

Statement on Lebanon's adoption of its long-awaited National Social Protection Strategy

The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action

Abstract

The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action (CeSSRA) applauds Lebanon's adoption of its first-ever National Social Protection Strategy which constitutes an important milestone towards social justice in the country. This strategy represents a crucial step in establishing a new social contract between the state and its citizens, with social rights as one of its main pillars.

Keywords: Social Security, Inclusive Social Security, Social Protection, Universal Social Protection, Social Policy, Lebanon

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The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action (CeSSRA) applauds Lebanon's adoption of its first-ever National Social Protection Strategy which constitutes an important milestone towards social justice in the country. This strategy represents a crucial step in establishing a new social contract between the state and its citizens, with social rights as one of its main pillars.

This strategy has been developed through extensive consultations with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and is set to address immediate social protection needs while strategically laying the foundation for long-term and sustainable access to rights. Enshrining social protection as a fundamental human right, the strategy aligns with Lebanon's constitution and the country's international commitments.

Combining life-cycle and pillar approaches, the strategy ensures a human-centric perspective that tackles immediate poverty mitigation measures, as well as sets long-term pillars for the establishment of an inclusive, rights-based, and universal social protection system around 5 pillars: social assistance, social insurance, financial access to services (education and health), economic inclusion and labour activation, social welfare.

This multi-pillar strategy aims to consolidate the currently fragmented system and enhance coordination across databases and programmes, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and ensuring inter-ministerial and institutional collaboration.

While the centre celebrates this important milestone in the history of Lebanon and of social policy-making in the country, we are aware of the limitations of this strategy, which is now, on the short-term, pending the adoption of specific legislation for its implementation.

Although the initially drafted strategy was inclusive, the adopted one, in its current form, excludes non-

nationals. The exclusion of non-nationals is only bound to exacerbate vulnerabilities within the population, hindering the overall goal of universal social protection, creating a comprehensive and equitable social protection system, and ultimately achieving a more just society.

The ongoing financial, fiscal, and economic crises demand vigilant monitoring and adaptive measures to ensure the strategy's financial sustainability. Since its drafting, notable economic changes have occurred in the country, including a staggering deterioration in poverty indicators, increased erosion of individuals' savings, further devaluation of the national currency, depletion of foreign currency reserves, and the complete removal of subsidies without corresponding anti-inflationary measures. As such, an update of the strategy's financing mechanisms is evidently imperative. The recent escalation of conflict at Lebanon's southern border not only exacerbates the economic situation but imposes urgent protection priorities to mitigate the consequences of war.

The enactment of this strategy must also be embedded within a democratic political process of accountability, participation, and citizen oversight to ensure the appropriate implementation of its various pillars, as well as the creation of the proper fiscal space to allow earmarking and disbursement of funds for its financing, implementation, and sustainability.