

Validation Workshop Report:

Meeting to Develop an Initial Advocacy Plan on Social Protection in Lebanon



Beirut

April 18, 2024



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



annd
Arab NGO Network
for Development
شبكة المنظمات العربية
غير الحكومية للتطوير

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) organized an online meeting to reflect on an initial advocacy plan regarding social protection in Lebanon. The meeting was held virtually on April 18, 2024, and was attended by ANND's team and several representatives of international and national organizations. The validation workshop was supplemented by bilateral meetings held with key informants representing trade unions and workers, and a local civil society organization, the findings of which are also reflected in this report.

The validation workshop began with a presentation of the main outcomes of the National Consultation meeting held on February 2, 2024. Attendees discussed updates on the National Social Protection Strategy since the last consultation meeting held on February 2, 2024. Attendees concurred on the importance of developing a national advocacy plan in light of the approved National Social Protection Strategy and current processes.

Updates on the National Social Protection Strategy

- The government, in partnership with several international organizations, launched the strategy on February 13, 2024.¹
- Supported by international organizations, the government aims to form a sectoral team from various ministries, i.e., a joint ministerial committee tasked with developing an implementation plan for the strategy by August 2024.
- A technical committee is writing the action plan.
- There is a process to develop an implementation plan and pressure from the EU to ensure its development.
- In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs is working to implement several initiatives for the social assistance sector mentioned in the strategy to amend relevant policies and link the strategy with all other strategies and plans.
- Attendees agreed that we cannot ignore the legislative path that began with Parliament approving some relevant laws (for example, the Pension Law 319 by passed Lebanon's Parliament in December 2023).
- Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Affairs has been financing programs related to poverty, people with disabilities, the elderly, and other issues.

¹UNICEF. (2024). The government of Lebanon launches its first national social protection strategy.

Key take-aways and recommendations from the meeting

- Several attendees and key informants agreed that addressing the ongoing financial and economic crisis is a prerequisite to ensuring success of the National Social Protection Strategy.
- There is a need to engage in discussions with a broader group of relevant stakeholders, particularly those that were not consulted in the development of the National Social Protection Strategy.
- Civil society must be activated to hold the government and policy-makers accountable with regards to the National Social Protection Strategy. They should monitor the implementation processes of the various initiatives related to the National Social Protection Strategy, including the formation of the joint ministerial committee. To this end, and where necessary, civil society actors must be provided with the necessary tools (for example, through capacity building) to fulfill this role.
- Civil society must also lobby to ensure that necessary amendments in legislation related to labor, social security, and mutual fund laws are undertaken.
- The EU is organizing a meeting on April 24, 2024, to discuss the proposed strategy, and it is essential for civil society to follow-up on the outcomes of the meeting.
- Attendees agreed that while discussions on the level of actual official commitment have been slow, the fact that discussions have been initiated and are ongoing is positive.
- Civil society could be engaged in the proposed implementation plan in an advisory role. Civil society must follow the committee's work and create shared spaces for the committee's effectiveness.
- Attendees noted that civil society must be aware of parallel processes and their effects, particularly developments related to international bodies and reductions in aid/grants/loans. That is, advocacy for social protection must not ignore other processes, including the influence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), especially reforms in the public budget.
- They also agreed that civil society must be aware of the core messages to be delivered. The universal approach is one of them, emphasizing that social protection policies are part of public policy. Any plan must be comprehensive, horizontal, and vertical, sustainable, flexible, and advanced. That is, advocacy must be directed toward social policies in their entirety, avoiding partial approaches.
- In Lebanon, social issues must be addressed through several organizing principles, including the rights-based approach.

- Gender equality must be a key component in the strategy.
- In addition, work on social protection must not ignore the political dimensions related to power, government, independence of the judiciary, and overcoming the crisis as a fundamental economic condition.
- In parallel, a direct path to social protection should be created through a clear plan. In the plan, it is critical to pay attention to the deduction of funding, how to compensate for it, and be aware of the compensation processes and their potential risks. For example, we must tackle taxes from the perspective of reform, first, and income distribution.
- The role of MPs in working on social protection needs consideration.
- Coordination among various actors is a necessity.
- It is essential to pay attention to the funds that can be monitored and saved. Still, there are difficulties, especially regarding the lack of a national payment system.
- Donors must be closely monitored and followed up, pressing for an agenda responsive to civil society's aspirations and oriented toward a human rights and universal approach.
- One-on-one meetings for advocacy are helpful, particularly with government entities and policymakers.
- In the practical steps, it was suggested to be present within all relevant current mechanisms and bodies to have an effective influence.
- Use social media networks and organize the possibility of appearing in a formal media program.

Based on the outcomes of the national consultation meeting of February 2, 2024, and the subsequent validation workshop, ANND proposes the below workplan (Table 1), as a general guideline for an initial advocacy plan for social protection in Lebanon.

Table 1. Proposed Workplan

Identify needs	Implement the approved social protection strategy while aware of the associated political, economic, and social aspects.		
Identify goals	Raise awareness of the importance of implementing the national social protection strategy and linking it to economic and social policies and the political dimension toward strengthening support for the strategy among relevant stakeholders	Build coalitions (including civil society and other stakeholders) to implement the social protection strategy. Such coalitions should also include community representatives of various the various groups in Lebanon.	Pressure for the implementation of the social protection strategy in Lebanon, and the adoption of relevant legislations and strategies
Target group	Civil society in the broad sense: NGOs, unions, employers' representatives. communities.	UN and other international organizations: ILO, World Bank, UNICEF, EU.	House of Representatives, government, relevant ministries; once established, the joint ministerial committee, ECOSOC.
Factors for the success or failure of the campaign	<p>Success factors: The existence of foundations for dialogue between the parties.</p> <p>Failure factors: Conflict of interest between stakeholders.</p>	<p>Success factors: Establishment work that contributed to developing the strategy.</p> <p>Failure factors: the presence of agendas and priorities related to financing.</p>	<p>Success factors: Timing - strategy approval.</p> <p>Failure factors: The country's fragility/pressures and lack of resource allocation.</p>
Message	Social protection is a right for all and an urgent need given the current circumstances.		
Channels	Dialogues with MPs and Government.	Meetings with Associations.	Multilateral dialogues and training.
Executive Plan Timeline Roles	ANND guide on social protection. Social media campaigns.	Dialogues to determine the coalition's work priorities.	Push to produce data. Dialogues about taxes as a component of strategy.