



Lebanon National  
Gender Observatory  
المركز الوطني اللبناني  
للمساواة بين الجنسين

# Gender Analysis of the Beirut Blast:

Challenges and gaps in ensuring an inclusive  
immediate, mid-term and long-term response

Lebanon National Gender Observatory

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# Acronyms

<b>ATM</b>	Automated Teller Machines
<b>BFER</b>	Beirut Forward Emergency Room
<b>BEB</b>	Beit El Baraka
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>FHH</b>	Female Headed Households
<b>LRC</b>	Lebanese Red Cross
<b>LGBTQ</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
<b>MSNA</b>	Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>3RF</b>	Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual Reproductive Health
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund

**Scope & Purpose:** This brief sets out the main contextual factors surrounding the blast, gives an overview of gendered needs in the affected neighbourhoods, assesses the integration of gender in the response, considers challenges and gaps in the response, and offers recommendations for stakeholders.

**Approach & Method:** the Lebanon National Gender Observatory undertook a rapid review of reports, assessments and media coverage related to the Port Blast and held Key Informant Actors with five stakeholders involved in the response from across the government, United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society spectrum.

## Summary Findings

The Neighborhoods affected by the blast are home to a diverse range of people with different needs in the response, from business owners to migrant workers to people on lower incomes. Each population group has particular vulnerabilities and women and girl experience intersecting vulnerability;

There has been a quick locally led response to the Blast, spearheaded by local non-profit actors and volunteers, and supported by individual and private funding;

There have been multiple efforts to embed gender sensitivity into response efforts, but the overall response lacks cross-cutting gender considerations as most actors do not have systemic gender mainstreaming;

There is potential to scale-up and replicate women centred initiatives that provide assistance and promote the economic empowerment of women.

## Introduction

On August 4th 2020, two explosions (with the second categorized amongst the largest non-nuclear explosions in the world) occurred in the Beirut port, leading to massive human and material losses. There have been over 200 reported deaths, with an additional 5,000 people injured and 300,000 displaced, half of whom are women/girls, and one third children<sup>1</sup>. Estimates put the physical damages from the Blast at US\$3.8-4.6 billion, with losses anticipated in economic activity, fiscal revenues and possible trade disruption<sup>2</sup>.

Owing to Beirut's central role as the country's political and economic capital, the Blast has added an additional level of complexity to the multifaceted crisis which Lebanon is facing, which includes the Syrian refugee crisis, the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, underscored by the socio-political unrest. However, the impact of these crises is not necessarily felt equally across the affected populations, with women and girls known to be particularly vulnerable in times of crisis and other factors like income and migration status exacerbating vulnerability. Women are more likely to be food insecure, unemployed, lack access to social protection, shelter and legal residency status, making them less resilient to shocks<sup>3</sup>.

**“ This is an area where people live work and go out. It has a big variety and it has people from other nationalities Syrian and foreign workers, and we help everyone and based on the criteria and based on the needs. ”**

Samar Abou Jaoudeh, Coordinator at Lebanese Red Cross

Since 2011, conflict in Syria has led to a refugee crisis in Lebanon with an influx of millions of Syrians seeking asylum and almost 900,000 registered refugees remaining in Lebanon to date<sup>4</sup>. This large influx has adversely affected the socio-economic situation in Lebanon, decreasing the income of both host and refugee communities. By 2015 170,00 Lebanese had fallen into poverty, and unemployment doubled to reach 20%<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, refugees are mostly involved in informal unskilled labour, where there is potential for exploitation given its lack of regulation. The Syrian crisis has also increased strain on the already limited basic services and infrastructure, including healthcare, electricity, water, sanitation etc. This in turn has led to more competition over limited resources and services, which is a main driver of tension between host and refugee population. Increased tension can also be attributed to political reasons, as the presence of refugees has added a further layer of complexity to the confessional and politically driven tensions found in Lebanese society. Numerous instances of conflict between host and refugees have occurred since the beginning of the crisis<sup>6</sup>, and the “...relationships between Syrians and Lebanese can be described as weak...”<sup>7</sup>. In this context, women and girls are among the most vulnerable, with 79% of those involved in a study on the situation of refugee women in Lebanon reporting their inability to meet basic needs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "What do people in Beirut need after the explosion?" <https://www.rescue.org/article/what-do-people-beirut-need-after-explosion>

<sup>2</sup> World Bank. (2020). Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment. Washington DC: World Bank .

<sup>3</sup> Harb, M., & Fawaz, M. (2020). Leave No One Behind: For an Inclusive and Just Recovery Process in Post Blast Beirut. UNDP. p.3

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR Lebanon Portal <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

<sup>5</sup> ILO Response to Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon. <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/employment-policy/syrian-refugee-crisis/lebanon/lang-en/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Hostility grows towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon – Ellen Francis, Reuters, August 2017 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-refugees-tension-idUSKCN1B8128>

<sup>7</sup> Qualitative Research on Social Tensions in Lebanon – Empatika, July 2019

<sup>8</sup> Unpacking gender realities in displacement: The status of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon – UNWOMEN, 2018

Adding to the strain created by the Syrian crisis is the ongoing economic and financial crisis that has affected all inhabitants of Lebanon, regardless of nationality. By June 2020, unemployment in Lebanon had surpassed 30%, resulting from the unprecedented inflation and devaluation of the local currency. As a result, 550,000 individuals are unemployed, with 350,000 of them having lost their jobs due to the recent economic crisis, noting that a no gender disaggregated numbers were offered<sup>9</sup>. Prior to the explosion, one fifth of companies in Lebanon had either halted or suspended their work by 2019 with a further half completely shutting down by May 2020.<sup>10</sup> According to a report by the International Rescue Committee there were an estimated 30,000 unemployed women in Beirut alone pre-Blast, a number which is likely to have increased after the Blast last<sup>11</sup>.

Compounding this situation, Lebanon along with the rest of the world has been facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently Lebanon is facing a second much stronger wave of infections, with many health agencies (local and international) noting that it was triggered by the confusion created after the blast<sup>12</sup>. As of mid-October 2020, COVID-19 cases in Lebanon have surpassed 55,000, with 501 deaths<sup>13</sup>.

The pandemic played a major role in the deterioration of the Lebanese economy, and furthering economic gender inequalities, where women have been encouraged to leave the workforce in favour of taking on greater roles at homes<sup>14</sup>. This is an additional limitation to advancing women's economic participation and is particularly impactful on female headed households who carry a dual social responsibility as both breadwinners and housewives. Adding to the economic effect of the lockdown on women, it has also created social issues and protection concerns, with increased risk of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) and domestic abuse due to the lockdown<sup>15</sup>. Women's mental health has been affected by the multiple crises and the Blast it likely to put women at increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Lebanon's unemployment rate surges past 30% amid meltdown.

<https://www.consultancy-me.com/news/2900/lebanons-unemployment-rate-surges-past-30-amid-meltdown>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> "What do people in Beirut need after the explosion?"

<https://www.rescue.org/article/what-do-people-beirut-need-after-explosion>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53833273>

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Public Health Dashboard

<sup>14</sup> "Women's Needs and Gender Equality in Lebanon's Covid-19 Response." [https://www2.unwomen.org//media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/03/updated%20lebanon%20brief/gender%20and%20covid\\_english.pdf?la=en&vs=403](https://www2.unwomen.org//media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/03/updated%20lebanon%20brief/gender%20and%20covid_english.pdf?la=en&vs=403)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Harb, M., & Fawaz, M. (2020). Leave No One Behind: For an Inclusive and Just Recovery Process in Post Blast Beirut. UNDP.

In addition to the economic and health crises, Lebanon has been going through an acute socio-political crisis since October 17, 2019, which is a continuation of the political crises Lebanon has faced since 2011. Prior to the Blast, Beirut was home to widespread demonstrations and public outcry against the deteriorating socio-economic, health and safety situation in Lebanon, and the perceived inaction of the government. These protests (which have included a significant number of women protestors, organizers and leaders) have continued after the Blast, turning particularly violent on the 8th and 9th of August 2020, with over 700 protestors and security forces injured, and one security personnel killed.

As such, the Beirut Blast has had huge social, health and economic repercussions and has been an additional blow to Lebanese all over the country. In this context, women and girls, refugees and migrant workers face additional and specific vulnerabilities from these overlapping crises. The following sections will explore these vulnerabilities, followed by a profile of interviewed response actors and some of the challenges in ensuring a gender-sensitive response. The brief ends with recommendations for the Lebanese Government and humanitarian community.

# 02.

## Gendered needs in affected areas within Beirut

### Overview of affected areas

Beirut has been the political and economic centre in Lebanon since the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1991, with reconstruction efforts focused on the areas that now comprise Downtown Beirut. This has propelled many Lebanese from across the country, as well as migrant workers from multiple nationalities, to relocate to Beirut in search of employment. Geographically, the physical situation of the Blast on the sea side of the grain silos in the port, spared most of the Western part of the city from the full force of the explosions. The most affected areas are Medawar, Rmeil, Mar Mikhael, Gemmayze, Ashrafiyye (including Karm El Zeytoun and Siofi), Geitawi, Burj Hammoud and Karantina<sup>17</sup>.

These areas are demographically and economically diverse - a distinction that creates different needs. Whilst greater damage has been suffered in Beirut, the affected population within the Burj Hammoud municipality for example, is home to a large number of vulnerable individuals (men and women) and around half of the damaged infrastructure there is mobility infrastructure, essential for living conditions and economic activity<sup>18</sup> and implying greater vulnerability with further limited livelihood and income opportunities. Burj Hammoud and Karantina are industrial areas, with a high number of daily workers, refugees and migrant workers (especially women domestic workers) who have lost their stream of income, and are less likely to have emergency monetary reserves. The population is suited for cash assistance and cash for work interventions to help them recover and enhance their resiliency. Conversely, Mar Mikhael and Gemmayze are more urbanised and home to companies, coffee shops, restaurants and bars which have all been affected by the Blast, limiting the income of business owners and employees. These shops have been afflicted by the economic crisis and COVID-19 lockdown prior to the blast, and many are unable to rebuild using their own funds. Thus, by supporting the recovery of these businesses, actors can assure that employers and employees have access to a steady income.

<sup>17</sup> Analysis of affected areas in Greater Beirut – ACAPS August 2020

<sup>18</sup> World Bank. (2020). Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment. Washington DC: World Bank

This is particularly true for women led businesses and those with predominantly women staff, for whom a loss of income could lead to increased vulnerability and risk of abuse.

**“ Women who had small and medium business lost their work and here comes our role to rebuild these small business and empower women. ”**

**Maya Chams Ibrahimchah, Founder & President at Beit El Baraka**

Due to the above factors, it is essential to apply an intersectional lens<sup>19</sup> to the analysis of needs owing to the population's diversity in gender (including non-binary sexual orientations), age, nationality, sects/religions, ethnicity and race. For example, prior to the blast, the economic situation of Lebanese, refugees and migrant workers have suffered through the financial crisis and the COVID-19 lockdown. Daily workers were described as the most vulnerable, who spent the lockdown with no source of income<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, middle class families have been mainly affected by the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira, and consequently leading to the devaluation of their salaries, contributing to an increase in poverty. To assure that the response is effective and holistic, actors have to account for the specific needs of the different populations, and of the women from different nationalities and social classes.

<sup>19</sup> Intersectional theory asserts that people are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers.

<sup>20</sup> Key Informant Interview with Beit El Baraka

## Risks of sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls affected by the blast

Estimates indicate that 150,000 women and girls were among those displaced by the blast. Meanwhile, others (particularly women over 60) remain in their damaged houses, while some have been moved to temporary accommodation and communal shelters. These insecure conditions, coupled with the disruption to service provision, leaves women and girls vulnerable to exploitation and abuse<sup>21</sup>. In fact, shared shelters have been characterised as insecure, leading to an increase in cases of sexual exploitation, violence and abuse<sup>22</sup>. 54% of female respondents to a multi-sectoral needs' assessment conducted after the Blast have reported an increase in abuse, violence and harassment against women and girls<sup>23</sup>. Informants highlighted that protection from harassment and abuse, along with the freedom to make decisions were key concerns for women<sup>24</sup>. This was supported by a Gender Flash Report<sup>25</sup> to guide humanitarian responders on the needs of women after the blast, which identifies the increased risk of SGBV, with the decreased accountability in Beirut.

<sup>21</sup> UNFPA. (2020). Situation Report: Lebanon - Beirut Port Explosion. Issue No. 5. UNFPA.

<sup>22</sup> "What do people in Beirut need after the explosion?"

<https://www.rescue.org/article/what-do-people-beirut-need-after-explosion>

<sup>23</sup> "UN Women and partners provide immediate relief to women and girls impacted by the Beirut blasts."

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/8/news-un-women-and-partners-provide-relief-after-beirut-blasts>

<sup>24</sup> Key Informant interviews with LRC and UNICEF

<sup>25</sup> Gender Flash Report - The Beirut Explosion: What Humanitarian Response Needs to Know on Gender - UN Women August 17, 2020

## Female headed households and elderly women are amongst the most vulnerable

The gender analysis of the Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) of the Beirut Explosion<sup>26</sup> identified that 50% of the participating households as being female headed (FHH). Female heads of household often have to balance providing financially for their families and managing caring activities, often contributing to time poverty. The assessment found these households were 16% more likely to report persons with disability in the household, when compared with male headed households and were also more likely to report a need for medical and hygiene items. As such, FHH are more likely to need support for family members with a disability, and in accessing basic medical and hygiene services and equipment. During one of the key informant interviews (UNICEF), the participant stressed on the importance of considering the needs of children and their caregivers, especially households where females are the sole breadwinners. This group is facing decreased livelihood opportunities and income, potentially leading to the adoption of negative coping mechanisms such as prioritizing basic needs over children's education. This is particularly true in the switch to remote learning, where many families are suffering to cover the costs for devices and internet connection.

Moreover, 3% of all assessed households reported having a pregnant or lactating women, who present increased vulnerability and need for continuous access to health care. The assessment showed that 45% of those households reported needing help in accessing sexual reproductive health (SRH) and child health services. This is supported by the Gender Flash report which identifies the reduced capacity of Beirut's hospitals to offer SRH post-blast.

The same MSNA assessment found that 13% of the interviewed households were composed of older women living alone, three quarters of whom were over the age of 60. Elderly women are among the overrepresented populations living in poverty in Lebanon, being less likely to have worked and have saving or access to a retirement pension. This population is also more likely to be at risk of exploitation and abuse<sup>27</sup>. This increased vulnerability has been noted by all of the interviewed actors, who have prioritized aid to them.

This was supported by secondary literature which has highlighted deepening vulnerabilities and increased risk of marginalization particularly amongst women, children and the elderly residents who have refused to leave their damaged houses<sup>28</sup>.



**Picture 1** In the absence of social security and pensions, Beit El Baraka has been supporting the elderly population of Beirut prior to the Blast

<sup>26</sup> |Emerging Gender Analysis - Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment of the Beirut Explosion - UNOCHA, UNWOMEN and ACTED August 2020

<sup>27</sup> The Gerontologist, "Aging in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities," October 14, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4542589/>.

<sup>28</sup> What do people in Beirut need after the explosion? <https://www.rescue.org/article/what-do-people-beirut-need-after-explosion>

## Women migrant workers in a struggling economy and an afflicted city

Prior to the blast, there had been increased cases of abandonment, abuse and denial of pay and passport perpetrated by employers against women migrant workers<sup>29</sup> including as a result of covid-19. Migrant workers (of both genders) normally send a significant proportion of their earnings back to their countries of origin, but with the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira, some workers have been dismissed by employers not able to provide them with cash dollars<sup>30</sup>. Others are receiving payments in the Lira, and have to exchange to dollars at the elevated rates of the black market to send money home.

In the aftermath of the blast, women migrant workers have been identified as one of the most vulnerable groups<sup>31</sup>. With the increased need for aid across Beirut and Lebanon owing to the multi-faceted crisis, UN agencies have reported that migrant workers have been overlooked by humanitarian assistance, and their needs must be included in the response<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Abandoned and forgotten, the Beirut explosion leaves Lebanon's migrant workers more vulnerable than ever - Gaia Caramazza & Florence Dixon, August 11th, 2020

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Key Informant Interview with Gender and Inclusion Focal Person at UNICEF

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

## Deepening vulnerabilities for the LGBTQ community

LGBTQ individuals have been majorly impacted by the blast<sup>33</sup> as they resided in areas affected by the blast, where they faced less homophobia and discrimination. The neighbourhoods of Mar Mikhail and Gemmayze had been considered relatively safer for LGBTQ community<sup>34</sup>. Their displacement increases their risk of facing harassment and prejudice<sup>35</sup>. Many members of the LGBTQ community relied on health and protective services from NGOs, and were already struggling to make a living given the dire economic situation. Due to the last, many of the services which the LGBTQ community relied on are no longer available<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore, during a key informant interview (UNICEF), it was highlighted that LGBTQ individuals face “housing and employment discrimination” when looking for accommodation and new jobs, which is bound to occur in the aftermath of the Blast.

<sup>33</sup> Gender Flash Report - The Beirut Explosion: What Humanitarian Response Needs to Know on Gender UN Women August 17, 2020

<sup>34</sup> Harb, M., & Fawaz, M. (2020). Leave No One Behind: For an Inclusive and Just Recovery Process in Post Blast Beirut. UNDP.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

## Inhibitors to gender analysis of needs: over representation of males in assessments and data collection

Initial data collection exercises conducted by local and international actors did not carry significant gender sensitivity components to capture the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls. This is evident in the assessments, reports and situational updates<sup>37</sup> released by some agencies up to two weeks after the blast, that offer limited insight to the particular needs of women and girls affected by the blast.

The over representation of male respondents in many of the assessments and data collection exercises conducted after the blast, has been also pointed out in an interview with the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC). The participant noted that more men were interviewed/surveyed than women. This could be in large part due to the nature of the Blast which occurred in the Port, where the majority of employees are men (day labourers and migrant workers)<sup>38</sup>, and that men were more likely to return to assess the damages after their families were displaced.

Gender and age disaggregated data is needed to identify the differential needs of women and girls, men and boys.

Many agencies have responded to the under representation of women. Interviewed implementers (LRC and Beit El Baraka) noted that their assessments account for gender considerations and the particular needs of women, whilst UNICEF mentioned that UN agencies have been working to assure gender mainstreaming, particularly UN Women which released a check-list for gender sensitivity in Beirut Blast response programming.

<sup>37</sup> Including assessments and reports released by: World Vision, strategy&, ACTED's Rapid Needs Assessment, and situation reports presented by local organizations such as Makhzoumi Foundation

<sup>38</sup> 2020 BEIRUT PORT EXPLOSION RESPONSE PLAN. [https://www2.unwomen.org/ /media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/08/un%20women%20lebanon%202020%20beirut%20port%20explosion%20response%20plan%20\(238\).pdf?la=en&vs=2907](https://www2.unwomen.org/ /media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/08/un%20women%20lebanon%202020%20beirut%20port%20explosion%20response%20plan%20(238).pdf?la=en&vs=2907)

# 03.

## The response so far: adaptation, coordination and challenges

The response to the Port Blast includes national (governmental, civil society and NGOs) and international actors (foreign governments, donor agencies, UN agencies, INGOs). While international actors, including donor agencies and NGOs, have played a significant part in the response to the Beirut Blast, local agencies have been crucial to relief and recovery efforts. The days following the Blast witnessed a rapid response from individual and group initiatives, local NGOs, and civil society organisations (CSOs), including women-focused organisations. They have taken part and many times led, search and rescue, rubble removal, provision of aid (food, shelter, medical, cash etc.) and rehabilitation/construction efforts<sup>39</sup>.

The below section provides examples of the work being done by local and international actors interviewed for this brief while highlighting the interaction between them, and the challenges they face.

<sup>39</sup> 2020 BEIRUT PORT EXPLOSION RESPONSE PLAN. [https://www2.unwomen.org/ /media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/08/un%20women%20lebanon%202020%20beirut%20port%20explosion%20response%20plan%20\(238\).pdf?la=en&vs=2907](https://www2.unwomen.org/ /media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/08/un%20women%20lebanon%202020%20beirut%20port%20explosion%20response%20plan%20(238).pdf?la=en&vs=2907)

## Lebanese Army taking a leading coordinating role

Following the Blast, Beirut city was announced as an “afflicted city”, and the Lebanese Army was tasked with the safety and security of the city, as well as the overall coordination of the response from the government’s side<sup>40</sup>. However, the response of the Lebanese government as a whole, faced criticism from international and local actors, who have marked the delays in planning and coordinating the response, as well as in deploying man-power, resources and experts. This also comes with the widespread criticism and mistrust directed towards the government by the Lebanese population, who have been holding anti-corruption and anti-establishment protests since October 2019<sup>41</sup>. The miscoordination between non-profit actors and the government, and the absence of a leading may lead to a protracted crisis with inefficient service delivery, not attuned to the needs of the local population<sup>42</sup>.

**“There are three problems: No precision of jobs, no decision making [at] the high level to arrange and to remove the destruction, and it is not clear who will pay [for] repair...”**

Colonel Marwan Aridi of the Lebanese Army

The Lebanese Army set up the Beirut Forward Emergency Room (BFER) - a coalition consisting of the Lebanese Army, Lebanese Red Cross, Beirut Governorate, Beirut Municipality, High Relief Committee, the Ministries of Health, Social Affairs, Public Works and Transport, Communications, Energy and Water, and the Civil Defense - four days after the blast, coordinating mainly with the LRC who provided the army with information and technical assistance. A centralized call center was set-up, with guidance and training from the LRC, to take on the calls of actors working on the ground and to capture the concerns and needs of anyone affected by the Blast and the call center has received over 6,000 calls to date (not all related to the blast). The Lebanese Army has also been providing services and referring cases to other actors. Services provided include cash assistance for affected families, medication, food, health and shelter (particularly for persons with disabilities). In addition, the Army has linked its work with the psychological first aid being provided by multiple agencies (such as LRC and UNICEF), and is also receiving and identifying cases of abuse, harassment and sexual exploitation, which they refer to the relevant authorities/service providers

<sup>40</sup> As mentioned during a KII with the Lebanese Army and the BFER

<sup>41</sup> Fawaz, M., & Harb, M. (2020, October 13). Is Lebanon Becoming Another “Republic of the NGOs”? Arab Center Washington DC.

<http://arabcenterdc.org/research-paper/is-lebanon-becoming-another-republic-of-the-ngos/>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

## Experienced local actors leading the response

The Lebanese Red Cross was one of the main actors first present on the ground after the blast, transporting wounded persons, providing primary health care treatment and providing essential goods. The LRC reached over 36,000 people through door-to-door household MSNA surveys, providing them with a multi-sectoral view of the affected population's needs<sup>43</sup>. While a gender analysis of this MSNA was conducted for 4,000 of those surveys (results presented earlier), a gender analysis for the complete results is not available yet, and there is no indicator of gender specific questions to probe into women and girls' particular needs.

The LRC has also provided 5,000 households with cash assistance, to help them cover basic needs and empower them financially<sup>44</sup>. The rationale, methodology and gender considerations of the cash assistance were discussed during the KII. The representative explained that households are supported through cash dollar assistance withdrawn from automated teller machines (ATM), with a monthly value of 300 USD over seven months. The cash dollar payment is not affected by the devaluation of the Lira. In selecting recipients, FHH, households with pregnant women and infants are prioritized owing to their vulnerability. It should be noted that the LRC's assistance also included mental health care and psychosocial support for men, women and children.

<sup>43</sup> Beirut Explosion Weekly Update - Lebanese Red Cross, from August 4th till October 14th 2020

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

## Local actors shifting their scope of work to respond

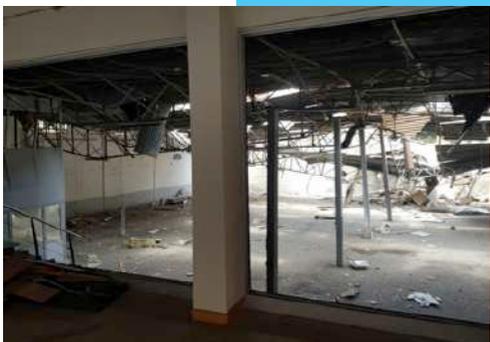
While the LRC has been involved in emergency responses over most Lebanon's modern history, amassing considerable experience over the years, other local actors had to shift their scope of work to respond to the blast.

A prime example of this is Beit El Baraka (BEB), a local NGO that began supporting vulnerable retirees and households in poverty in 2019. This includes providing food, shelter, and medicine to more than 300 families, an effort which was scaled up during the COVID-19 pandemic to reach 15,000 families. Shortly after the blast, BEB stated that services were expanded to include rebuilding homes, and empowering businesses. A total of 3,011 homes have been rehabilitated, and the food needs of 2,020 families have been met.



**Picture 2** Beit El Baraka's Free Supermarket, where beneficiaries are given the freedom of choice to collect their own food assistance

Particularly for businesses, BEB has committed to rehabilitating of 200 small and medium enterprises affected by the blast. BEB has focused on women entrepreneurs and women owned businesses who the representative described as among the most vulnerable in Lebanese society, noting the social norms restricting women's economic participation. By supporting these women led businesses, BEB is helping them sustain their financial independence despite the Blast.



**Picture 3** Despite the heavy damage to Souk El Tayyeb's offices and marketplace, staff were still able to provide aid

Another example is local social enterprise, Souk El Tayyeb, that was able to shift its focus in response to the Blast and continue supporting women's economic empowerment. Souk El Tayyeb began in 2004 as a farmer's market promoting small-scale farmers, and grew to a collaboration of farmers, cooks, and chefs specializing in Mouneh across Lebanon. The Souk's offices and restaurants in Mar Mikhail and Siofi were heavily damaged, but their teams were able to set up an emergency kitchen at the World Central kitchen, providing meals to the volunteers and those affected by the blast.

**“When the explosion happened, we wanted to stop everything. Two days later, the ladies from the kitchen told me that they were coming, they started helping out in the first emergency kitchen that we created, and we were giving food for the homeless.”**

**Kamal Mouzawak, Founder of Souk El Tayyeb**

This initiative not only met the increased need for food directly after the blast, but also allowed the staff to continue receiving a financial income. The initiative, dubbed “Matbakh El Kell” (Everyone's Kitchen), has hosted international and national volunteers, and is supported by individual donations and private fundraising efforts.

## International institutional actors supporting gender sensitive response actions

International institutions and UN agencies have supported the relief efforts by promoting coordination, and by providing services and resources (in-kind and financial). One interviewee noted there have been collaborative efforts amongst the different UN agencies, including the production of a Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF), which was submitted to the World Bank and the European Union, and should include gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting theme.

UN Women has created a checklist of humanitarian and relief actors responding to the blast, to make sure that interventions are gender sensitive, although the uptake and usage of this will need to be monitored. Other UN agencies have been supporting the particular needs of women and girls. For example, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided medical services to pregnant women, assisted women's access to mental health support, and distributed dignity kits<sup>45</sup>.

UNICEF has responded through the reconstruction of the Karantina Hospital, which faced great damage and UNICEF has been providing cash assistance to people living in the most vulnerable and damaged areas of Karantina, Burj Hammoud, Remail and Basta. The once-off cash assistance targets females headed households, and households with children, elderly persons (over 70), and persons with disabilities. UNICEF has also focused on the psychosocial well-being of children and their caregivers, offering mental health support to those who need it.

<sup>45</sup> Young women and men step up to rebuild Beirut after the blasts. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/8/feature-youth-step-up-to-rebuild-beirut-after-blasts>

## Coordination: challenges and successes

Coordination between different actors (international and local) was one of the earliest highlighted issues in the response. In the first week after the Blast, there was no central coordinating bodies, as such all involved actors' efforts were not regulated, which as one informant noted led to duplication and waste of human effort and resources<sup>46</sup>, and with reports characterising the official response as 'slow and uncoordinated'<sup>47</sup>. With the establishment of the BFER, this was mitigated to a certain extent, but many actors (mainly local ones) refused to coordinate with the Room based on the mistrust of the government. There was a general criticism by key informants, and in the reviewed literature, on the delayed response by the government. Many noted that this was the main reason for the lack of coordination in the earlier stages of the response, an issue which all of the interviewed actors have pointed out. Another main barrier toward coordination, is the overall lack of trust of the government's capacity and ability to take on a more effective role in the response. Without a central coordinating body, the risk of having a fractured response increases, leading to duplication of efforts, decreased response time and inability to control quality of interventions. Additionally, as one report noted, the NGO sector is not necessarily free from political or sectarian organisation and without coordinating recovery efforts effectively, there is a risk of contributing to aggravating existing social tensions and inequalities, and creating new ones.<sup>48</sup> The responsibility of coordinating the response does not lie among non-governmental actors. It is crucial to have a central coordination governmental body/mechanism to assure gender is mainstreamed and social inclusion and conflict sensitivity considered across all sectors, and upheld at all levels.

<sup>46</sup> Key Informant Interview with the BFER

<sup>47</sup> Harb, M., & Fawaz, M. (2020). Leave No One Behind: For an Inclusive and Just Recovery Process in Post Blast Beirut UNDP.

<sup>48</sup> Harb, M., & Fawaz, M. (2020). Leave No One Behind: For an Inclusive and Just Recovery Process in Post Blast Beirut UNDP.

Notably, the response to the Blast has seen instances of close coordination between local and international actors. Local actors, such as the LRC, have used their early presence to provide other actors, with information from the field and to initiate coordination and referrals with other actors. The interviewed LRC representative describe a referral system that was set in place in the first 72 hours after the blast, focusing on providing women with mental health support. Also, LRC has established a referral link with UNICEF, for referrals to ensure children affected by the Blast have the means to continue education, through cash assistance and registration support. However, volunteer organisations have been instrumental in the response, but are less connected to the recovery, leading to a risk of uncoordinated work<sup>49</sup>, not to mention missed opportunities to fund, support and scale voluntary or grassroots initiatives where effective

<sup>49</sup> Harb, M., & Fawaz, M. (2020). Leave No One Behind: For an Inclusive and Just Recovery Process in Post Blast Beirut. UNDP.

## Access to funding, a challenge for all actors

Acquiring consistent and sustainable funding for response work was an issue noted by all interviewed local actors. Interviewed local actors have not been able to access funding from international agencies and governments. While many countries have provided immediate in-kind and human resources, financial support to local and international actors remains limited. Multiple international appeals have been released, and numerous pledges made, but processes for the disbursement and allocation of this funding present further delays as the response progresses.

While the response of local actors was quick and energetic, there are concerns for the sustainability of the response without access to more sustainable funding, not through private efforts<sup>50</sup>. One representative highlighted that most local initiatives are relying on private funding initiatives from individuals and groups, particularly coming from the Lebanese diaspora. However, institutional international funding through multilateral and bilateral agencies has not reached many local initiatives, which limits the scale of their interventions<sup>51</sup>. Private donations may be suited for short-term and small-scale quick impact projects, but institutional donations allow for a more sustained response, which is needed in crises of this magnitude. As such, the efforts of local actors (NGOs and CSOs) providing gender sensitive aid may be hindered with limited funding. Large donations made by international agencies empower local actors, and contribute to the localization of the response, promoting increased resilience and ability to respond to crises.

Another local organisation echoed this, stating that most local initiatives are able to implement gender sensitive and needs based programming, but would require a supportive response coordination system that eases and does not hinder work<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Fawaz, M., & Harb, M. (2020, October 13). Is Lebanon Becoming Another "Republic of the NGOs"? Arab Center Washington DC. <http://arabcenterdc.org/research-paper/is-lebanon-becoming-another-republic-of-the-ngos/>

<sup>51</sup> Key informant interviews with local actors (BEB and Souk El Tayyeb)

<sup>52</sup> Key Informant interview with Souk El Tayyeb

“*This is something to build upon [localisation of the response], to work with [local gender focused] organizations even without crisis...*”

May Abou Samra, Gender and Inclusion Officer

Also, these actors will most likely not have access to funding from the Lebanese government. The deployment of governmental funds is often delayed due to bureaucratic processes, as with the compensation for those affected by the blast, which was announced in September and released in October. Initial statements by officials suggest that almost all governmental funds will be mainly channeled through the Lebanese Army, and the High Council for Relief.

Issues in the transparency of accessing international funding was noted by most interviewed actors. Non-governmental actors, including local and international organisations and civil society actors have called for the release of aid directly to associations and organisations, while the governmental actors (Army) have called for a transparent distribution of aid. The Army representative called for a “Master plan”, that outlines a clear aid-distribution mechanism across all levels, from the donor to the implementers and finally to the beneficiaries. Till date, no clear plan has been set except for the general Flash Appeal released by UNOCHA, which includes the particular needs of women and girls affected by the blast, and has gender mainstreamed in all of the identified priority sectors of intervention. However, this plan only covers the response up until November 2020.

## Needs for great involvement of women in planning and strategizing

A main challenge toward the gender sensitivity of the response, is the limited involvement of women in strategic planning. This lack of involvement may hinder the relief and recovery efforts’ ability to respond to the needs and vulnerability of women and girls<sup>53</sup>. The underrepresentation of women was particularly evident amongst governmental agencies. At the national level, the Lebanese political system remains a male dominated space, with women comprising just 4% of parliamentarians and 30% in the last cabinet which had a significantly higher women representation than previous ones. This may gravely affect how attuned the response is to the particular needs of women and girls<sup>54</sup>. For example, only 18% of the government inter-ministerial committee on COVID-19 are women<sup>55</sup>, an issue which was highlighted by UNFPA as a major barrier towards the inclusion of women and girl’s needs in the response to the COVID-19 crisis, especially with the increased risk of SGBV and loss of livelihoods due to the lock-down. The same gender in-sensitivity could be replicated in the response to the Beirut Blast.

<sup>53</sup> Young women and men step up to rebuild Beirut after the blasts. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/8/feature-youth-step-up-to-rebuild-beirut-after-blasts>

<sup>54</sup> Gender Flash Report - The Beirut Explosion: What Humanitarian Response Needs to Know on Gender - UN Women August 17, 2020

<sup>55</sup> Gender Alert on COVID-19 in Lebanon: “Government of Lebanon’s Inter-Ministerial on COVID-19, June 2020; 7 out of 39 of the NOR technical team members are women”.

# 04.

## Learning from Women Centred Initiatives

Beyond the coordination challenges of the response, the interviews and desk review have highlighted some successes in ensuring a gender sensitive response to the Beirut Blast. There are a great number of personal, group and institutional initiatives in Lebanon and abroad focusing on aiding those effected by the blast. Among these initiatives, many were focused specifically on women and girls. Below is a non-exhaustive set of examples that put women at the centre of what they do.

### Consistent delivery of SGBV services

Despite the damage which occurred to 16 Primary Healthcare Centers (which are part of the services provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs), the SGBV hotline and clinical management of rape (CRM) facilities remain operational. As mentioned by multiple key informants, this has allowed service providers to continue the referral of identified SGBV cases. As mentioned earlier, it is crucial to maintain such services, as crisis contexts can lead to an increase in harassment and sexual abuse cases, particularly amongst the vulnerable and marginalized populations.

### Contributions to gender sensitivity in data collection and needs assessments

All of the interviewed agencies have mentioned that gender is disaggregated in their assessments and data collection exercises, including the LRC, BEB, the Lebanese Army and UNICEF, but none of these assessments were tailored to capture the specific needs of women and girls. Also, none of the reviewed data collection exercises had a non-binary gender disaggregation, which may lead to the exclusion of affected LGBTQ individuals.

UN agencies and international organisations have laid out concrete steps as to how gender sensitivity can be encouraged in needs assessments. This includes setting indicators that will offer a detailed gender breakdown (including LGBTQ) on the composition of households, the needs of different individuals within each household, and the safety and protection status of all members . The availability of concrete and gender specific data will contribute to the design of programmes, projects and interventions that address the needs of the targeted populations through a well-developed theory of change.

<sup>56</sup> As reported by UNICEF, UNFPA and the Ministry of Public Health

<sup>57</sup> Emerging Gender Analysis - Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment of the Beirut Explosion - UNOCHA, UNWOMEN and ACTED August 2020

## Women and girls at the forefront of the response, where gender roles don't matter

The initial local response to the Blast can be described as community based and built on the enthusiasm of local youth, organisations and associations to help those affected.

Women in particular have played an integral part of the response in their roles as nurses, doctors, paramedics, fighters and social/humanitarian workers. This is not only limited to women from within Beirut, as many groups and women's organizations and associations have come to Beirut to provide whatever aid they can<sup>58</sup>. The presence of experienced women in the field contributes to the gender sensitivity of the response.

An additional success has been that many volunteers were willing to take on roles that are normally considered a women's job, such as preparing meals for beneficiaries, volunteers, and aid workers. Multiple local NGOs and CSOs have noted and encouraged this, as an additional step towards defying social gender roles<sup>59</sup>.



**Picture 4** The mixed but predominantly female staff of Souk El Tayyeb preparing meals for volunteers and those in need

<sup>58</sup> Gender Flash Report - The Beirut Explosion: What Humanitarian Response Needs to Know on Gender - UN Women August 17, 2020

<sup>59</sup> Young women and men step up to rebuild Beirut after the blasts.

## Meeting the affected population's needs, while empowering women

Some local initiatives have kept women at the centre of the response, whether they are the ones benefitting or providing the service/assistance. While numerous actors have such initiatives, the following are some examples gathered through key informant interviews and secondary literature.

Souk El Tayyeb was one of the organisations heavily affected by the Blast, with damage to their kitchens valued at USD 660,000<sup>60</sup>. With the loss of these spaces, many of Souk El Tayyeb's staff, who are mostly migrant workers, rural women and refugees, face a loss of income as their work is put on hold.

The head of Souk El Tayyeb described the situation post-Blast as dire, and the first thought was to close operations and plan for recovery.

Two days after the Blast, the women employed in the kitchens organized themselves, and set-up in an emergency kitchen to provide food to volunteers and those in need. The kitchen provides up to 1,500 meals per day and has given 70 women with a continued source of income through their work at the kitchen. The purpose of this initiative, is to continue supporting the economic empowerment and financial independence of those employed at the Souk, particularly women to whom an additional income means freedom from social norms and a lowered risk of exploitation and abuse at home.

Souk El Tayyeb also launched multiple fundraising initiatives, one of which that led to the rebuilding and relaunching of the Souk El Tayyeb markets. Operations were moved to the fixed location (dubbed Matbakh El Kel), and collected funds are being used to supply the kitchen and pay the fees for cooks and employed women. There are enough funds to compensate for the work of 30 women for a year.

<sup>60</sup> Fighters and farmers step in to help Beirut after the blast. <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2020/Aug-19/510497-fighters-and-farmers-step-in-to-help-beirut-after-the-blast.ashx>

“ *Women who had small and medium business lost their work and here comes our role to rebuild these small business and empower women.* ”

Maya Chams Ibrahimchah, Founder & President at Beit El Baraka

Beit El Baraka is another actor who focused on rebuilding businesses, to ensure that employers and employees have access to sustainable livelihoods while recovering. This includes the rehabilitation of businesses affected by the Blast and owned by women, as well as providing them equipment to resume operations. Many women led businesses have been destroyed by the blast, particularly those in Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhael. The owners of these businesses are optimistic of their ability to rebuild using private donations and their own efforts, in order to grow and continue to provide livelihood opportunities for their employees<sup>61</sup>. However, this may not be the case for women business owners in other areas that are more economically underdeveloped (such as Burj Hammoud and Karantina), and may not be able to lobby for private donations or afford to rebuild on their own.

<sup>61</sup> "Cultural First Aid: Post-blast, can Beirut save its heritage and art scene? <https://beirut-today.com/2020/09/18/cultural-first-aid-post-blast-beirut/>"

# 05.

## Recommendations

This brief has highlighted the different ways women, girls, from all communities have been affected. While all suffer gender-related consequences of the blast, women migrant workers, poor women, elderly and women heads of households have been left particularly vulnerable following the Blast. Whilst efforts have been made to ensure an inclusive response, gaps remain, their needs have must be addressed appropriately.

The recovery from the Blast goes beyond meeting immediate humanitarian needs, to a longer term economic and infrastructural recovery process that must integrate gender and inclusion or risk reproducing existing inequalities in society.

As a unique institutional entity in Lebanon focusing on producing knowledge on gender equality issues in Lebanon, and based on the main findings of this rapid assessment, the National Gender Observatory offers a series of recommendations for the immediate, mid and long-term recovery for government and humanitarian actors. The target audience for each recommendation is highlighted.

## Immediate

At the current stage of the response, actors are focusing on life-saving aid to affected populations, with some rehabilitation and work for homes and businesses. The following recommendations are for a period of three months and respond to the most urgent gender specific needs that service providers must consider.

1. Provide multi-sectoral aid to female heads of households to meet their individual and families' needs. This may include cash assistance, food, health and protection to all members of the family, and supporting their children's access to education **(local and international aid providers);**
2. Enhance the capacity, quality and security of temporary women's shelters **(government, donor agencies, local NGOs, CSOs, and INGOs);**
3. Arrange secure temporary accommodations suitable for members of the LGBTQ community **(local NGOs, CSOs, and INGOs);**
4. Provide migrant workers with their basic needs, legal advice and support for their repatriation if desired **(government, local and international aid providers);**
5. Identify and support (financially and through capacity building) local grassroots initiatives targeting and supporting women and girls **(local NGOs, CSOs, INGOs, and donor agencies);**

## Mid- term

In the aftermath of the immediate response to the crisis, and with more concrete information on how the response will progress, the following considerations will guide decision makers on how to maintain gender considerations in advanced relief stages, and in the shift from relief to recovery. These recommendations are applicable for an additional six-month period after the immediate phase.

1. Enhance monitoring of gender mainstreaming and targeting by international and local NGOs, and local CSOs through the cluster system **(government, UNOCHA, UN Agencies and sector leads, BFER);**
2. Conduct, and disseminate the findings of, an intersectional gender impact assessment (joint or coordinated individual ones) to quantify and develop a deeper understanding on the needs of women and girls **(government, local NGOs, CSOs, and INGOs, UN agencies);**
3. Set up a consultative group of leading women in Lebanon from a variety of sectors and backgrounds to oversee the recovery planning from a gender perspective **(government);**
4. In the business sector, prioritise supporting women business owners, and businesses with employees amongst the vulnerable populations, to promote resilience, self-sustenance, and financial independence of women **(local and international aid providers).**

## Long-term

The following recommendations offer guidance on how gender needs can be met longer term and how the response to the Blast can influence change in the lives of affected women and girls' post-recovery.

1. Contribute to social behavioural change regarding gender roles and stereotypes by showcasing women's role in the response (**government, local NGOs, CSOs, and iNGOs**);
2. Identify opportunities for recovery programming to additionally address roots causes for gender-based inequalities and vulnerabilities (**donor agencies, local NGOs, CSOs, and iNGOs**);
3. Invest in setting up sustainable women centred services (i.e. women's shelters, enhancing sexual and reproductive health care in PHCs...) that can last beyond the response and meet the needs of the population beyond the crisis (**government, donor agencies, local NGOs, CSOs and iNGOs**);
4. Create gender sensitive preparedness and emergency response mechanisms, including: Disaster Management Units, Disaster Risk Reduction plans and response frameworks. This will enable stakeholders to provide gender sensitive aid during future crises in a timely and efficient manner (**government, local NGOs, CSOs, donor agencies and iNGOs**).
5. Produce analyses, research and roundtables to coordinate governmental body efforts and assure gender is mainstreamed (**Lebanese National Gender Observatory**)

# 06.

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## About the Lebanon National Gender Observatory

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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's Region Fund, and supported by EuroMed Feminist Initiative, the 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.