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# Addressing life-cycle vulnerabilities through social protection: Establishing Social Grants in Lebanon - Supporting Social Security and Institutional Reforms towards a Strengthened Social Protection System in Lebanon

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**Administrative Office:** ROAS

**Technical Office:** DWT Beirut

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**LBN/21/01/CEF:** EUR 20 million - **LBN/23/02/GBR:** US\$ 633,865.56

**Key Words:** [Use themes as provided in i-eval Discovery](#)

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The two projects under evaluation shared the same focus on supporting the vision of the Government of Lebanon for an all-encompassing, inclusive and rights-based approach to the social protection floor. The project 'Addressing Life-Cycle Vulnerabilities through Social Protection- Establishing Social Grants in Lebanon' (LBN/21/01/CEF), implemented by ILO and UNICEF and funded by the European Union, on behalf of the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to Syrian Crisis (EU-Madad), supported the development and implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) based on a life-cycle approach. It designed and rolled-out the National Disability Allowance (NDA) and National Child Grant (NCG), it promoted related societal awareness through the engagement of civil society actors and think tanks, and with strategic implementation roles assigned to Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). The project mobilized existing implementation mechanisms in response to the emergency situation and wide-scale displacement resulting from the military conflict in 2024.

The project 'Supporting Social Security and Institutional Reforms towards a Strengthened Social Protection System in Lebanon' (LBN/23/02/GBR), implemented by ILO and funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), envisioned key reforms on two main fronts. First, it established a lifecycle social protection by introducing social grants to complement poverty-targeting programmes and provide income security to vulnerable groups, such as People with Disabilities (PwDs), those raising children and older persons. Second, it aimed to prevent the collapse of the social insurance sector and improve the adequacy of its benefits, including pensions and health financing reform.

### Present situation of the project

The projects came to an end in March and June 2025. The projects are addressing gaps in Lebanon's social protection system, which is especially fragile, fragmented, underfunded and unable to meet the needs of citizens and refugees. This is critical given the country's ongoing economic crisis, marked by a 38 percent contraction in GDP and inflation reaching 269 percent in 2023, has pushed over 80 percent of the population into poverty. This crisis, compounded by political instability, regional conflict, and a collapsed banking sector, has severely weakened the country's ability to provide essential services. The National Social Security Fund (NSSF), covering only 56 percent of the population, suffers from major gaps including the lack of inflation-adjusted pensions and inadequate health and family benefits, leaving over 42 percent without health insurance. Social safety nets like the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) and Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) reach only 20 percent of the population, while many programmes still rely on international donors. The recent introduction of the NDA in 2023 is a step forward but limited in scope. Persons with disabilities face systemic barriers to employment and

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|                                                     | support, despite existing legal protections under Law 220. Weak governance, inefficiency, and poor coordination further hinder effective service delivery, leaving Lebanon's most vulnerable, particularly women, PwDs, the elderly and refugees, without adequate social protection.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation</b> | Clustering the evaluation of both projects, the objective was to assess their performance towards objectives throughout their full durations and assess their potential impact on the targeted populations. The evaluation formulated lessons learned and practical recommendations to improve future programming in Lebanon. The primary clients are ILO, UNICEF, EU-Madad, the Embassy of the UK, FCDO, Government of Lebanon, central non-state actors and relevant constituents, such as civil society and OPDs.                                                           |
| <b>Methodology of evaluation</b>                    | The Final Evaluation systematically used the standard criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee. A participatory mixed-method approach was employed, data collection included Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with a wide range of stakeholders/ constituents. Human rights, inclusion, social dialogue and gender equality were mainstreamed into the evaluation, while also ethical considerations were prioritized, ensuring independence, confidentiality and security of information. |

## MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

### Relevance

The projects were highly relevant to Lebanon's fragile socio-economic context and aligned closely with national priorities and international development commitments. The projects addressed long-standing gaps in institutional weaknesses, limited coordination and inadequate coverage, particularly for PwDs, children and older people. The development and operationalization of the NSPS, alongside the roll-out of the NDA and supporting the design of the UNICEF-led NCG, the social pension and health insurance, demonstrated strategic alignment with the Government of Lebanon's vision for inclusive and rights-based social protection. The projects also prioritized gender equality, disability inclusion and rights-based targeting, making strong use of local structure, community engagement and disaggregated data. This process involved Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), civil society actors and institutions working to promote the rights and services of older persons. However, the Association of Lebanese Industrialists (ALI - Employer association) maintained that their views were not sufficiently considered in discussions around some of the aspects of the pension reform namely the End of Service Indemnity (EOSI). The ILO for their part maintained that many discussions around EOSI were carried out with ALI but no concrete agreement was reached. The evaluation believes that more efforts are necessary to bridge the disagreement with ALI.

The projects responded well to the urgent needs of the long-fragmented and underfunded system and were seen by stakeholders as timely, necessary and well-aligned with beneficiary vulnerabilities and country priorities, making them both contextually and institutionally strategic.

### Coherence

The projects demonstrated a high degree of internal and external coherence, both in design and implementation. Internally, they aligned with ILO and UNICEF strategic objectives, particularly around universal social protection and disability inclusion, and were implemented with a shared vision and coordinated delivery model. The sequential relationship between the EU-Madad- and FCDO-funded projects enabled knowledge transfer and built institutional momentum, allowing the latter to benefit from the foundations laid by the former, especially in scaling the NDA and advancing the role of the R&A centres. Externally, both projects were well-aligned with national frameworks, including the NSPS, Law 220/2000 on the rights of PwDs and with international frameworks such as the SDGs, EU-Madad priorities, FCDO strategies on disability and health and pertinent international conventions. Coordination between ILO, UNICEF and stakeholders was generally effective, especially with MOSA and the R&A centres. However, coherence gaps revealed in areas like employer organizations' discussions and inter-ministerial dialogue, coordination relied heavily on informal or adhoc channels rather than structured platforms. This affected consistency, diluted accountability, and at times, limited sustained participation from key actors in decision-making. Despite these issues, the projects represented one of the most important multisectoral efforts in Lebanon's social protection sector.

### Effectiveness

The projects delivered most planned outcomes and outputs, launched the NSPS, piloted the NDA as a new social assistance model, introduced reform to the design of the NCG, social pension and health insurance. The number of beneficiaries receiving NDA reached over 35,000 individuals through the NDA.<sup>1</sup> The projects supported digital Management Information System (MIS) tools, capacitated MOSA staff and R&A centres and produced over 40 policy and advocacy outputs. The established referral mechanisms, GRM structures and outreach models contributed to more inclusive service delivery and accountability. To some extent, the projects facilitated multi-sectoral

<sup>1</sup> According to the QIN Q1 2025 of the ILO-UNICEF joint project, the project reached 27,911 PwD under the regular NDA (15-30 age range) funded by the EU, 6,678 CwDs under the expanded NDA to children funded by UNICEF, and 131,729 children under the UNICEF child grant (*Haddi*) which was discontinued in February 2023 with plans to transition to a National Child Grant.

coordination through participatory methods, partnerships with OPDs and responsiveness to community needs, however, limitations in engagement of some stakeholders in some areas emerged, such the inability to reach an agreement on the EOSI with employer organizations thus affecting the pension reform dialogue and the limited involvement of OPDs from the call centre design, undermining balanced participation and weakening shared ownership of the reforms.

While the projects made significant progress in advancing key reforms in the design of the social pension, healthcare and social assistance, full policy integration across these components is yet to be achieved. Each pillar seem to have been advancing on its own trajectory and coordination mechanisms are still emerging. Coordination across entities, agencies and ministries on social protection remains a significant issue, which the projects attempted to address through the secondment of UN-paid focal points in ministries. While these arrangements may have facilitated a level of inter-ministerial coordination, they often lacked depth, they were neither meaningful nor institutionalized. Stakeholders noted that governance structures under the NSPS were not fully operational, which limited cross-sectoral alignment and slowed momentum toward a cohesive, integrated social protection system. Despite economic collapse and conflict in 2024, both projects demonstrated strong agile adaptive performance and responsiveness to crises through shock-responsive assistance.

### **Efficiency**

The two projects under evaluation demonstrated efficient use of resources and strong adaptability in a complex operating environment in Lebanon. The ILO/UNICEF joint project funded by the EU (USD 26.8 million) prioritized direct support to vulnerable populations, with 69 percent allocated to NDA cash payments. The smaller ILO project funded by the FCDO (GBP 500,000) focused on upstream reforms and capacity strengthening, with strategic staffing and technical inputs. Although ILO faced staffing shortages, it adopted a cluster staffing model later in implementation, which allowed technical staff to work across multiple projects and themes, helping sustain delivery. At the same time, UNICEF was able to draw on internal support and use its own fast-track financial systems to quickly deliver assistance. Resource allocation strongly aligned with the needs of women and PwDs, with high beneficiary satisfaction and gender-sensitive design features. Operational delays stemming from political instability delayed NSPS approval and conflict, which were mitigated through flexible planning, internal borrowing and no-cost extensions. Within

ILO, the joint implementation of the EU and FCDO projects created synergies and enhanced the efficiency by sharing staff, avoiding duplication and strengthening national systems. Coordination between ILO and UNICEF under the EU-MADAD funded project was operationally efficient and complementary. Both contributed to policy development, capacity building, and efforts to embed social protection within national governance structures. While UNICEF focused on delivery systems, ILO supported policy reform and capacity-building. This dual-track implementation maximized impact, although coordination burdens sometimes strained staff resources. Coordination was managed primarily through direct, bilateral communication and technical working groups, although the lack of a formal joint Steering Committee increased the coordination burden on staff. Robust M&E tools, including ROMs, PDMs and real-time MIS, enabled responsive delivery and informed future programme planning.

#### **Impact Orientation**

The projects contributed to both immediate improvements in beneficiaries' lives and longer-term systemic social protection policy and institutional change. Through the NDA, 35,000 vulnerable individuals received regular, predictable financial assistance and were supported to withstand economic shocks, improve nutrition and education outcomes. This support helped to enhance dignity and autonomy among PwDs, women and children. The projects also fostered increased access to services via digital referral systems and strengthened grievance redress mechanisms, deepening beneficiary trust and engagement with public institutions. At a higher impact level, the endorsement of the NSPS, advancement of the UNICEF-led NCG and social pension reform, and institutionalization of the R&A centres helped shift Lebanon's social protection programmes from fragmented, donor-dependent assistance to a more integrated and nationally anchored system. Public dialogue on social protection was evidence-based broadened through knowledge and advocacy products. The participation of government stakeholders in their development has built capacity and allowed for a better identification of system gaps and greater understanding of the policy solutions needed. Furthermore, the establishment of the Social Protection Academy marked a lasting investment in institutionalizing government capacity strengthening means, noting the lack of capacity building for workers and employer organizations. Although structural and fiscal constraints continue to threaten the scale and sustainability of these impacts, the projects have positioned Lebanon on the right path and contributed to meaningful progress towards more inclusive and rights-based social protection. Notably, the exclusion of refugees and non-Lebanese

populations from national systems still poses exclusion concerns and limits the full realization of universal protection.

### Sustainability

The design and implementation of both social protection projects were majorly anchored around sustainability and continuation of results. The projects' contributions to policy and institutional change are evident. This is specifically true with the development of the NSPS, institutionalizing reform across pension, health financing and social assistance and enhancing operational systems, individual capacities and coordination structures. The projects' deliberate strategy was to avoid building parallel systems and instead integrate the tools and processes within existing national institutions like within MOSA and the R&A centres, preparing them for full operational ownership. The Government of Lebanon demonstrated growing fiscal ownership, it doubled its budgetary allocation, committing \$10 million to the NDA in 2025; 40 percent of its cost. While the projects were responsive and adaptive, yet, key risks to sustainability remain, including on-going fiscal constraints, the absence of a clear medium-term financing strategy and the need for continued technical assistance on several fronts in the current context, specifically, in contributory schemes. As such, no exit is envisioned in the near future for many of these reform areas. With regard to the NDA for example, a full transition to government ownership is contingent upon the development and strengthening of delivery systems.

## RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

### Main findings & Conclusions

**To enhance prospects of sustainability of the social protection programmes, ILO and UNICEF should support the Government in developing a realistic medium-term financing/ resource mobilisation strategy.** This should begin with a thorough assessment of financing needs and a clear estimation of funding gaps to inform a phased and feasible approach. Rather than relying on external funding commitments, such strategy should aim to integrate social grants within broader economic and fiscal policies to enhance governmental ownership, ensure continuity and institutional buy-in. Involving social partners in this efforts is also important as a way to ensure ownership and propose creative solutions. In parallel, strengthening capacity within MOSA on financial planning, expenditure tracking and evidence-based policy-making is a crucial element in the process. This approach would enable the Government to engage

with donors strategically while maintaining realistic expectations regarding external funding constraints.

*Responsible unit(s): ILO HQ, ROAS & Lebanon CO, UNICEF Lebanon*

*Priority: High - Time implication: Short-term - Resource implication: Medium*

*Priority: High - Time implication: Short-term - Resource implication: Medium*

#### Recommendation 2:

**Future programming should institutionalize structured, multi-stakeholder engagement mechanisms from the outset, ensuring equal and balanced engagement with employers, workers, OPDs and different government stakeholders.** This will strengthen ownership, design effectiveness and ensure no opportunities get missed in terms of access to employment and benefits for the target vulnerable populations, PwDs, women and elderly.. In these two evaluated projects, MOSA's leadership and R&A centre contributions were pivotal, but limited participation of employer organizations and uneven worker representation weakened the legitimacy and balance of key reforms, such as the NDA and pension law.

*Responsible unit(s): ILO ROAS & Lebanon CO, UNICEF Lebanon*

*Priority: High - Time implication: Short-term - Resource implication: Medium*

#### Recommendation 3:

**Building on the successful implementation of the NDA and the emergency response, ILO and UNICEF should support MOSA to develop an institutionalised shock-responsive social protection framework,** alongside pertinent pre-approved contingency funding, strengthened partnerships with OPDs and national actors, as well as capacity-building of OPDs and social workers to ensure inclusive emergency response. Establishing a digital platform for rapid beneficiary enrolment and payout during national crises will further enhance responsiveness and impact. This is particularly important given the fragile context in Lebanon and the ongoing regional conflicts and could be already considered as a core element of the new EU NDICI programme implemented by ILO and UNICEF.

*Responsible unit(s): ILO ROAS & Lebanon CO, UNICEF Lebanon*

*Priority: High - Time implication: Medium-term - Resource implication: High*

#### Recommendation 4:

**ILO and UNICEF should work with the Government of Lebanon to operationalise the NSPS and the NCG through a phased targeted-approach.** Given financial constraints, a targeted roll-out could focus on the most

vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities or younger age groups (e.g. 0-5 years). Exploring blended financing models, including donor contributions and government cost-sharing, can ensure sustainability. Additionally, leveraging the NCG as a shock-responsive mechanism in emergencies should be institutionalised, ensuring automatic activation in the event of crises.

*Responsible unit(s): ILO ROAS & Lebanon CO, UNICEF Lebanon*

*Priority: High - Time implication: Medium-term - Resource implication: High*

Recommendation 5:

**To maintain effective coordination between the NDA, AMAN, ILO and UNICEF should support MOSA in developing a unified governance framework with clear roles, responsibilities and a harmonised targeting system.** Enhancing integration between existing MIS platforms will allow for seamless beneficiary tracking, reduce duplication and improve service delivery, and would support in applying consistent eligibility criteria and targeting tools across the NDA, AMAN program to reduce overlaps. A joint GRM across programmes should also be enhanced to ensure equitable access to benefits and more efficient use of limited resources.

*Responsible unit(s): ILO ROAS & Lebanon CO, UNICEF Lebanon*

*Priority: High - Time implication: Medium-term - Resource implication: Medium*

### Main lessons learned and good practices

- The presence of shock-responsive social protection programmes is imperative to ensure effective usage and reach to beneficiaries in times of crisis and emergencies, especially important in the context of fragility and conflict. The NDA mechanism was leveraged by MOSA during the faced crises as platform, which could be further enhanced and supported to become more impactful and sustainable. Likewise, the NCG, which was designed by the project, but not launched, has the potential to act as a shock-responsive social protection.
- The focus on comprehensive systems integrating the different social protection models (NDA, NPTP, ESSN... etc.), along with a strong coordination mechanism, GRM and monitoring systems enables the continuous evolution of the system and ensures its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. Furthermore, flexibility and adaptability leads to complementarity and increased impact, for example, the project changed its approach to development of a unified registry due to EU direct funding to the same to the Government. The project adopted an adequate approach for the updating of the MIS for the R&A centres and the development of an MIS for MOSA.
- Adopting a structured inclusive coordination approach that emphasised the engagement of multiple stakeholders, particularly through partnerships with OPDs, enhanced programme design, outreach and service delivery. OPDs played a crucial role in the emergency response to the October 2024 crisis, mobilising support despite war-related delays. Operating on volunteer efforts, they facilitated coordination and advocacy, though their impact was constrained by the lack of sustainable funding. This experience highlighted the importance of institutionalising the role of OPDs within social

protection systems and securing dedicated financial resources to ensure long-term engagement.

- The integration of digital innovations to enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability in social protection delivery has been beneficial. For example, the project introduced a robust MIS to streamline beneficiary identification, payment processing and grievance redress mechanisms. The digitization of payment systems reduced cash disbursement delays, strengthening financial accountability, while digital referral systems improved linkages between cash assistance and essential services such as healthcare and education. Strengthened GRM further ensured that final beneficiaries could raise concerns and access timely support, reinforcing the role of technology in improving the effectiveness of social protection interventions.