



Spotlight

Lebanon: Flexible funds catalyse a new approach to mental health

Over the past few years Lebanon has experienced multiple crises – a political revolution, the COVID-19 pandemic, an explosion that destroyed large parts of Beirut city and port, and a severe financial depression. These crises have compounded Lebanon’s underlying social and political problems and are contributing to serious mental health challenges. Emotionally, much of the population is in turmoil, with rates of suicide doubling among adults and young people alike. However, given the myriad of other health, sanitation, and education issues facing the country, the mental health risks affecting children of all ages has been little more than an afterthought.

Thanks to the flexibility of Core Resources for Results (RR), UNICEF’s team in Lebanon has reinforced its work on a new solution: to embed mental health services across multiple platforms and sectors, and to ensure they are available both to children and adults. Key to this effort is a highly qualified technical staff. To strengthen the Child Protection team in Beirut, UNICEF Lebanon used RR funding to bring on a new mental health expert, Riwa Maktabi, with the ambitious but achievable mandate to transform mental health programming across all areas of UNICEF’s work in Lebanon – including health, education, child protection, and youth engagement.

The investment is paying immediate dividends. For instance, RR funding has allowed the team to pilot a new programme to place a psychologist, psychiatrist, and social worker in three primary health care centres to provide mental health services for children, and it is expected that this initiative will be rolled out across the country. RR has also enabled us to pilot peer-to-peer psychological first aid training, specifically adapted for training children and adolescents in how to best support their friends following a distressing event. Similarly, RR has allowed us to address the mental health of adults working with children in Lebanon’s social services, many of whom suffer from burnout due to the



severe stresses of their occupation. RR funded a ground-breaking study of the needs of these frontline workers; and based on insights from this work, UNICEF is providing support to approximately 300 such professionals across the country. This not only helps them individually, but it also helps to reduce staff turnover and, in turn, to strengthen the social service sector.

For all of our accomplishments, our work is also about the future. Having a dedicated mental health staff member has allowed UNICEF to drive forward vital progress with the government through sustained engagement on key working groups within Lebanon's national systems. The benefits of this work will be felt nationwide as we make the case with government decision-makers to scale up and embed mental health services within national systems and in collaboration with civil society.

RR has been transformational in Lebanon by allowing UNICEF to engage more deeply, to trial new approaches, and to lay a strong foundation upon which we can build effective, sustainable, and long-term change for children.