



Displaced Children in Lebanon A Rights-Based Reading of the Psychosocial Crisis in the Context of Conflict



March 2026



**Developmental Action
without Borders - Naba'a**

This report is based on field observations by Naba'a teams in response areas during March 2026, in addition to an analysis of trends drawn from previous crises in Lebanon, and a review of international literature in the field of mental health and psychosocial support.



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Executive Summary

This report provides a rights-based analysis of the psychosocial crisis affecting displaced children in Lebanon in the context of the **March 2026 escalation**. Drawing on field observations by Naba'a teams, combined with lessons from previous crises and international mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) frameworks, the report argues that children's psychological suffering is not merely a consequence of conflict, but a direct violation of their fundamental rights.

Since the escalation began on **March 2, 2026**, Lebanon has witnessed mass displacement exceeding one million individuals, widespread destruction, and significant civilian casualties, including children. These developments have deepened an already fragile context shaped by years of compounded crises, economic collapse, the Beirut Port explosion, COVID-19, and the deterioration of public services, resulting in cumulative trauma among children.

The report highlights that displaced child are exposed to three overlapping layers of trauma:



1. Direct war-related trauma
2. Displacement-related trauma (loss of safety, routine, and environment)
3. Post-displacement stress linked to poverty and instability

This convergence produces what is known as toxic stress, severely affecting children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, with long-term consequences if left unaddressed [١٠٤].

Field data reveal alarming levels of psychosocial distress:

- 60–70% of children experience chronic anxiety
- Over 50% face learning and concentration difficulties
- Up to 55% exhibit behavioral challenges such as aggression
- Around 70% of households report increased family stress
- Significant protection risks, including child labor and early marriage, are emerging [١٠٤].

These impacts are closely linked to the conditions of displacement. Children living in overcrowded shelters, insecure housing, or unstable host arrangements are deprived of basic rights, including safe housing, education, protection, and psychosocial well-being. In extreme cases, families are forced into undignified or unsafe living conditions, further exacerbating children's vulnerability [١٠٤].

Despite ongoing humanitarian efforts, the report identifies critical gaps in the current response: Overemphasis on the quantity of services rather than their quality and impact

- Predominance of short-term, activity-based interventions
- Limited professionalization and capacity in MHPSS
- Weak integration across sectors (protection, education, health)
- Insufficient contextual and culturally adapted programming
- Overreliance on recreational activities rather than evidence-based therapeutic approaches [١٠٤].

These gaps limit the ability of humanitarian actors to achieve meaningful recovery and risk

perpetuating a cycle of unaddressed trauma.

The report calls for a fundamental shift in the humanitarian approach, grounded in a child rights-based framework. Key priorities include:



- Designing evidence-based, long-term, and layered MHPSS interventions
- Integrating psychosocial support with protection, education, and health systems
- Strengthening staff capacity through specialized training and supervision
- Enhancing accountability, child participation, and non-discrimination
- Engaging families and communities in protection and recovery processes
- Adapting interventions to local cultural contexts and realities

Ultimately, the report emphasizes that the effectiveness of any response should not be measured by the number of activities delivered, but by its ability to restore children's sense of safety, rebuild their sense of belonging, and support their recovery and development.

Failure to act decisively risks long-term consequences for an entire generation of children in Lebanon. Addressing this crisis requires urgent, comprehensive, and rights-based interventions that place dignity, justice, and child well-being at the center of humanitarian action.

1. Introduction

In light of the recent aggression on Lebanon, which began on March 2, 2026, and was accompanied by a wide military escalation exceeding **2,792 hostile acts**, **1001 fatalities** and **2,584 injuries** were recorded, including **118 child fatalities**, in a grave violation of the principles of international humanitarian law and children's rights. This escalation has led to new waves of displacement and has further exacerbated humanitarian vulnerabilities, particularly among children.





Children's mental health is a fundamental right guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly in articles related to the right to life, survival and development (Article 6), protection from all forms of violence (Article 19), and recovery and reintegration following conflict (Article 39). However, children in conflict settings, as in Lebanon, are exposed to severe and repeated violations that undermine this right and expose them to profound and long-term psychological impacts.

The current psychosocial reality of children cannot be separated from the accumulation of crises since 2019, including the economic collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut Port explosion, the deterioration of basic services, and repeated waves of escalation and conflict culminating in the March 2026 aggression. These successive crises have exposed children to repeated and cumulative trauma, increasing their psychological vulnerability and weakening their ability to cope and feel safe.

Amid the recent military escalation and resulting large-scale displacement, displaced children are facing a complex psychosocial crisis whose effects extend beyond the present moment, posing a long-term threat to their psychological, cognitive, and social development.

Field experience from Naba'a indicates that displaced children suffer not only from the direct trauma of war but also from a complex interplay between displacement, the breakdown of daily routines, and increased economic and social pressures within families. This interaction produces a state of chronic psychological stress that directly affects children's behavior, learning capacity, and social interaction.

Despite multiple humanitarian interventions, there remains a clear gap between the scale of needs and the quality of response, particularly in the field of mental health and psychosocial support, where short-term, activity-based approaches often prevail over sustained professional interventions. This limits the effectiveness of the response and its ability to achieve genuine recovery for children.

"This reality poses a serious risk to an entire generation of children in Lebanon and calls for an urgent, comprehensive, and child rights-based response."



2. Background and Context

1.04M

Displaced Individuals

From the South, southern suburbs of Beirut, and the Bekaa

134,439

In Collective Shelters

Across 636 collective shelters — others in host families, rented accommodation, or on the streets

Lebanon has recently witnessed a sharp escalation in military operations, resulting in the displacement of approximately 1,049,328 individuals from various regions, particularly the South, the southern suburbs of Beirut, and the Bekaa. Around 132,742 displaced persons have sought shelter in 622 collective shelters, while others have been distributed among host families (often in overcrowded housing accommodating multiple households), rented accommodation under inadequate conditions, and extreme cases of forced displacement where some families, including children, have been forced to live on the streets or in unprepared locations.

Displaced families during the March 2026 war are living in undignified conditions that lack the minimum standards of human dignity. Some families have been forced to resort to the streets or unsafe and unprepared shelters due to the limited capacity of collective shelters to absorb the increasing number of displaced persons, in the absence of accurate data reflecting the magnitude of this group.

The living conditions of displaced children can be categorized into four main types:

- Collective shelters
- Rented housing
- Hosting by relatives or host families
- Living on the streets or in exposed and unprepared locations

These conditions constitute clear violations of several fundamental rights guaranteed under international human rights law, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including:

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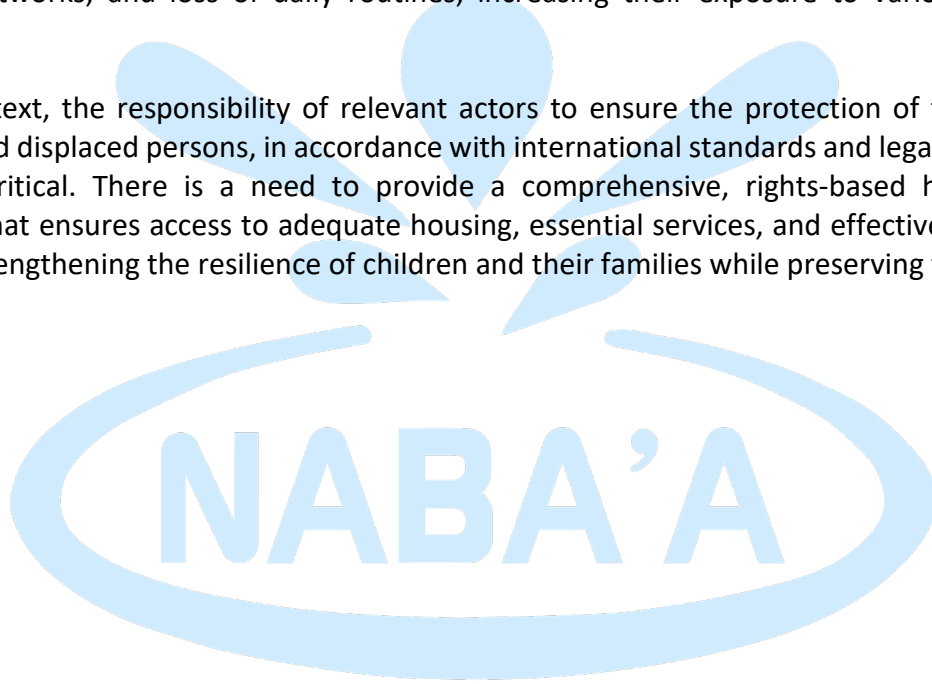
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- The right to adequate and safe housing
- The right to protection from violence, exploitation, and neglect
- The right to uninterrupted education
- The right to health and psychosocial support
- The right to live with dignity in a safe and stable environment

These conditions deprive children of a protective and supportive environment and exacerbate their psychosocial vulnerability due to instability, disruption of education, breakdown of social support networks, and loss of daily routines, increasing their exposure to various forms of violations.

In this context, the responsibility of relevant actors to ensure the protection of the rights of children and displaced persons, in accordance with international standards and legal obligations, becomes critical. There is a need to provide a comprehensive, rights-based humanitarian response that ensures access to adequate housing, essential services, and effective protection, thereby strengthening the resilience of children and their families while preserving their dignity.



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3. Psychological Trauma as a Form of Violation of Children's Rights in the Context of Displacement and Conflict

- 1 Direct War-Related Trauma**
Exposure to violence, shelling, and loss
- 2 Displacement Trauma**
Loss of safe environment and disruption of daily routines
- 3 Post-Displacement Stress**
Linked to poverty, instability, and family pressure

Psychological trauma experienced by children in the context of conflict and displacement in Lebanon constitutes, in itself, **a form of violation of children's rights**, rather than merely a byproduct of violent events. Exposure to continuous fear, loss of safety, separation from protective environments, and living in inhumane conditions represents a direct violation of fundamental rights, particularly the right to life, survival, and development (Article 6),

the right to protection from all forms of violence and neglect (Article 19), and the right to recovery and reintegration (Article 39) under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Field data indicate that the reality of displaced children is shaped by three overlapping levels of crises: direct war-related trauma, displacement-related trauma and loss of a safe environment, and post-displacement stress linked to poverty and instability. This overlap leads to what is known as **toxic stress**, one of the most harmful factors affecting brain development and behavior in children, as it transforms traumatic experiences into a continuous state that disrupts normal development and increases the likelihood of long-term psychological and behavioral disorders.

Accordingly, trauma in this context cannot be separated from the rights framework but must be recognized as a form of compounded violation of children's rights requiring urgent intervention based on protection and comprehensive recovery.

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4. Key Psychosocial Challenges

The suffering of displaced children is not limited to indicators and numbers but is reflected directly in their daily experiences. One child in a shelter stated:

“I can't sleep at night... every time I try, I'm afraid the shelling will come back.

Another child said: “I want to go back to my school... not the school we are sleeping in.”

These testimonies reflect continuous fear, sleep disturbances, and children's longing for normalcy, highlighting the profound impact on their sense of safety and psychological stability.



Based on field observations since the outbreak of war on March 2, 2026, and trends from previous crises in Lebanon, displaced children face multiple overlapping psychosocial challenges, categorized as follows:

A. Psychological and Emotional Disorders

- Trauma-related disorders (nightmares, flashbacks, persistent fear), affecting approximately 30–40% of children
- Chronic anxiety and constant sense of danger, observed in 60–70% of children
- Depression and social withdrawal

B. Behavioral Problems

- Aggressive behavior and difficulty regulating emotions (45–55%)
- Social isolation and loss of trust (around 40%)

C. Developmental and Age-Related Disorders

- Developmental regression (e.g., bedwetting, infantile behaviors), affecting 20–25% of younger children

D. Health and Sleep-Related Issues



- Sleep disturbances affecting more than 50% of children

E. Educational and Cognitive Difficulties

- Learning difficulties and lack of concentration, affecting more than 50% of children

F. Family and Social Challenges

- Increased family stress and conflict (around 70% of households)

G. Protection Risks

- Child labor (20–25%)
- Exploitation in unsafe and overcrowded environments
- Early marriage as a negative coping mechanism

These challenges are directly linked to displacement environments and the availability of protection and psychosocial support, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive, sustainable, and rights-based interventions.

5. Differences by Displacement Setting (Child Rights-Based Perspective)

Field data show that psychosocial challenges vary depending on the displacement setting, directly affecting children's enjoyment of their fundamental rights.

A. Collective Shelters

Overcrowding and lack of privacy violate children's right to adequate living conditions and a safe environment. The absence of child-friendly spaces and protection mechanisms increases exposure to violence and neglect.

B. Rented Housing

Economic pressure and housing insecurity undermine children's sense of safety and stability, leading to chronic anxiety and potential depression.



C. Hosting by Relatives or Host Families

While providing some protection, overcrowding and limited resources affect children's dignity and sense of belonging, often leading to withdrawal and low self-esteem.

6. Gaps in the Current Response (Rights-Based and International Standards Perspective)

Field review by Naba'a highlights several challenges affecting the effectiveness of the humanitarian response:

- A relative focus on quantity over the quality of services, with a need to further strengthen service quality and depth of impact, in line with the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.
- A predominance of short-term interventions, which may limit sustainability and long-term impact, highlighting the importance of adopting a layered and progressive approach to recovery as outlined in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support.
- The need to strengthen the capacity of staff and volunteers in the field of mental health and psychosocial support through more specialized and structured training, in line with the Child Protection Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Action.
- Limited integration of contextual and cultural considerations in some interventions, underscoring the need to better tailor programmes to the specific realities and needs of children and their environments.
- An over-reliance in some cases on recreational psychosocial activities, with a need to expand the use of professional, evidence-based approaches focused on recovery and resilience building, in line with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support.
- Limited integration across sectors, with opportunities to strengthen linkages between mental health and psychosocial support, protection, education, and health interventions, in line with the Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response.
- The need to strengthen accountability and protection mechanisms, including more effective complaint and feedback systems and the reinforcement of measures to prevent sexual



exploitation and abuse, in line with the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

There is also a need to strengthen a child rights-based approach through:

- Ensuring the best interests of the child
- Supporting child participation
- Ensuring non-discrimination
- Strengthening accountability mechanisms

7. Critique of Current Psychosocial Support Approaches

Field experience indicates that many psychosocial support programs still rely on short-term, recreational activities, with insufficient focus on professional and sustained interventions.

In some cases:

- Activities are implemented without comprehensive needs assessments
- Follow-up and case management mechanisms are limited
- Success is measured mainly by the number of beneficiaries rather than impact

This highlights the need for evidence-based, long-term, and structured approaches aligned with humanitarian quality standards.

8. Recommendations



8.1 Program Level

- Design evidence-based interventions grounded in systematic needs assessments
- Integrate Mental Health and Psychosocial Support with protection, education, and health sectors
- Ensure continuity through multi-layered support pathways
- Use monitoring tools that measure changes in child well-being



8.2 Staff Level

- Provide specialized and continuous training
- Establish regular professional supervision systems



- Strengthen trauma-informed and “Do No Harm” approaches

8.3 Community Level

- Engage caregivers and families
- Strengthen community protection networks
- Raise awareness on mental health and trauma

8.4 Methodological Level

- Adopt a child rights-based approach across all stages
- Ensure safe and meaningful child participation
- Localize knowledge and adapt to cultural context
- Align interventions with the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, Child Protection Minimum Standards, Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, and the Sphere Handbook – Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response.

9. Conclusion

The psychosocial crisis facing displaced children in Lebanon is not a temporary condition but a prolonged challenge requiring comprehensive and sustainable interventions that address psychological, social, and rights-based dimensions.

Naba'a emphasizes that the effectiveness of the response should be measured not by the number of activities or services delivered, but by its ability to:

- Restore children's sense of safety
- Strengthen their sense of belonging
- Enable their recovery and healthy development

Protecting children's mental health is intrinsically linked to protecting their fundamental rights. True recovery cannot be achieved without ensuring a safe environment that preserves dignity and promotes justice. **“Failure to address this crisis today will result in long-term consequences for an entire generation of children, necessitating urgent action grounded in rights, justice, and human dignity.”**