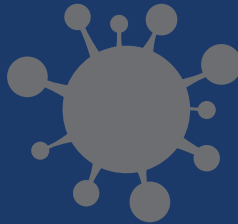


LEBANON UNDER COVID-19: GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)



Lebanon National Gender Observatory
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The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated all forms of violence against women. This brief examines the response of the Lebanese government and civil society organizations to gender-based violence (GBV) during the pandemic in terms of availability and access to protection services such as hotlines, shelters, psychosocial support and legal counseling.

COVID 19: COURSE AND IMPLICATIONS

In February 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Lebanon, at a time of existing political instability. The health emergency relating to COVID-19 has aggravated a months-old socio-economic crisis across the country, and its impact on the economy and the population of Lebanon is drastic. It is expected that 50% of the population will soon be living under the poverty line¹.

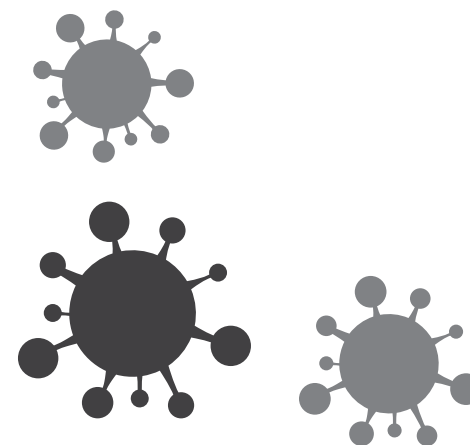
Following the lockdown in response to the pandemic, prolonged periods of isolation, income insecurity and restricted access to medical and social services have aggravated violence. Women refugees and women from the host communities belong to the most marginalized and vulnerable part of the society and have been hit the hardest.

WHERE ARE WE NOW

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the gender inequalities in Lebanon and exposed a weak protection system for women and girls which was particularly manifested in the lack of preparedness for the surge in the domestic violence cases, their severity, and the availability and access to state protection services in terms of free of charge hotlines, shelters, financial and legal support.

The explosion that took place in Beirut on 4 August left tens of thousands without shelter and put a mental and physical strain on a large proportion of the city's population. The dramatic event has aggravated the already precarious socio-economic situation in the country and uncovered the weakness of emergency preparedness and response.

With the restriction of movement and confinement to homes, there is the risk that most cases of GBV remain unreported and women in Lebanon continue to suffer. Structural reforms to combat GBV starting with stringent law enforcement measures, sufficient resources to programmes combating violence and protection services, and eradication of practices rooted in discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls are among the short and long-term measures to be urgently adopted by the policy-makers.



¹ <https://www.unescwa.org/news/Lebanon-poverty-2020>

GBV IN LEBANON UNDER COVID-19

Ever since the expansion of the coronavirus and the start of confinement, there has been a growing fear, worldwide, for the women and children stuck with one or many abusers.

Violence against women and girls is endemic in Lebanon. The IMAGES Survey¹ shows that 31 percent of women in Lebanon reported ever experiencing one or more forms of intimate partner violence, and 24 percent of men reported ever perpetrating one or more forms of intimate partner violence. The outbreak of the pandemic and its heightened worries and strains has intensified domestic violence cases.

The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS)² reports an increase in several forms of GBV during the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same period months of 2019. Data indicates a disproportionate impact of violence on women and girls (99%); a 5% increase of physical assault incidents, and a 3% increase of violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member. With the dominance of communication technology, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) report sexual harassment and blackmailing crimes to have increased by 184% through cyberbullying during COVID-19 lockdown³.

Furthermore, during the pandemic, the country has witnessed several female homicides many with unprecedented circumstances.^{4, 5, 6}

GBV actors in Lebanon, national, international, governmental, and civil society organizations adapted their services to new remote and alternative modalities in order to ensure that GBV services



remain available for women and girls during lockdown despite the immense challenges.

WOMEN FACING MULTIPLE FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION DURING COVID-19

It is intrinsic to note that Lebanese women are not the only women who suffer in Lebanon. The country has the highest refugee population per capita in the world. Incidents of harassment, discrimination and verbal, physical and economic abuses have been seen amongst particularly vulnerable groups, including refugees and migrant domestic workers. In areas with high refugee populations, the Lebanese Democratic Women's Gathering (RDWL) has registered a marked increase in the number of calls to the hotlines dedicated to supporting Lebanese and Syrian women and girls through the European Union Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the EU 'Madad' Fund. In March and April 2020, during the COVID-19 quarantine period, RDWL provided case management to 145 women and girls, psychological therapy sessions to 94 women and girls, and legal consultations and court representation to 256 women and girls. All services were given to survivors of GBV in Beirut, Baalbeck, Mount Lebanon, and Tripoli.

However, confinement rules and fear of the perpetrator affect the ability of victims to reach out for help. The number of Syrian women who would contact the Kafa NGO (Enough Violence and Exploitation) centre in Bekaa or call the hotline used to constitute 45% of the total number of women who reached out to the centre. However, since the first of April, only 6 Syrian women, out of a total of 22,

have contacted Kafa. The drop in calls from Syrian women, according to the organisation, can be linked to many factors, mainly the lockdown forcing people to stay in their houses or informal settlements, and the stricter confinement rules applied to the Syrian refugee camps in Beqaa governorate

Moreover, women migrant domestic workers, which are excluded from labour law protections are subjected to restrictive rules thus raising the risk of violence, exploitation and abuse¹. In some households, pre-existing abusive conditions have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. While staying at home can help prevent the spread of the virus, it increases the risk of exploitation and other forms of abuse suffered by live-in migrant domestic workers at the hands of their employers.² Also, there have been reports of undocumented female domestic workers being denied testing despite displaying symptoms of COVID-19 infection³. During this period, thousands of workers have flocked to their embassies, and hundreds of them have been deported according to general estimates.⁴

Women facing multiple forms of discrimination (migrant domestic workers, refugees, disabled women, ...) with lack of access to technology and information, are unable to receive vital information around GBV services, and unable to contact organizations or other community members to report GBV incidents, or to seek help when needed.⁵

¹ The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), the largest multi-country study, conducted surveys with 1,050 men and 1,136 women between the ages of 18 and 59, representing both the Lebanese and Syrian populations living in Lebanon.

² The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) enables those providing services to GBV survivors to effectively and safely collect, store, analyze and share data related to the reported incidents of GBV. These statistical trends are generated by the fourteen data gathering organizations that coordinate the GBVIMS through a national steering committee in Lebanon. The data is only from reported cases and does not represent the total incidence or prevalence of Gender Based violence (GBV) in Lebanon.

³ Lebanon Inter Security Forces, May 2020. Available at <https://twitter.com/LebISF/status/1257215652995182592>

⁴ Al Arabia. May 20, 2020. Available at <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/last-page/05/05/2020-#>

⁵ See more at <https://beirut-today.com/27/04/2020/call-toxic-masculinity-by-its-name/>

⁶ Sharika wa Laken Media, May 2020, 4. Available at <https://www.sharikawalaken.media/اب-بسم-است-ويقتل-في-عجالة/04/05/2020/>

¹ See more at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/lebanon/report-lebanon/>

² Amnesty International. (2020). Lebanon: Migrant domestic workers must be protected during COVID19- pandemic. Available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/04/2020/lebanon-migrant-domestic-workers-must-be-protected-during-covid-19pandemic/>

³ Azhari, T. (2020). Undocumented in Lebanon: No papers, no coronavirus test. Al Jazeera. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/03/2020/undocumented-struggle-access-coronavirus-tests-lebanon200328114859620-.html>

⁴ Kafa. "The Toll of Coronavirus on Domestic Workers in Lebanon: from Isolation to Confinement," May 2020, 01. Available at <https://www.kafa.org.lb/en/node/411>

⁵ Aoun, R. "Covid19- Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East," GBV AoR Help Desk. Available at <https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/05-2020/COVID20%19-and20%Impact20%on20%Vulnerable20%Female20%Migrant20%Domestic20%Workers5%B5%5D.pdf>

What are the provided services?

SERVICE PROVISION

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| HOTLINES | <p>Reporting lines are available 24/7 across the country, including the national ISF hotline and the lines of the nongovernmental service providers. However, the national domestic violence hotline (1745) is NOT free and as such remains inaccessible to some survivors.</p> <p>During March 2020, the ISF have reported that their hotline (1745) dedicated to domestic violence complaints has registered a rise of 100% in incoming calls, in comparison with March 2019. The 1745 ISF hotline received 151 calls in April 2020, compared to 97 calls in March 2020 .</p> <p>The hotline of Madad for Women partner RDFL, which has been active since 2016, has registered a 180 % increase in the number of calls received since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. After the official announcement of the lockdown, the hotline has been dedicated to providing online counselling -from 9 AM to 3 PM, Monday to Friday- to women and girls survivors of GBV, to ensure provision of remote case management, and responding to their needs in terms of psychosocial and legal support.</p> <p>The hotlines of Madad for Women partners, Legal Action Lebanon and Care International in Lebanon, provided legal assistance and counselling, psychosocial support, and sexual and reproductive health counselling.</p> |
| SHELTERS | <p>Women safe shelters are run by CSOs. Several women's shelters across Lebanon are at full capacity and have reported that they are no longer able to host new survivors. In addition, some shelters are unwilling to accept hosting survivors of violence due to fear of COVID19- contagion¹⁴.</p> |
| STATE PROTECTION SERVICES | <p>There are reports of forensic doctors being unable or unwilling to document physical abuse of survivors at police stations for fear of COVID19- spread, but some judges are waiving these procedures in favour of the survivor.</p> <p>Despite the lockdown measures, state security forces have been able to respond to cases of domestic violence by conducting home visits and receiving cases at police stations.¹⁵</p> |
| ACCESS TO SERVICES | <p>The Madad for Women programme has worked to adapt quickly to the current situation and geared all its efforts towards providing protective services for women and girls, which were classified as "vital" during COVID19-. Through domestic violence hotlines, sexual and reproductive health services, referral pathways, and legal consultations, GBV survivors are directly or remotely supported through consistent access to sustainable services.</p> <p>The Regional Civil Society Observatory, hosted by EuroMed Feminist Initiative in Amman, has produced under the Regional Campaign on Zero Tolerance for VAWG, funded by the European Union, a comprehensive directory of services for victims and survivors of VAWG in Lebanon to help them find the support they need. The directory provides the contact details of governmental, international and non-governmental organizations all over Lebanon distributed according to the type of service they provide.</p> |
| HEALTH SERVICES | <p>Hospitals and primary health care centres continue to provide medical care for incidents of physical abuse and clinical management of rape.</p> |

¹³ Inter-agency SGBV taskforce, NCLW, WHO, UN Women, UNFPA. (2020). "Gender Alert on COVID19- Lebanon – Issue 3". June 2020 .3. Data collected by the NCLW from the ISF. Available at <https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/06/2020/Gender-Alert-on-COVID-Lebanon-Issue3-English.pdf>

¹⁴ Inter-agency SGBV taskforce, NCLW, WHO, UN Women, UNFPA. (2020). "Gender Alert on COVID19- Lebanon – Issue 1". April 2020 ,10. Data collected by the NCLW from the ISF. Available at <https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/04/2020/Gender-Alert-on-COVID-Lebanon-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁵ KAFA. "March monthly report on domestic violence,". March 2020. Available at <https://www.kafa.org.lb/ar/node/407>

¹⁶ Directory of services, Available at [http://www.efi-ife.org/sites/default/files/Directory for services for victims of VAWG Lebanon - Ostik.pdf](http://www.efi-ife.org/sites/default/files/Directory%20for%20services%20for%20victims%20of%20VAWG%20Lebanon%20-%20Ostik.pdf)



ABOUT THE LEBANON NATIONAL GENDER OBSERVATORY

The Lebanon National Gender Observatory is at the forefront of engendering policies and practice by undertaking gender transformative research, providing gender analyses and gendered and evidence-based recommendations to national policy makers, and bringing together scholars, researchers, state actors and gender experts. Funded by the European Union through the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the EU 'MADAD' Fund, and supported by EuroMed Feminist Initiative, the Lebanon National Gender Observatory works on the engendering of Lebanon crisis response, ensuring the protection of Syrian refugee women and Lebanese women in the local communities. On a national level, it works on promoting international women's rights mechanisms in Lebanon.

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