

# CHILDREN AND THE CITY: THE STATUS OF VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN CITIES OF THE MENA REGION

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give a brief overview of socio-economic characteristics of children living in some cities of the MENA region, with more emphasis on vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The paper will also look into the similarities and differences in problems facing children in cities of the MENA region. The paper falls into the following subsections.

- Brief demographic profile for some countries of the MENA region.
- Review the status of children in selected countries in the MENA region.
- Review problems and issues facing children in selected cities of the MENA region.
- Outlining the institutions responsible for children's issues in urban areas, including: objectives, target groups, plans and obstacles.
- Concluding remarks.

Most of the data used in the paper are derived from assessments commissioned by the Child Protection Initiative in 12 MENA cities. The Child Protection Initiative (CPI) was established in response to a recommendation made at the December 2002 "Children and the City" Amman conference for 'building the capacities of municipal authorities, and establishment of a regional fund to respond rapidly to the risks faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the MENA region'. The CPI, which was launched in September 2003, is supported by the World Bank and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), which is hosting its secretariat in Riyadh. After two years, the CPI is expected to become an independent regional entity with a reliable funding mechanism. More information about the CPI is contained in the website: [www.menacpi.org](http://www.menacpi.org). One of the main activities of the Child Protection Initiative (CPI) during its first year was to build a knowledge base about the status of children – particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged children – in some cities in the MENA region, to identify the institutions responsible for children and to assess the capacity of these institutions (especially municipalities). The CPI has commissioned

studies in some cities for building a knowledge base namely, in Casablanca, Algiers, Alexandria, Khartoum, Beirut, Amman, Riyadh, Al-Medinah Al Munawarah, Kuwait city, Sana'a, Gaza and Tehran. Vulnerable and disadvantaged children include those who are poor, working children, girl child, children with disabilities, orphans, street children, refugee/displaced children, and children affected by violence.

## 1. Demographic characteristics

Most countries in the MENA region are characterized by high birth rates and gradually decreasing death rates, leading to a high rate of natural increase, especially when compared with developed countries and many other developing countries. The rates of population growth range from 3.5% for Saudi Arabia and Yemen, to 2.5% for Lebanon and Tunisia (UNICEF, 2003). Although the total fertility rate (TFR) has declined in some countries of the MENA region, the rates are still very high in many countries like Yemen (6.0), Saudi Arabia (5.3) Palestine (4.9), Iraq (4.1) and Jordan (4.0) (UNICEF, 2003: 76).

These high fertility rates lead to a broad based population pyramid; the proportion of population under age 15 is about 40% of the total population for most of these countries. The size of child population (0 to 18 years) in the MENA region is currently about 130 million and is projected to increase gradually to about 143 million in the year 2020. The rate of growth of children (0-18) varies significantly among countries. In the West Bank and Gaza strip, and Saudi Arabia, the child population is growing rapidly at more than 3 percent per year, whereas in countries with rapid fertility decline, such as Iran and Tunisia, the size of the child population has already started to decline (UNICEF, 2003). Table 1 shows the percentages of child population under 5, under 15 and under 18 years for some countries in the MENA region for the year 2001. The proportion of children under 15 years being 48.9%, 46.3%, 39.3%, 38.5% and 37.4% for Yemen, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Oman respectively.

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**Table 1. The percentages of child population (to the total population) in some countries of the MENA region, 2001**

| Country              | % of population under 5 year | % of population under 15 year | % of population under 18 year |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Bahrain              | 8.4                          | 29.4                          | 32.7                          |
| Iran                 | 10.5                         | 33.9                          | 44.3                          |
| Iraq                 | 15.4                         | N.A                           | 48.1                          |
| Kuwait               | 7.6                          | 26.3                          | 37.7                          |
| Oman                 | 15.9                         | 37.4                          | 50.6                          |
| Qatar                | 9.2                          | 26.9                          | 31.1                          |
| Saudi Arabia         | 15.5                         | 39.3                          | 49.0                          |
| United Arab Emirates | 7.5                          | 26.4                          | 30.7                          |
| Yemen                | 21.2                         | 48.9                          | 56.4                          |
| Jordan               | 15.5                         | 38.5                          | 46.5                          |
| Lebanon              | 9.4                          | 30.2                          | 36.5                          |
| Palestine            | 18.5                         | 46.3                          | 52.8                          |
| Syria                | 13.8                         | 39.1                          | 47.7                          |
| Algeria              | 11.4                         | 34.3                          | 41.0                          |
| Egypt                | 11.6                         | 35.7                          | 41.6                          |
| Libya                | 12.3                         | 32.0                          | 40.6                          |
| Tunisia              | 8.7                          | 29.4                          | 35.5                          |
| Morocco              | 6.11                         | 32.3                          | 40.6                          |

Note: N.A: Not Available

Source: Lynkeus and Censis, 2004. Charting the Mediterranean Child.

The proportions of children under 18 years for countries in the MENA region are considerably high compared with corresponding proportions for the less developed countries and for the developed countries; the percentages being 48.6%, 42.73% and 25.17% respectively (Lynkeus and Censis, 2004). The population projections for countries of the MENA region indicate that the child population will increase by about 30 percent in 2025, and the expansion will be faster in some countries like Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Oman, compared to other countries in the MENA region (Lynkeus and Censis, 2004). This expected increase in the number of children may adversely affect their socioeconomic situation and welfare, especially vulnerable and disadvantage children.

The countries of the MENA region are experiencing rapid urbanization due to the high rate of natural increase and to the continuous flow of rural-to-urban migration. The rate of urbanization is even higher in the Arabian Gulf countries compared to other countries in the region due to international labour migration from Southeast Asia, South Asia, Arab countries and from other countries of the world. The rapid rise in population of MENA cities, has had a profound impact on the most vulnerable group of the society, namely the children. In Jordan, for example, 78.7% of the population now live in urban areas, and almost three quarters (72%) of Jordan's population live in three governorates: Amman, Irbid and Zarqa. The highest proportion of the population (38%) is residing in Amman (IRC, 2004:7). The study by Al-

Sheddi and others, shows that the city of Riyadh is experiencing a very high rate of population growth, reaching 8.1% per year; the population of Riyadh has increased from 350,000 in 1970 to about 4,500,000 in 2003, and it is expected to reach 6.9 millions by 2010 (Al-Sheddi. et.al, 2004:2)

The city of Beirut contains now almost half of the population of Lebanon, including displaced persons. The growth of the city periphery and its population is due mainly to rural-to-urban migration, particularly from the South of Lebanon. The population living in the suburbs consists mainly of internal migrants that were forced out of their rural villages in the southern regions of the country due to civil war and the Israeli occupation (Deep, 2004: 5-6).

The population of Greater Khartoum ( including the three cities of Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman) has grown very fast during the last three decades; the official estimates shows that the total population of Greater Khartoum was about 5.4 million in 2003, implying an annual growth rate of 4.3% compared to a national level of 2.6% (Ibrahim and El-Karib, 2004:3). The high rate of population growth for Greater Khartoum is attributed to the high rate of natural increase, to the heavy rural-urban migration and to the continuous flow of internally displaced families due to civil war, famine, floods and desertification. It is worth noting here that children, and specially vulnerable and disadvantage children are the most affected by these disasters and by the civil war in the southern, western and eastern parts of

the country. Gaza city is the principal city and the main administrative centre in Gaza Strip, a rectangular coastal area on the Mediterranean sea adjoining Egypt. It is a densely populated and impoverished region inhabited primarily by Palestinian refugees; the majority live in large, overcrowded refugee camps. Approximately 33% of the families in Gaza live below the poverty line. Gaza, like most other Palestinian cities, took active part in resistance and uprisings against Israeli occupation. It was in the Gaza camps that the first uprising (Intifada) broke out before it spread all over Palestine (Ali, 2004). After the second Intifada broke out in September 2000, almost half of the active population cannot find work, either because they are not allowed to seek employment in Israel, or because the local economy was ravaged which compels many households to live below their usual living standards. The population under 18 years old in Gaza accounts for more than half of the population; and it is expected to reach 53% in 2010. Children have always been the most marginalized group in the Palestinian society due to Israeli aggression, and they have always paid the heaviest price in times of political unrest.

Algiers city has been the capital of Algeria since its independence in 1962. The population of Algiers has increased from 960,000 in 1966 to 2,700,449 in 2003, due to a high rate of natural increase and internal migration. The number of children under 19 years in Algiers city constitute 38.9% of its total population, distributed as: 8.9% for children aged 0-4, 9.4% for children aged 5-9, 10.1% for children aged 10-14 and 10.5% for children aged 15-18 (Gabi, 2004). The data shows no significant difference between males and females children in the city of Algiers; the percentages being 50.5% and 49.5% respectively.

## 2. Review of the status of children

Since the World Summit for Children in 1990, many countries in the MENA region have ratified the "Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)". Some of these countries have witnessed progress in addressing the rights of children in terms of: survival and health, education and development, child protection and child participation. Following is a review of:

### *Survival and health*

During the second half of the 20th century many countries of MENA region have achieved considerable reduction in infant and child mortality. The infant mortality rate (IMR) for Jordan, for instance, has declined from 151 per 1000 live births in 1961 to 28.5 per 1000 live births in 1997 (IRC, 2004:). Moreover, under-five mortality rate has declined from 38.8 per 1000 in 1990 to 34.2 per 1000 in 1997. Since 1998, no cases of death due to diarrhoea or severe dehydration were reported. Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) is reported as a leading cause of death among Jordanian infants and

the second among children age 1-5 years. The available information for Lebanon indicate that infant mortality rate has declined from 35% in 1990 to 28 % in 1996, and the under five mortality rate went down from 43 % to 32 % during the same period. The National Report on follow-up to the World Summit for Children, shows regional disparities among regions and between urban and rural areas. The rates for the Beqaa and south Lebanon are two- to-three times higher than the rates for Beirut and Mount Lebanon. This significant child mortality differential, together with problems of prematurity, low birth weight and congenital malformations present a serious challenge for health planners.

Sudan is characterized by the highest infant and child mortality rate compared to most countries in the MENA region. The Safe Mother Survey of 1999 reveals an infant mortality rate and under-five mortality rates of 68 % and 104 per 1000 for the Northern part of the Sudan (Ibrahim and El-Karib, 2004:4). The rates for the Southern region is even higher and this is due to the adverse economic situation and to the civil war since 1956. The survey has shown considerable gender differential for infant and child mortality; infant mortality is 73% for males and 62 %for females, and the under-five mortality is 108 %for males and 99 %for females. Diarrhea, ARI, malaria, anemia and dysentery are among the leading causes of child death in the Sudan.

The rates of infant and child mortality for Yemen are even higher than for Sudan: 96 %and 137 %respectively in 1997. Although, recent estimates for Yemen in 2002 have shown a decline for these rates to 73.3 %and 104.9 %respectively, child health and child survival remain serious challenges for health planners. The high rates of infant and child mortality for Yemen are attributed to low percentages of immunization, malnutrition and low birth weight. Deaths among children usually attains about 25% of the total mortality in Gaza strip. Children experiences of violence and trauma have long-term effects on their ability to heal. Children are burdened with heavy and disproportionate price for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, many with lives. More than 500 children have been killed since the beginning of the Intifada in 2000. (Ali, 2004). The UNICEF statistics show that the rate of "moderate" to "severe acute malnutrition" (wasting) among Palestinian children (6-59) months old, is 15.1% (PCSC, 2002). Furthermore, cases of anemia, parasite infections, hyper tension, diabetes have all increased.

### *Malnutrition*

It is worth noting here that Article 24. 2C of the Convention on the Right of the Child stresses the need to prevent malnutrition. Recent studies show that the level of malnutrition varies considerably among countries of the MENA region. According to UNICEF reports, malnutrition is not an acute problem in Jordan.

| Table 2. Availability and quality of information about vulnerable and disadvantaged children in some cities of the MENA region |                  |      |    |               |      |    |                  |      |    |                 |      |    |               |      |    |                              |                 |               |                      |                              |               |  |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------|----|---------------|------|----|------------------|------|----|-----------------|------|----|---------------|------|----|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------|--|--|
| Cities                                                                                                                         | Data on children |      |    | Poor children |      |    | Working children |      |    | Street children |      |    | Children with |      |    | Orphans & abandoned children |                 |               |                      | Refugee & displaced children |               |  |  |
|                                                                                                                                | A                | Q    | G  | A             | Q    | G  | A                | Q    | G  | A               | Q    | G  | A             | Q    | G  | Availability of data         | Quality of data | By gender age | Availability of data | Quality of data              | By gender age |  |  |
| Alexandria                                                                                                                     | A                | Good | A  | A             | Fair | NA | NA               | Nil  | NA | NA              | Poor | NA | A             | Fair | NA | NA                           | Nil             | NA            | A                    | Fair                         | NA            |  |  |
| Amman                                                                                                                          | NA               | Nil  | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | A                | Poor | NA | A               | Poor | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | NA                           | Nil             | NA            | NA                   | Nil                          | NA            |  |  |
| Beirut                                                                                                                         | A                | Good | A  | NA            | Nil  | NA | A                | Good | A  | NA              | Nil  | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | NA                           | Nil             | NA            | NA                   | Nil                          | Nil           |  |  |
| Casablanca                                                                                                                     | A                | Fair | A  | NA            | Nil  | NA | NA               | Nil  | NA | A               | Fair | A  | A             | Fair | NA | NA                           | Nil             | NA            | NA                   | Nil                          | Nil           |  |  |
| Khartoum                                                                                                                       | A                | Fair | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | NA               | Nil  | NA | A               | Poor | NA | NA            | -    | NA | NA                           | Nil             | NA            | NA                   | Nil                          | Nil           |  |  |
| Riyadh                                                                                                                         | NA               | Nil  | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | NA               | Nil  | NA | NA              | Nil  | NA | A             | Fair | NA | NA                           | Nil             | NA            | NA                   | Nil                          | Nil           |  |  |
| Sana'a                                                                                                                         | NA               | Nil  | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | A                | Fair | NA | A               | Poor | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | NA                           | Nil             | NA            | NA                   | Nil                          | Nil           |  |  |
| Gaza                                                                                                                           | A                | Fair | A  | NA            | Nil  | NA | A                | Fair | NA | NA              | Nil  | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | NA                           | Nil             | NA            | A                    | Fair                         | NA            |  |  |
| Algiers                                                                                                                        | A                | Fair | NA | NA            | Nil  | NA | NA               | Nil  | NA | A               | Poor | NA | A             | Fair | NA | A                            | Fair            | NA            | NA                   | Nil                          | NA            |  |  |

Note: NA = Not Available / A= Available / Nil= None

Source: Based on unpublished studies commissioned by CPI in 2004

Legenda: A Availability of data – Q: Quality of Data – G: By Gender Age

**Table 3. Indicators of Health problems due to malnutrition in children under 5 years in Yemen (%)**

| Malnutrition |         | Short Stature |                       | Low Weight    |                       | Disproportionate Weight and Height |                       |
|--------------|---------|---------------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Region Sex   |         | Face problems | Facing acute problems | Face problems | Facing acute problems | Face problems                      | Facing acute problems |
| Yemen        | Males   | 59.3%         | 18.6%                 | 50.5%         | 16.8%                 | 22.9%                              | 8.6%                  |
|              | Females | 54.9%         | 16.1%                 | 45.1%         | 15.0%                 | 20.1%                              | 6.8%                  |
| Sana'a       | Males   | 41.1%         | 13.1%                 | 37.3%         | 8.8%                  | 13.7%                              | 4.5%                  |
|              | Females | 41.4%         | 11.2%                 | 37.9%         | 7.5%                  | 13.4%                              | 13.4%                 |

Source: Dept. of Statistics, 1999, " Main Report for the National Survey on Poverty, Ministry of Finance, Sana'a, Yemen"

In 1997 the proportion of children (under-five) below average weight was only 5% , and the percentage of stunting children was about 8%. The percentage of goitre, the most visible iodine deficiency among school-age children was about 34%. Iron deficiency constitutes an important health concern in Jordan. Anemia prevalence is 35% among women in reproductive age (15-49). The percentage of school children with anemia is 15% for infants (IRC, 2004: 11-12).

For the case of Lebanon, protein-energy malnutrition (PEM) is present but in a limited form among families of low socio-economic status, the displaced persons and Palestinian refugees. Iron deficiency, anemia and growth faltering are reported for children aged 6-23 months. Gender differentials in nutrition status are slight. Children above age 5 have unhealthy eating habits. Iodine deficiency seems to affect children in Bekaa and the Mountains (Deeb, 2004: 16). The level of malnutrition in the Sudan, on the other hand, is higher than the level for many countries in the MENA region. Recent studies for the Northern part of the Sudan show that 11 percent of children under age five showed wasting (too thin for their height). Children whose mothers have secondary or higher education are likely to be underweight compared to children of mothers with less education. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) of 2000 shows that 31% of infants are estimated to weigh less than 2500 grams at birth (Ibrahim and El-Karab, 2004).

The data in Table (3) shows that children under-five years of age in Yemen are facing serious problems of malnutrition; 50.5% of the males and 45.1% of the females weigh less than the average. Moreover, 16.8% of the males and 15.0% of the females under age five face acute problems of low weight. The data also shows that 22.9% of the males and 20.1% of the females under age five are too thin for their height. In addition, 8.6% of the males and 6.8% of the females face acute problems of wasting.

#### *Educational status*

As a result of the national program of educational reform in Jordan, significant progress has been attained in the quantitative expansion of basic education and narrowing the gender gap in enrolment throughout the 1990s. The

primary enrolment ratio increased from 87% in 1990 to 91.1% in 2002, with minimal differential between boys and girls in both urban and rural areas. With regard to drop-out rates, the data from the Ministry of Education indicate that the rates are relatively low for early grades and start rising at age eleven.

The reasons for dropping out of school between 11 and 15 years can be attributed to financial pressure, poverty and poor school environment. With regard to early childhood education, the role of the Ministry of Education is limited to supervision and licensing of private and NGO kindergartens, the main providers of these services. The data for Jordan shows that the enrolment for boys is slightly higher than that for girls. Despite this considerable progress, the educational expansion in Jordan needs to be coupled with qualitative improvements particularly regarding vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Lebanon has the lowest illiteracy rate compared to other Arab countries: in 1996, its illiteracy rate stood at 13.6%, reflecting considerable progress in the field of education. The illiteracy rates vary considerably between regions, with the highest rate in North Lebanon (20%), and the lowest rates in Beirut and Mount Lebanon (9.5%).

Illiteracy rates vary as well between gender groups; 25.1% for females and 10.8% for males. In spite of the efforts of Sudan government to expand educational services, the literacy rates and the school enrolment are still low, compared to many countries in the MENA region. Among males and females age six and over, 34% and 51% are illiterate. As for pre-school education, slightly over 25% are enrolled in pre-school education. Regarding primary school attendance, the statistics show that 53% of the children of primary school age in the Northern part of the Sudan are not attending primary school (37% urban, 63% rural).

It is worth noting here that the enrollment ratios for Southern Sudan are much lower than in the Northern regions, due to civil war and lack of funds. Khartoum state has adopted a policy of main streaming disabled children into general education, however the data shows that less than 50% of them are enrolled in both general and special education. The major constrain is the lack of trained teachers to deal with disabled children. During

the last four decades, the general education in Yemen has witnessed continuous progress; new schools were built, teacher training was expanded and school equipments were increased. However, the enrollment ratios for both males and females are still very low compared to many Arab countries; the enrollment ratios being 64.8% and 37.9% for primary and secondary schools respectively, with gender differential, in favor of males. Pre-school education receives little attention in Yemen, because of limited resources allocated to this type of education.

There were only 13580 children enrolled in 184 kindergartens in all the governorates of Yemen; most of these institutions are located in urban areas (98%), and more than half are located in Sana'a (Al-Sabbri and Al-Howeri 2004). Primary school enrollment in Morocco is very high compared to Sudan and Yemen; the current enrollment ratio is about 92%. However, children from poor families find it difficult to continue their general education. Some schools in poor areas lack basic equipments, books and necessary health and sport facilities. Many classes are crowded; the class density is above 50. The pre-school enrollment in Morocco is 59%, and most of the pre-school institutions are operated by the private sector and NGOs.

### 3. Problems and issues facing urban children

As mentioned earlier, many cities in the Middle East and North Africa are witnessing a remarkable and an unprecedented rate of population growth. This high rate of growth led to many socio-economic, health, and environmental problems. Needless to say, children and specially vulnerable and disadvantaged children are adversely affected by these urban problems. This section will review issues and problems facing vulnerable and disadvantaged children residing in some cities of the MENA region. Most of the previous studies show general lack of information about the conditions of vulnerable and disadvantaged children, specially for urban centers. Limited data about these children is available only at the national level, and in rare cases the data is classified by age, gender and socio-economic characteristics. Table (2) shows that most of the urban centers in the MENA region lack the necessary data to identify problems facing vulnerable and disadvantaged children. It is worth noting here that the quality of the available data about this group of population is either "fair" or "poor", and rarely classified by age, gender and socio-economic characteristics.

#### *Poor children*

Accurate figures on child poverty are not available. However, using the simple proportion of child

population, the number of children in poverty (those on less than US\$ 2 per day) in the MENA region would be about 34 million. The general conclusion from studies for the nine cities (shown in Table 4), is that poverty is likely to remain an important threat to the region's children for the foreseeable future. The extent of child poverty among cities of MENA region varies considerably depending on the economic situation of countries in the region. The available estimates for poor children in Jordan range between 393,000 and 900,000; out of which only a small percentage (6% to 14%) receive any kind of financial assistance from both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The study for Jordan shows that one out of three children lives in poverty, (residing mainly in urban areas), and 75% of the cases are engaged in economic activities to support his/her large family. The percentage of poor people in Alexandria was estimated at 11.3%, and their total number amounted to 331252. The number of ultra-poor people amounted to 70354 in 2003. The number of poor children amounted, to 132062, including 28049 who can be considered as ultra-poor. Moroccan children (below age 18) have higher poverty rates than adults; the rates being 24.1% and 19.0% respectively. There is a considerable differential in child poverty between urban and rural settings; the rates being 15% and 32.4% respectively.

Table (4) shows that the main problems facing poor children in some cities of the MENA region are summarized in the following: (i) high levels of deprivation (ii) inheritance of poverty (iii) social exclusion (iv) challenges to child welfare (v) lack of basic services (vi) involvement in child labor (vii) school drop-out. Moreover, the study for Gaza city shows that children suffer repeatedly from loss of belongings due to demolished houses.

#### *Child labour*

Most of the studies on child labour in countries of the MENA region, indicate that child work is observed among poor populations with weak coping mechanisms vis-à-vis for economic crises. For that reason, child labour typically is regarded as a response to economic vulnerability. One of the major gaps in the existing literature is the absence of reliable estimates of the prevalence of child labour in many countries of the MENA region. The nature of child labour is complex and affected by a number of interrelated socio-economic factors including the structural changes in the economy, urbanization, enforcement of legislative laws and formal education. The cities studies commissioned by the CPI show that the phenomenon of child labour in the region is concentrated among males rather than females.

**Table 4. The Degree of vulnerability of children in some cities of the Mena Region**

| Cities     | Problems of Poor Children                                                                                 | Problems of Working Children                                                                                                                     | Problems of Street Children                                                                                                                          | Problems and Issues of Children with Disabilities                                                                                           | Problems of Orphans and abandoned children                                                                                            | Problems of Refugees & Displaced children                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alexandria | -deprivation<br>-Inheritance of poverty<br>-vulnerability to crises<br>-social exclusion                  | -working conditions<br>-industrial safety and health<br>-vocational training/remedial education<br>-recreation                                   | - exploitation<br>-violence/ abuse<br>-lack of legal protection<br>-health problems<br>- exposed to risks of violence                                | -prevention<br>-problem of early detection<br>-education<br>-lack of skills<br>-social exclusion<br>-protection from maltreatment and abuse | -emotional, physical and mental neglect<br>-deprivation<br>-social exclusion<br>- violence/abuse<br>-low education<br>-lack of skills | -education<br>-health care<br>-social, psychological rehabilitation<br>-recreation                                                                                                        |
| Amman      | -high level of deprivation<br>-challenges to child welfare<br>-lack of basic services & health, education | - low family income<br>- poor working conditions<br>- no health insurance<br>- long working hours<br>- minimal safety<br>- deprived of schooling | -negative community reaction<br>-police arrests<br>-health problems<br>-addiction and substance abuse<br>-emotional abuse<br>-lack of sound guidance | -visual and communication disorder<br>-mental retardation<br>-down's syndrome<br>-hearing impairment<br>-autism                             | -psychological problems associated with long term institution care<br>-deprived of family care                                        | -poor housing conditions<br>-physical & mental problems<br>-higher unemployment<br>-lower income<br>-limited basic services<br>-no access to safe water, sewage electricity and education |
| Beirut     | NA                                                                                                        | -poverty<br>-school drop- out<br>-poor working condition<br>-high cost of living                                                                 | NA                                                                                                                                                   | NA                                                                                                                                          | NA                                                                                                                                    | NA                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Casablanca | NA                                                                                                        | -families facing poverty<br>-long working hours<br>-bad working conditions<br>-low wages conditions<br>-hard job                                 | -drug abuse<br>-prostitution<br>-poverty<br>-no places for sleep<br>-police arrest                                                                   | -visual impairment<br>-mental retardation<br>-problems of adjustment in the community                                                       | NA                                                                                                                                    | NA                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Khartoum   | NA                                                                                                        | -poverty<br>-family displacement due to war & desertification<br>-deprived of schooling<br>-bad working conditions                               | -high mobility<br>-band health conditions<br>-school drop-out<br>-drug abuse                                                                         | -physical disability<br>-disability/ poverty<br>-mental disability<br>-few are enrolled in school<br>-health problems                       | NA                                                                                                                                    | NA                                                                                                                                                                                        |

CONTINUED - Table 4. The Degree of vulnerability of children in some cities of the Mena Region

| Cities  | Problems of Poor Children                                                                                                                                       | Problems of Working Children                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Problems of Street Children                                                                                                                           | Problems & Issues of Children with Disabilities                                                                                                                                             | Problems of Orphans & Abandoned children                                                                                                                                                | Problems of Refugees & Displaced children                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Riyadh  | NA                                                                                                                                                              | NA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | -use street as source of income<br>-children of illegal migrants<br>-selling goods<br>-live with their family                                         | -receiving better care<br>-efforts for their adjustment<br>-physical impairment<br>-visual impairment<br>-speech impairment                                                                 | -lack of family care<br>-problems of social exclusion<br>-need for adjustment                                                                                                           | NA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Sana'a  | NA                                                                                                                                                              | -poverty<br>-school drop – out<br>-poor working conditions<br>-high cost of living                                                                                                                                                       | -lack of parental care<br>-delinquency<br>-drug abuse<br>-health problems<br>-police arrests                                                          | NA                                                                                                                                                                                          | NA                                                                                                                                                                                      | NA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Gaza    | -high rate of poverty.<br>-belongings lost due to demolished houses.<br>-Children suffer from micro-nutrient deficiencies<br>-Many children suffer from hunger. | -5.9% of children 10-18 are in labour force.<br>-Child labour due to poverty & Israeli aggression.<br>-Family members turned out of job due to Israeli aggression.<br>-High rates of unemployment for parents due to Israeli aggression. | -Israeli aggression led children to streets.<br>-Psychological distress due to continuous conflicts.<br>-Emotional problems.                          | -Only 41.7% of children with special needs are enrolled in schools.<br>-Continuous conflict led to more disabilities.<br>-Psychological distress.<br>-Lack of skills.<br>-Social exclusion. | -Number of orphans increased and more males than females.<br>-Emotional & physical and mental neglect. - Deprivation.<br>-Low education.<br>-Convicted juveniles.                       | -Thousands of houses completely demolished.<br>-More families became refugees -due to hostilities carried out by Israeli army.<br>-Serious impact of hostilities on children's well being and stability.<br>-Inadequate buildings and infrastructure.<br>-Absence of recreation and cultural centers libraries, parks. |
| Algiers | NA                                                                                                                                                              | NA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | -No or little contacts with their families.<br>-Lack of schooling.<br>-Broken families.<br>-Health problems.<br>-Poor families.<br>-Risk of violence. | -Disability among children increase due to terrorism during the nineties.<br>-More physical disability.<br>-Visual impairment.<br>-Mental disability.<br>-Few are enrolled in school        | -Increasing number of orphans and abandoned children.<br>-Some children born to mothers is due to sexual abuse (mainly from terrorist).<br>-Deprived of family care.<br>-Low education. | NA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

Note:NA = Not Available

Source:Based on unpublished studies commissioned by CPI in 2004

The majority of working girls are involved in subsistence work and domestic chores. The majority of working children in the urban centers of MENA region belong to low socio-economic families. All the studies highlight the strong association between poverty and child labour. Poor parents often cannot afford the cost of education and need the income of their children as a supplement to the household income.

The city studies show that the proportions of child labour differ considerably among cities of the MENA region; the proportions are high for Casablanca, Alexandria, Khartoum, Gaza and Sana'a, and very low for Riyadh. The proportions of child labour for Amman and Beirut lie in the middle.

The data shown in Table (4) summarizes the main problems facing working children in the following:

- Low family income
- Lack of work place and minimum safety regulations.
- Substandard working conditions
- Long working hours
- Health problems and lack of health insurance
- Deprived of schooling and school drop-outs
- Low wages.

#### *Street children*

Street children are defined as: "children whose families and community were unable to meet their basic needs due to social and economic problems which push the child to live either partially or fully on the streets. The children mostly survive on their own, and lack any kind of care and protection. They are exposed to danger, abuse and deprived of their basic rights". The definition of street children varies from one country to another. In Jordan, for example, street children are not necessarily homeless, they are beggars who are mostly of school drop-outs, from poverty broken families, and/or internal migration. In Saudi Arabia street children are mainly children of illegal migrants and products of school drop-out and broken families. The main reasons given for the growing numbers of street children in Egypt are related to increase of poverty, social disintegration, child neglect and domestic violence. Studies in cities of the MENA region show that both boys and girls are found among street children, although the number of boys seems to be considerably higher. According to Khartoum study, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of street children because of their high mobility, lack of central registration and lack of public or private institutions for the homeless. However, a recent study by UNICEF, the number of street children in Khartoum ranges between 30,000 and 35,000 (Ibrahim and El-Karib 2004).

The main problems facing street children in some cities of the MENA region are as follows:

- Exploitation, exposed to risks of violence and abuse

- Health problems, drug abuse and addiction
- School drop-out
- Lack of shelter and homelessness.
- Children of illegal migrants, refugees, displaced families
- Lack of parental care
- In crime and police arrest
- Sexual abuse and prostitution

#### *Children with disabilities*

There is no unified definition of disability for the countries of MENA region. The National Council of Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in Egypt, defines a person with special needs as: "a person who suffers from impairments preventing him/her from playing the roles and executing the tasks that his/her peers of the same age, socio-economic and medical background do in the areas of education, play, vocational or academic formation, or familial and other relationships". Reliable estimates of child disability are not available for most countries in the region, although estimates for Egypt, Jordan and Yemen suggest that between 25 and 38 percent of all children between the ages of 0-14 years have some form of disability. The Demographic and Health Survey in Egypt for 2000, estimated that about 8% of all children suffer from one or more disabilities. If this percentage is applied to the total number of children in Alexandria, the number would amount to 93,494 children with disabilities. The following types of disabilities have been specified as the most common among children in cities of MENA region: Down's syndrome, autism, attention deficit disorder, mental retardation, spina bifida, muscular atrophy, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment and visual impairment.

#### *Orphans and abandoned children*

Abandoned children are defined as children with no family link and live entirely on their own, both for material survival and emotional comfort. The main reasons for children being abandoned are illegitimate sexual relations, poverty and family break-downs. Prevailing religious, social and cultural values led many women who become pregnant without being married to hide pregnancy and child birth. The city studies show limited information about orphans and abandoned children. Orphans are generally considered to be a high-risk vulnerable group in need of special protective care. Without family protection, orphans may lack appropriate health care services, or receive inadequate nutrition. Orphans may not be able to enroll in schools, or may be forced to drop-out early, and they may become street children. Detailed figures on orphans and abandoned children in Alexandria are not accessible. According to a list provided by the Directorate of Social Affairs, the total number of orphanages and care institutions in Alexandria amounts to 18 institutions hosting a total of 711 children, and no clear breakdown is available for boys and girls. There is no precise estimate of the number of orphans and destitute children in Jordan. This

is due to the fact that not all cases of deprivation of family care end up in institutional care. In most cases, the extended family plays a decisive role in protecting the child from delinquency through its full support, and also because of the way Islam emphasizes the importance of providing care, particularly to the orphans and destitute children. The study for Riyadh emphasizes the need for addressing problems of orphans and abandoned children through expanding institutional care, providing social, emotional and psychological adjustment to orphans and abandoned children. Some studies show that orphans placed in institutions receive inadequate care and facilities, and they may lose connection with their original communities.

#### *Refugees and displaced children*

The United Nations define a refugee as: “ someone who is outside his/her country of origin, has a well-founded fear of persecution of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion and is unable or unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country, or return there, for fear of persecution”. Displaced persons are defined as: “people who, as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights, natural or human-made disasters have been forced to flee their homes and have crossed an international border, but who are not legally recognized as refugees”. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the other hand, are those displaced persons who opt to seek refuge within their countries.

Palestinians constitute the greater number of refugees in the MENA region. There are about 3.7 million Palestinian refugees, living in camps established through UNRWA in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip. A large proportion of these refugees are children, who suffer from poverty, insufficient health, malnutrition and poor educational services. Recent statistics show that 42% of all Palestinian refugees are living in Jordan (1.7 million), and about one million of them are children and young people (under age 24). The largest number of refugees in Egypt come from Sudan (60%), the remaining originate from 35 different countries.

The official reports show that the total number of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt includes 20,000 Sudanese, 7000 Somalis and more than 1000 refugees from various other countries. In Egypt, there are between 50,000 to 70,000 Palestinians, the majority of whom has been displaced from the West Bank and Gaza by the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The studies of Khartoum, Algiers and Beirut provide no information about the refugees and the displaced persons. During the last two decades a considerable number of families has been displaced from the Southern and they Western regions of the Sudan (mainly to Khartoum) due to civil war, desertification, famine and floods. The group of refugees and displaced children in urban centers of MENA region face a number

of problems such as, poor living conditions, limited basic services, no access to safe water, lack of sewage system, electricity, social and psychological problems (Table 4).

## **4. Institutions working for vulnerable and disadvantaged children**

Most countries of the MENA region have moved from a situation where the state has sole responsibility for public welfare to a situation where society's well being and development depend on collaboration between civil society and governments. In many countries of the MENA region the role of NGOs is expanding, specially in carrying for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. In addition to ministries and governmental agencies, there are a number of active civil society organizations registered to work in different sectors of development.

The number of NGOs working in Jordan, for instance, has increased from 655 in 1995 to 830 in 2002. Currently, the number of NGOs working in Amman governorate alone reached 104. These organizations work in sectors of education, health, protection and recreation, all of which enhance the quality of children's life. A study on the situation of children and youth in Jordan indicates that the performance of NGOs has not been up to expectations, due to shortages in trained manpower and lack of resources. The study further points out to the lack of coordination among these institutions which resulted in duplication of their work.

The Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs, Ministry of Awqaf, Al Azhar, Ministry of Youth and the Young Graduates Employment Organization are among the many governmental agencies working with vulnerable and disadvantaged children in Egypt. There is a wide range of NGOs, mosques, churches and religious networks in Egypt providing aid and services to the poor and to vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The NGOs in Egypt offer a variety of projects including health care services, credit and saving schemes, literacy programs, support to children to prevent their dropping out of school, awareness raising activities, training and skills development.

Many ministries and governmental agencies in Yemen are also working with children, namely the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture and Information. In 1991, the government of Yemen has established the Higher Council for Childhood and Motherhood. This Council is responsible for formulating national strategies for all matters concerning the welfare and well-being of children. It is also a coordinating body for all the governmental and governmental agencies and organizations working with children.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The following are the most important key findings of the present study:

- Studies in some cities of the MENA region show that many interventions to improve the status of children are not effective enough due to inappropriate approaches and lack of coordination. These studies show that some important needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children are not addressed due to lack of expertise, qualified staff and specialized skills, specially for national NGOs and governmental agencies.
- Some national NGOs have limited attempts to involve community leaders in capacity building measures and training.
- Studies in some cities of the MENA region show that the levels of technical, planning, targeting, implementation and monitoring capacities differ widely among NGOs. Some international NGOs have important capacity building functions by providing training for staff of national NGOs or governmental agencies.
- Many of the existing services offered to vulnerable and disadvantaged children in some cities of the MENA region also suffer from deficiencies in program design, strategy, as well as institutional deficiencies and lack of commitment of executive staff
- Most of the cities in the MENA region lack sufficient information about children and specially information about vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The limited available data for V & D children in most urban centers is some times not available by age, gender and socio-economic characteristics.
- The lack of analysis of information for monitoring and evaluation purposes is another area of weaknesses for the governmental agencies and national NGOs, working with V& D children.
- Cooperation and coordination among governmental agencies as well as with NGOs is another point of weakness .

The task to improve the well being of children in the MENA region, specially of V&D children, is a daunting one which requires the collaboration of and close coordination between relevant government agencies, NGOs, regional and international development agencies. The role of municipalities in initiating and coordinating

these efforts is a central one – hence the role of the MENA Child Protection Initiative in building up municipal capacities is a vital role.

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