



# Dialogue Summary

Addressing the Double  
Burden of Malnutrition  
through Daycare Centers  
in Lebanon



K2P Policy Dialogue convenes key policymakers and stakeholders to capture contextual information, tacit knowledge, views and experiences including potential options to address high priority issues. K2P Policy Dialogues are informed by a pre-circulated K2P Policy Brief or Briefing Note to allow for focused discussion among policymakers and stakeholders.



# Dialogue Summary

+ Included



Definition and contextualization of the priority issue



Summary of stakeholders' deliberations on options



Recommended course of action



## **K2P Dialogue Summary**

# Addressing the Double Burden of Malnutrition through Daycare Centers in Lebanon

**Authors**

Clara Abou Samra, Reem Masri, Michelle Assal, Sahar Nassour & Fadi El-Jardali\*

**Acknowledgements**

This Policy Dialogue was organized in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Social Affairs. The views expressed in the dialogue summary are the views of the dialogue participants and should not be taken to represent the views of the authors of the dialogue summary.

We wish to thank the K2P core team for their support during the Policy Dialogue.

**Dialogue**

The Policy Dialogue about: Addressing the Double Burden of Malnutrition through Daycare Centers in Lebanon was held on March 24, 2022, at the Gefinor Rotana Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon. The policy dialogue was facilitated by Dr. Fadi El-Jardali, Director of the K2P Center.

**Partnership**

This initiative is in partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) under the Ahlan Simsim.

**Citation**

This Dialogue Summary should be cited as  
Abou Samra, C., Masri, R., Assal, M., Nassour, S., El-Jardali, F., Addressing the Double Burden of Malnutrition through Daycare Centers in Lebanon, Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon, July 4, 2022

\*Senior author

# Contents

<b>Preamble</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Deliberation about the problem</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Deliberations about elements for addressing the problem</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Recommendations and Next Steps</b>	<b>17</b>

# Deliberations

# Preamble

The K2P Policy Dialogue, was convened on March 24, 2022, to address the double burden of malnutrition through daycare centers in Lebanon, in partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). The dialogue hosted 19 diverse stakeholders from different sectors and from multi-disciplinary backgrounds to ensure richness of discussions.

These included representatives from

- The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)
- The Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA)
- The two Syndicates of Nurseries Owners in Lebanon
- Representatives from the following Academic Institutions (AUB, BAU)
- UN agencies (UNICEF and WHO), international non-governmental organizations ( IOCC)
- National Governmental Organizations (NGO) (Ana Aqraa)
- Representatives from daycare centers and from the Citizen Consultations conducted earlier

The policy dialogue was facilitated by Dr. Fadi El Jardali.

Prior to the discussions, a video presented the process leading to the methodology and the use of high-quality evidence to develop policy options. The dialogue is a result of a triangulation of the evidence extracted from stakeholder engagements and citizen consultations.

The discussion was guided by a pre-prepared PowerPoint presentation.

# Deliberation about the problem

Dialogue participants discussed the framing of the problem and agreed on the importance of addressing the double

## Background to the Policy Dialogue

The Policy dialogue was convened in order to support a full discussion of relevant considerations (including research evidence) about a high-priority issue in order to inform action.

### Key features of the dialogue were:

- 1) Addressing an issue currently being faced in Lebanon;
- 2) Focus on different underlying factors of the problem;
- 3) Focus on Three Elements for addressing the policy issue;
- 4) Informed by a pre-circulated Policy Brief that synthesized both global and local research evidence about the problem, recommendations and key implementation considerations;
- 5) Informed by a discussion about the full range of factors that can inform how to approach the problem and recommendations for addressing it;
- 6) Brought together many parties who would be involved in or affected by future decisions related to the issue;
- 7) Ensured fair representation among policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers;
- 8) Engaged a facilitator to assist with the deliberations;
- 9) Allowed for frank, off-the-record deliberations by following the Chatham House rule: "Participants are free to use the information received during the meeting, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed"; and
- 10) Did not aim for consensus. Participants' views and experiences and the tacit knowledge they brought to the issues at hand formed key input to the dialogue. The dialogue was designed to spark insights that can only come about when all of those who will be involved in or affected by future decisions about the issue can work through it together. The dialogue was also designed to generate action by those who participate in the dialogue and by those who review the dialogue summary.

burden of malnutrition through daycare centers in Lebanon. One participant ascertained the need to focus on micronutrient deficiency as part of undernutrition and to include the role of breastfeeding in addressing this problem. All stakeholders acknowledged that this issue existed prior to the deterioration of the economic situation in Lebanon that has further worsened food insecurity in the country. Parents' cultures and personal beliefs have long affected the dietary intake of children. One example reported by a stakeholder was parents giving children laxatives to treat constipation, not knowing the side effects on the child's speech and cognitive skills. All dialogue participants ascertained that the first 1,000 days of the child's life are the most critical, thus addressing the double burden of malnutrition within this vulnerable age group is imperative. In addition, one stakeholder mentioned the importance of integrating evidence linking developmental disorders such as ADHD with nutrition. All participants made certain that dietary habits and feeding indicators on this age group can be part of the policy brief. Furthermore, some participants highlighted that levels of malnutrition are expected to rise for both undernutrition and over-nutrition given the current economic crisis, and stressed on the importance of addressing this issue.

### **Underlying factors**

Dialogue participants then proceeded to discuss the factors underlying the problem. The stakeholders agreed on the multi-level underlying factors leading to the double burden of malnutrition among preschool children including governance, socio-economic, delivery and individual levels.

Some participants mentioned that the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) has developed a nutritional guide in 2012. This guide, complemented with several other policies provided for daycare centers are currently not implemented due to a lack of enforcement. The majority of participants ascertained that it is not enough to develop policies, but also to train staff on the implementation of these guidelines. Stakeholders highlighted that continuous and mandatory staff training is crucial for implementing policies. Similarly, other participants mentioned that the Ministry of Social Affairs developed a nutritional guide for daycare centers that also fails to be implemented fully due to a lack of financial resources. Participants added that the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) conducts a monitoring and evaluation activity to assess the availability of the menu and whether guidelines are being followed in daycare centers by checking invoices, on a yearly basis. In addition,

participants ascertained that the lack of trust and communication between parents and daycare center staff is a major concern when it comes to what the child eats at the nursery.

One stakeholder added that media and advertised commercials on unhealthy foods are also main contributors in negatively influencing the children attitudes and beliefs towards healthy food. One participant highlighted that MOSA launched an awareness campaign on healthy eating a couple of years ago that was discontinued due to the current circumstances in the country. One stakeholder mentioned that SDCs stopped providing food to children due to the financial crisis. Some participants raised the issue of the lack of milk due to the economic crisis, and addressed how parents are rather referring to rice and carbohydrates; thus, expecting to see a future rise in obesity rates within this age group and a higher prevalence of micronutrient deficiency.

All dialogue participants agreed that the majority of daycare centers in Lebanon lack appropriate practices such as role modelling and passive eating. This has caused a major issue, as the daycare center is an influential setting for developing healthy eating practices. The lack of financial resources has prevented daycare center teachers from accessing the appropriate resources for activities tailored for healthy nutritional intake such as gardening and preparing healthy dishes. According to participants, daycare center teachers sometimes do not abide by regulations such as consuming unhealthy food in front of children. Dialogue participants added that not all staff are well equipped with nutritional information that allow them to share recommendations with parents. Other stakeholders addressed the fact that some parents perceive healthy food to be expensive, thus referring to unhealthy and cheaper options. Furthermore, the majority of dialogue participants raised the issue of associating fun activities with unhealthy foods due the culture within the community.

All dialogue participants have highlighted that both the MOPH and MOSA have developed guidelines for healthy eating, such as the IYCF recipe booklet and a book containing 20 healthy recipes developed by MOSA with a collaboration of a local NGO. Nonetheless, joint efforts and increased collaboration on these initiatives between both ministries are needed to prevent confusion, fragmentation, duplication of efforts and thus inefficiencies in the implementation of such interventions.

All participants agreed that pediatricians play a vital role in explaining guidelines to parents when it comes to allergy prevention and

healthy dietary behaviors. One stakeholder mentioned that if pediatricians fail to fulfil their imperative responsibilities towards educating parents on nutritional guidelines, this can lead to several cases of allergies and poor dietary habits within this children age group. In addition, no referral system exists between pediatricians and nutritionists to follow up on potential malnutrition cases.

## **Deliberations about elements for addressing the problem**

Dialogue participants discussed the four elements that were examined in the Policy Brief.

### **Element 1› Establishing Written Policies and Guidelines that Target Nutrition and Physical Activity in the Daycare Center.**

Stakeholders deliberated on the importance of promoting proper nutrition and physical activity in daycare centers by introducing comprehensive guidelines and policies that are tailored to the current situation in Lebanon. The deliberations covered the two sub-elements; (1) Development and implementation of nutrition, physical activity, and screen-time policies to improve children eating habits and reinforce these policies in the curriculum, (2) Conduct menu modification to reinforce healthy eating in the daycare centers. Additionally, the stakeholders discussed the different policies and strategies that can be introduced to improve child nutrition outcomes in daycare centers.

The participants discussed the importance of developing a national nutrition strategy and an accompanying action plan. However, stakeholders mentioned that the strategy would not be sufficient on its own to improve child nutrition in daycare centers. Due to the ongoing crises, some daycare centers have been unable to provide meals to children. Additionally, the cost of food items has dramatically risen which has made healthy food options inaccessible to some families. Therefore, the stakeholders suggested there be a collaboration with academic institutions to develop a list of alternative foods that are affordable and healthy for parents and daycares to purchase. Additionally, they highlighted the need for international organizations to

provide food assistance packages for vulnerable daycare centers. Furthermore, the participants agreed that there is a need to estimate the cost of food per child so that daycare centers can plan accordingly and ensure there is an operational costing guide.

At the institutional level, the stakeholders suggested that the daycare curriculum be updated regularly. Furthermore, they agreed that context specific and easy to understand nutrition guidelines for children 0-5 years old, should be developed and disseminated to daycares and parents. These guidelines should include healthy and budget friendly food items that can be provided at home and at the daycare centers. The guidelines should also be updated every year in order to remain context specific. Participants recommended that these guidelines be a collaborative effort between academic professionals in the field of nutrition and the Ministries of Public Health and Social Affairs. Moreover, they suggested that nutrition be integrated into daycare standards. At a national level, all the participants highlighted the need to develop a national nutrition guidance, accompanied by a unified curriculum that would be implemented across all daycare centers and institutions in the country. Furthermore, the stakeholders expressed the need to develop a clear nutrition operational plan for donors to be able to assess and meet the child nutrition needs in the country. They also came to a consensus that a clear capacity-building plan needs to be developed for the daycare staff to be able to implement nutrition guidelines. According to the stakeholders, both the operational and capacity building plans should be shared with donors and UN agencies.

During the dialogue, the participants emphasized gaps in the current policies and their implementation. According to the stakeholders, there is a need to revise current national policies to promote breastfeeding. Furthermore, they stated that the current labor laws are unsupportive of working breastfeeding mothers, which would also affect child nutrition. Thus, there is a need to increase the time given for maternity leave and to introduce workplace policies, which allow for women to breastfeed during working hours. In terms of policy implementation, the stakeholders stated that monitoring systems are often weak when it comes to monitoring the implementation of breastfeeding policies in the country. Additionally, the stakeholders came to the consensus that there needs to be better collaboration between the Ministries of Public Health and Social Affairs to ensure sustainability in carrying out these initiatives.

Participants agreed on the need to pilot the implementation of future nutrition guidelines in a small sample of daycares for the span of a few months. The ministries involved, to determine their accreditation status, would then reassess daycares that fail to implement the guidelines. Doing so would promote ownership and accountability in daycares. Monitoring child nutrition indicators can also be used to assess the impact of nutrition guidelines on child health outcomes. Stakeholders mentioned that can be done by collaborating with academic institutions, who would provide students to assess malnutrition indicators in daycare-enrolled children. Stakeholders added that updates could be made to the Ministry of Public Health's application to include child nutrition indicators.

### **Element 2› Improving staff knowledge and attitudes on child nutrition and physical activity**

This element presented the evidence from a number of systematic reviews and single studies that have demonstrated effectiveness of enhancing knowledge and attitude of staff on child nutrition and physical activity. The participants highlighted the need to improve staff knowledge and attitude in daycare centers to encourage better eating habits in daycare centers. Some daycare staff are not equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to ensure appropriate child feeding habits. Hence, there should be a collaborative effort between ministries, academic institutions, and NGOs to strengthen the capacity of daycare workers. Participants also mentioned that such collaborative efforts should also target the community as it helps in building trust when it comes to healthy eating practices within the society as a whole.

Stakeholders discussed the importance of having a continuous and mandatory educational program for daycare staff. This program can be a collaborative effort between involved ministries and international organizations. Once these plans are developed, the daycare staff should be trained on the nutrition guidelines continuously. Since daycare centers may not have sufficient human resources and expertise, the stakeholders suggested that the Ministry of Public Health and syndicates carry out these staff trainings. Moreover, they mentioned that peer-to-peer training should be considered as an option to ensure continuity of these training activities. Participants stressed on the importance of involving daycare center staff and owners in decision-making processes when developing training material. Additionally, stakeholders stated that staff training should be coupled with tools and guides.

One of the gaps identified by stakeholders during the dialogue was that the current trainings that are implemented in daycare centers are general and are not engaging for daycare staff. Some participants mentioned that the Ministry of Social Affairs is currently implementing several capacity developments programs but what remains challenging is the sustainability of coaching and training mechanisms. Stakeholders agreed on the need to develop specific trainings on child nutrition and infant and young child feeding practices. One stakeholder added that daycare staff need to be trained on encouraging children to eat healthy foods during mealtime and identifying developmental problems (i.e. improper chewing habits) in addition to acting as role models for children in the daycare by consuming healthy foods and snacks while at the daycare.

### **Element 3› Engaging Parents in the Daycare Center to Improve the Nutrition and Physical Activity Practices of Children**

The dialogue participants discussed the evidence surrounding the third element. The following sub-elements were also deliberated; (1) Conveying information to parents on physical activity and nutrition via educational material and by engaging them in events, workshops or activities, (2) Communicating policies with parents or engaging parents in policy development. The role of parents in influencing child-eating practices was extensively discussed. The stakeholders stressed on the importance of effectively communicating nutrition guidelines with parents to ensure that proper nutrition practices continue outside the daycare center. Material disseminated to parents and caregivers need to be user-friendly and cater to people from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Additionally, daycare centers should use different platforms to convey important messages and guidelines (i.e. utilizing social media platforms). Daycare centers could also use the first meeting with parents as an opportunity to acquaint them with the center's guidelines.

The participants noted that daycare centers often engage with parents primarily to report any negative issues concerning their child (i.e. reporting bad behavior), which can discourage parents from participating in activities at the daycare center. Thus, some participants suggested using positive reinforcement for engaging with parents. Additionally, parental engagement is often limited to the involvement of the mothers. However, all participants agreed that it is essential to engage fathers as well in order to

promote child nutrition practices. Thus, the participants agreed that daycares should call both parents for the initial meeting to discuss guidelines, policies, and key messages. They also highlighted the need for a concerted effort to promote breastfeeding and good child nutrition practices among parents. For example, the participants mentioned that daycare centers should designate a specific area for breastfeeding in order to encourage mothers to breastfeed their children or to pump. Another suggestion by the stakeholders was to strengthen the role of community health workers in awareness raising through home visits. As part of awareness raising, the stakeholders mentioned that it is vital to raise awareness on the Ministry of Public Health's infant and young child feeding hotline. Furthermore, some participants mentioned the importance of reminding parents to fill out the pre-developed health record "Carnet de Sante" after each physician visits. The stakeholders also stressed that child health and nutrition outcomes are affected by the mother's dietary habits during pregnancy. Stakeholders added that obstetric and gynecologists should educate pregnant women on how to maintain or develop healthy food and physical activity habits during their pregnancy.

#### **Element 4› Improving child knowledge and attitude through engaging children in proper practices and enhancing nutrition education within the daycare center curriculum**

The participants deliberated the fourth element on the importance of engaging children in activities to improve their knowledge and attitude towards food and physical activity. The following two sub-elements were deliberated; (1) Children's nutrition education and (2) Applying healthy eating mealtime practices.

According to the stakeholders, involving children in hands-on activities is one strategy to improve nutrition knowledge and promote physical activity. Participants recommended that daycares and parents educate children on how to prepare food and involve them in gardening activities, if possible. Moreover, they suggested that parents can also take their children grocery shopping so that they learn more about food. Another point raised by the participants is the need to educate children on how to listen to their hunger and satiety cues in order to develop good eating habits. In terms of physical activity, the participants noted that there is a lack of outdoor spaces available in daycare centers, which makes it challenging for children to be physically active. Stakeholder stressed on the importance to ensure that children have sufficient outdoor spaces.

# Next Steps

# Recommendations and Next Steps

The deliberations around the four elements were successful in creating consensus among the different stakeholders on the steps required to improve nutrition among children in daycare centers. The stakeholders agreed that all elements and sub-elements are important. However, given the current situation, the participants agreed there should be a focus on achievable goals that take into consideration the current barriers. The recommendations and next steps tackled upon a variety of actions that will be implemented in the short and long terms. These included:

Recommended Action	Stakeholders involved	Expected timeline
<b>Governance &amp; Regulations</b>		
Develop a national nutrition strategy for daycare centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ International and local NGOs</li> <li>→ Daycare centers</li> <li>→ Syndicate of nurseries</li> </ul>	Short-term
Develop an operational plan to secure funding for nutrition in daycare centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> </ul>	Short-term
Develop and implement mitigation processes to work around current human resources and financial constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> </ul>	Short-term
Promote collaboration and coordination between the Ministry of Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> </ul>	Short-term

<b>Recommended Action</b>	<b>Stakeholders involved</b>	<b>Expected timeline</b>
and Ministry of Social Affairs on nutrition in daycare centers		
Address the nutrition needs of children with disabilities by developing guidelines and measures for children in daycares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Daycare centers</li> <li>→ Academic institutions</li> <li>→ Syndicate of nurseries</li> </ul>	Long-term
Unify daycare measures and standards across all MOSA and MOPH daycare centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ International NGOs</li> </ul>	Medium-term
Adjust the curricula in universities to educate professionals on child nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Education and Higher Education</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Academic Institutions</li> </ul>	Long-term
Revise the curriculum in daycare centers to include nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> <li>→ International NGOs</li> </ul>	Medium-term
Establish child friendly nurseries (improve their infrastructure, curriculum, and overall environment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Daycare centers</li> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> <li>→ International NGOs</li> </ul>	Long-term
<b>Capacity building &amp; Coaching</b>		

<b>Recommended Action</b>	<b>Stakeholders involved</b>	<b>Expected timeline</b>
Secure funding for food assistance packages, capacity building, and feeding programs for daycare centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Donors</li> <li>→ International NGOs</li> </ul>	Medium-term
Provide in-service training for daycare center staff on nutrition guidelines and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Academic Institutions</li> <li>→ Syndicate of nurseries</li> <li>→ Daycare Centers</li> <li>→ International and local NGOs</li> </ul>	Short-term
Introduce mandatory induction training for staff on nutrition guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Daycare centers</li> </ul>	Medium-term
Engage daycare staff in developing training curricula	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Daycare centers</li> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> </ul>	Short-term
<b>Service Delivery</b>		
Strengthen referral systems from pediatricians to dietitians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Healthcare facilities</li> <li>→ Order of Physicians</li> <li>→ Dietitians</li> <li>→ Daycare centers</li> </ul>	Long-term
Develop a package of essential services, for daycare centers, that includes nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ International organizations</li> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> <li>→ Daycare centers</li> </ul>	Long-term
Pilot nutrition guidelines in a set of chosen daycare centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Ministry of Public Health</li> <li>→ Ministry of Social Affairs</li> </ul>	Medium-term

<b>Recommended Action</b>	<b>Stakeholders involved</b>	<b>Expected timeline</b>
	→ Daycare centers	
Promote collaboration between academic institutions and daycare centers to conduct malnutrition assessments in daycare centers	→ Ministry of Public Health → Ministry of Social Affairs → Daycare centers → Academic Institutions	Short-term
<b>Advocacy</b>		
Increase visibility of child nutrition in daycare centers by collaborating with media outlets to raise awareness on the importance of child nutrition	→ Media → Daycare centers → Ministry of Public Health → Ministry of Social Affairs	Medium-term
Engage with parents on social media to notify them on any daycare activities and nutrition guidelines	→ Parents → Daycare centers → Ministry of Public Health → Ministry of Social Affairs	Medium-term
<b>Research</b>		
Map out current and previous child nutrition initiatives, guides, programs, and awareness raising activities	→ Ministry of Public Health → Ministry of Social Affairs	Short-term

Knowledge to Policy Center draws on an unparalleled breadth of synthesized evidence and context-specific knowledge to impact policy agendas and action. K2P does not restrict itself to research evidence but draws on and integrates multiple types and levels of knowledge to inform policy including grey literature, opinions and expertise of stakeholders.

Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
American University of Beirut  
Riad El Solh, Beirut 1107 2020  
Beirut, Lebanon  
+961 1 350 000 ext. 2942-2943  
[www.aub.edu.lb/K2P](http://www.aub.edu.lb/K2P)  
[K2P@aub.edu.lb](mailto:K2P@aub.edu.lb)

Follow us  
Facebook [Knowledge-to-Policy-K2P-Center](#)  
Twitter [@K2PCenter](#)