

For Immediate Release



Beirut: 26-11-2018

**K2P Center at AUB, The Ministry of Public Health, and UNICEF:**

**“We need to address early identification and intervention  
for children with disabilities and developmental delays”**

Around 11% of children, aged between 2 to 9 years, in different areas in Lebanon have a disability or developmental delay as per the latest statistics in 2009 (MICS 2009).

Stressors during the early years, such as poverty, malnutrition, prolonged exposure to violence, abuse and neglect, abandonment and institutionalization, war trauma, as well severe maternal depression are all contributing factors to increased prevalence of developmental delays.

In fact, children with disabilities and developmental delays are at risk of multiple morbidities, physiological implications, higher risk of violence, exploitation and abuse and preventable delayed complications. Many of those risks may be avoided if the identification and intervention of disabilities and developmental delays is initiated at an early stage.

While the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 calls for adequate early childhood development, Lebanon still faces multiple barriers at the health system, delivery, and financing level that pose a challenge in achieving this SDG. Evidence from high quality local and international studies, compiled by the Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut (AUB), showed that there is an urgent need to ensure availability of systems, services, and practices for early identification and intervention of children with disabilities and developmental delays. Yet, despite the urgency of this issue, there is still no up to date national data on the total number of children with disability and developmental delays in Lebanon.

Children with disabilities and developmental delays are, in most contexts, among the most marginalized and vulnerable demographics. Their integration into education, society, and work confronts them with “barriers to inclusion”, which include physical barriers, social and

attitudinal barriers, communication barriers and a lack of adequate policies to promote social inclusion and ensure full access to services. In addition to this the early detection and appropriate assessment of disabilities is key, but unfortunately rarely done. As a matter of fact, a large number of parents of children with intellectual, hearing, and disability are unaware of the precise condition of their children for lack of an appropriate diagnostic and claim that the children have “intellectual development delays” or “learning difficulties.

In this context, UNICEF is committed to “work across program outcomes to gather robust data and mainstream the needs of children and youth with disabilities, planning evidence-based specific interventions to address their needs” formulated in the Country Programme Document 2017-2020.

“The first years of child’s life are critical for his/her development. For children who experience disability, it is a vital time to ensure access to interventions which can help them reach their full potential”, said Tanya Chapuisat, UNICEF Representative.

UNICEF recognize that children with disabilities are equally entitled to the full spectrum of care and development – from immunization in infancy to proper nutrition and treatment for the ailments and injuries of childhood, early childhood and primary education and specialized services and support when necessary, to confidential sexual and reproductive health information and services during adolescence and into early adulthood.

The Ministry of Public Health and UNICEF, in collaboration with the Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center at the Faculty of Health Sciences, at the American University of Beirut (AUB), held a K2P Policy Dialogue to inform a national strategy on Early Identification and Intervention of Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays in Lebanon, on November 23rd 2018 at Rotana Gefinor, Beirut.

The dialogue convened key stakeholders including Majida Al Jubaili, Mrs. Safaa Al Dika, coordinator at the Special Needs Education Unit in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Dr. Rose Mary Boustany, Director of the AUBMC Special Kids Clinic, Dr. Lama Charafeddine representative of the Lebanese Society of Pediatrics, in addition to syndicates presidents, representatives from NGOs and specialized centers, researchers and academicians. Dr. Walid Ammar, Director General of the Ministry of Public Health stressed that children with disabilities and developmental delays should not stay marginalized and added: “this dialogue today with all key stakeholders and experts in their fields is not only acknowledging these children’s rights to education, well-being, and health but is also aimed at coordinating existing efforts toward achieving SDG 4.2”.

UNICEF's Chief of Child Survival Unit, Dr. Genevieve Begkoyian said "It will be crucial for stakeholders at the local level, in particular, to engage across all sectors, so as to put in place a holistic response for the needs to these children".

On this basis, K2P Director, Dr. Fadi El Jardali, elicited participants' input on the overall problem and its underlying factors. Participants discussed different aspects of the problem in Lebanon. Dialogue participants deliberated over three evidence-informed policy elements from the Policy Brief:

- Develop and implement policies, tools, and strategies for early identification and intervention of children with disabilities and developmental delays to be used in health, education, social protection, and other sectors.
- Enhance the knowledge and education of caregivers, healthcare providers, and educators to detect, refer or manage children with disabilities and developmental delays.
- Secure financial coverage for early identification and intervention services.

This dialogue was a stepping stone to inform the development of a national and inter-sectoral strategy on Early Identification and Intervention of Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delays in Lebanon. Participants showed serious intentions to move forward in taking action towards early identification and interventions to achieve the SDGs.

ENDS

**For more information please contact:**

Simon Kachar  
Director of News and Media Relations  
Mobile: (+961) 3-427-024  
Office: (+961) 1-374-374 ext: 2676  
Email: [sk158@aub.edu.lb](mailto:sk158@aub.edu.lb)

## 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 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 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 420-bed hospital.

### Stay up to date on AUB news and events. Follow us on:

Website: [www.aub.edu.lb](http://www.aub.edu.lb)  
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/aub.edu.lb>  
Twitter: [http://twitter.com/AUB\\_Lebanon](http://twitter.com/AUB_Lebanon)