They fear for the safety and well-being of their children but find themselves in a position where child labour is a final resort to ensure survival. Child labour, as such, presents a chronic concern arising from the need of vulnerable refugee families to secure their immediate well-being in Lebanon at the cost of creating a substantial risk of uncertainty in the future of their children.