

For Immediate Release



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AUB leads policy dialogue in partnership with IRC
and in collaboration with MOPH and MOSA:
“addressing the double burden of malnutrition
through daycare centers in Lebanon”

The Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center at the American University of Beirut (AUB), in partnership with the International Rescue Committee and in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon launched a policy dialogue on addressing the double burden of malnutrition through daycare centers in Lebanon.

Over 55 percent of the Lebanese population are currently living in poverty, which is preventing them from securing basic needs such as food, health, and shelter. The COVID-19 pandemic, current economic situation, and political instability in Lebanon have aggravated the food insecurity status of families across Lebanon, putting preschool children at a higher risk of malnutrition. Based on the latest reports, 9 percent of children 0-5 years old in Lebanon are obese and overweight, and 7.3 percent of Lebanese children suffer from stunting. Given that 61.7 percent of Lebanese children aged between 36 and 59 months are enrolled in a preschool program, there is a critical need to develop and implement policies and practices to address the double burden of malnutrition through daycare centers in Lebanon.

The dialogue

Representatives from related ministries, NGOs, INGOs, researchers, daycare centers, and syndicates gathered to discuss the double burden of malnutrition and the role that daycare centers can have in addressing this issue.

The dialogue was supported by a K2P policy brief, which brought together the best available local, regional, and international evidence, and offered elements for action. The policy brief was circulated to all related policymakers and stakeholders, prior to the dialogue, to inform the discussion and allow an active and focused discussion.

The stakeholders discussed steps that need to be taken to improve child nutrition in daycare centers. They agreed that as a first step, unified standards should be established for daycare centers and nurseries in Lebanon to promote child friendly nurseries. Given the current economic situation, funding for food assistance packages to vulnerable daycare centers should be secured to ensure diet diversity among preschool children. Continuing education for daycare staff on priority topics, including child nutrition, was also stressed upon during the dialogue. The role of parents and caregivers in influencing child-eating behaviors was also highlighted during the discussion.

Dialogue participants deliberated over four evidence-informed elements from the policy brief. The first element was establishing written policies and guidelines that target nutrition and physical activity in the daycare center. The second element was improving staff knowledge and attitudes on child nutrition and physical activity. Element three was engaging parents in the daycare center to improve the nutrition and physical activity practices of children. The fourth and final element was improving child knowledge and attitude through engaging children in proper practices and enhancing nutrition education within the daycare center curriculum.

At the end of the dialogue, participants agreed on the importance of overcoming the current barriers that prevent the implementation of policies and practices related to child nutrition in daycare centers and nurseries. They also agreed on the importance of implementing strategic and target-based policies and practices to curb the effect of malnutrition through daycare centers.

Participants

The dialogue convened key stakeholders including Pamela Zgheib, the head of Mother and Child Unit at the Ministry of Public Health; Sanaa Awada, Ghada Mansour, Abeer Abdel Samad, and Adnan Nasreddine as representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs; Wafaa Houmany from the Ministry of Public Health; Diana Alameh, IYCF coordinator at the International Orthodox Christian Charity (IOCC); Bayan Ahmed, health area coordinator at IOCC; Manal Chakrallah and Rana Hoayek, representatives from the Syndicate of Professional Nurseries in Lebanon; Yasmin Rihawi, representative from the World Health Organization; Joelle Najjar, health and nutrition national officer at UNICEF; Dr. Lara Nasreddine, associate professor at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at AUB; Hana Joujou, president of the Syndicate of Nursery Owners in Lebanon; Wafa Nasser, representing the Ana Aqra Association; Dr. Leila Itani, assistant professor at the Beirut Arab University; Manal Ayloush from Learn and Play nursery; in addition to daycare managers including Najwa Daou and Anissa Sibai.

ENDS

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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