



Lebanon National  
Gender **Observatory**  
المركز الوطني اللبناني  
للمساواة بين الجنسين

# Women in Crises:

Barriers to accessing services during  
crisis (COVID-19/Beirut Blast)

Policy Brief Series: Brief 4

December 2020



Funded by the European Union  
تمويل من الاتحاد الأوروبي



EuroMed Feminist Initiative  
المبادرة النسوية الأوروبية  
Initiative Féministe EuroMed



Lebanon National  
Gender **Observatory**  
المركز الوطني اللبناني  
للمساواة بين الجنسين



Lebanon National  
Gender **Observatory**  
المركز الوطني اللبناني  
للمساواة بين الجنسين

## SUMMARY FINDINGS

- With COVID-19 and Beirut Blast, the number of reported SGBV cases have greatly increased;
- Due to the crises, women's vulnerabilities were amplified at various levels putting them at greater risk of SGBV;
- Services were made unavailable, suspended or inaccessible due to the crises;
- SGBV service providers are overloaded and remained given the high need;
- Remote modalities were used as mitigation measures to support SGBV survivors yet limitations remain.



Funded by the European Union  
ممول من الاتحاد الأوروبي



EuroMed Feminist Initiative  
المبادرة النسوية الأورو متوسطية  
Initiative Féministe EuroMed

[www.nationalgendervservatory.org](http://www.nationalgendervservatory.org)

**Scope & Purpose:** the Lebanese National Gender Observatory has issued this brief, focusing on the situation of girls and women in Lebanon, in light of the overlapping crises. The brief provides an overview of the specific risk factors for SGBV faced by women due to the COVID-19, the Beirut Port Blast and the economic crisis. It also identifies barriers faced by women and girls in accessing services, particularly those responding to SGBV. The brief will also explore recommendations for service providers and authorities responsible for responding to or making referrals for women experiencing SGBV.

**Approach & Method:** a review of relevant secondary literature related to how women are experiencing the different crises in Lebanon was conducted. In addition, five key informant interviews were held with SGBV or gender experts and practitioners. Special thanks to practitioners and experts who participated in the interviews from RDFL, Embrace, Himaya, Lebanon Legal Action, ISF and the public administration.

## Table of Contents

<b>01- Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>02- Women in the Face of Crises: Specific vulnerabilities and exacerbated risks of SGBV .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>03- Barriers to women accessing SGBV Services .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>04- Recommendations.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>05- References .....</b>	<b>17</b>

# 01 Introduction

Women in Lebanon face distinct challenges, bias, discrimination and abuse in almost all aspects of their lives and in addition to these challenges, the country faces multiple overlapping crises including the Beirut Port Blast, COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis. With little to no governmental aid, and an overall weak social protection, women in Lebanon bear the brunt of the multiple overlapping crises.<sup>1</sup>

Crises more often than not **magnify existing inequalities**, whether based on gender, class, age or nationality.<sup>2</sup> For women in particular, this includes being more prone to fall into unemployment, and an increased risk of facing sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), including domestic violence<sup>3</sup>. The SGBV Taskforce found in 2019, increased risks of domestic violence, harassment, child marriage and child labour in response to social unrest and economic crisis and these trends will have been exacerbated by covid-19 and the Port Blast.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the **response to the multiple crises has been mostly gender-blind** according to a policy brief released by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)<sup>5</sup>, as an effective response must consider the social prejudices and conservative norms that discriminate against women. These considerations have not been adequately observed in the response to the **Beirut Port Blast**, the gender implications of which are discussed in detail in the first policy brief issued by the Lebanese Gender Observatory.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the **COVID-19 response** led by the Lebanese Government only addresses the “health emergency” that the pandemic poses, overlooking the medium and long-term socio-economic repercussions faced by the population as a whole, and women in particular.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Women. (2020). Women's Needs and Gender Equality in Lebanon's COVID-19 Response. UN Women | Arab States. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/gender-equality-in-lebanon-covid-19-response#:~:text=Publications-,Women's%20Needs%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20Lebanon's%20COVID%2D19%20Response,contribute%20to%20shaping%20the%20response.>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> UN Women. (2020). Women's Needs and Gender Equality in Lebanon's COVID-19 Response. UN Women | Arab States. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/gender-equality-in-lebanon-covid-19-response#:~:text=Publications-,Women's%20Needs%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20Lebanon's%20COVID%2D19%20Response,contribute%20to%20shaping%20the%20response.>

<sup>4</sup> SGBV Taskforce. 2019. "Humanitarian impact assessment of Lebanon's ongoing social unrest and possible economic crisis on women and girls." Inter-Agency Coordination.

<sup>5</sup> UN Women & UN ESCWA. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in the Arab Region. Retrieved from <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/the-impact-of-covid19-on-gender-equality-in-the-arab-region>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

The National Action Plan responding to the pandemic has been described by multiple local and international NGOs as being gender blind, and does not respond to the needs of women who are disproportionately affected by the crisis.<sup>8</sup>

The government declared a state of “general mobilization” in March 2020, and a series of total or partial lockdowns ensued, with the most recent one ending in November 2020. As reported by multiple agencies that provide SGBV services and all interviewees, including the ISF gender focal point, **cases of domestic abuse and SGBV have increased during the lockdown**, with the main perpetrator being a member of the core family<sup>9</sup>(father, mother, husband). This is concerning, as the only national level statistics available on SGBV (by UN Women in 2017) show that one out of every three women in Lebanon have experienced a form of SGBV.<sup>10</sup>

 *We (ISF) conducted a study to compare the percentage of violence before and after COVID-19, and the numbers have doubled.* 

*ISF gender focal point*

The evidence collected for this brief indicates that these numbers have increased, and more women are facing sexual abuse, rape, harassment and physical assault. Women are also victims of non-physical forms of abuse which are less commonly reported to organisations. This includes psychological abuse (verbal insults, humiliation etc.), financial abuse (withholding money, taking away income etc.) and restrictions on movement and blackmail (i.e. threatening to take away their children, enabled by the discriminatory personal status laws).<sup>11</sup> In addition, gender based violence is known to often be underreported generally; and particularly in the context of covid-19, when survivors may be living with perpetrators, their ability to safely report is constrained. Adding to this organisations have noted that victims do not feel confident that the perpetrator will be disciplined and thus are not encouraged to report.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the true prevalence of GBV is likely to be higher.

While multiple actors including the government, international and local NGOs, CBOs and CSOs are providing women and girls with protective services, there remain **numerous barriers hindering access to these services**. The following brief explores the exacerbated risks of SGBV that women face in times of crisis and the barriers to accessing SGBV services; and then offers recommendations to strengthen SGBV prevention and response in Lebanon.

---

<sup>8</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Focal point from Himaya

<sup>10</sup> Kafa. (2020, May 8). Calls Have Doubled Due to Lengthy Confinement and Crimes against Women: Kafa's April Report. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Focal point from Himaya

# 02

## Women in the Face of Crises: Specific vulnerabilities and exacerbated risks of SGBV

***Crisis contexts exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, with responses overlooking the particular needs of women***

**The Beirut Port Blast** which occurred on August 4th 2020, left hundreds of thousands homeless, and deepened the vulnerabilities of many. According to research studies, **women are “the ones bearing the brunt of the fallout of this devastating event”**.<sup>13</sup> After the blast, women from all nationalities, social classes and ages have suffered from higher risks of SGBV, limited access to health and protective services, job losses and psychological trauma.<sup>14</sup>

Globally, covid-19 restrictions have been linked to rising prevalence of GBV and Lebanon is no different. The quarantine and isolation policies applied by the Lebanese government have worsened the situation for women and girls who suffer from or are at risk of facing SGBV, as in many cases they were confined with the perpetrator<sup>15</sup> who in many cases had already violent behaviors prior to the crisis.<sup>17</sup> In addition, many women have seen their caring burdens increased, pushed to provide care to mildly infected persons with no access to treatment or healthcare.<sup>18</sup>

When coupled with the **economic crisis and the devaluation of the local currency**, the lockdown has increased individual and household stress leading to more cases of domestic violence and child protection issues.<sup>19</sup>

🗣️ *When I come back home my children are hungry, my wife says that I didn't bring food, children are not studying, everything is missing at home.* 🗣️

*Reported by a beneficiaries to the focal point from Himaya*

Prior to the Blast and the pandemic, **women in Lebanon were already suffering due to the economic crisis**. The majority of women in Lebanon are employed in the informal sector, leaving them without access to social safety nets, and often rendering them the first to be let go when employers decide to down-size.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Gharib, S. E. (2020, October 28). Women in Beirut at Increased Risk of Violence and Unable to Access Care After Port Explosion: Study. Global Citizen. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/women-beirut-explosion-gender-based-violence/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> ISF Focal Point, see also: Barkawi, Ben, “Coronavirus lockdown exposes LGBT+ people to family abuse in Middle East,” Openly, March 18 2020, <https://www.openlynews.com/i/?id=0880b357-da90-43a4-8ac7-36009a699482>,

<sup>17</sup> Focal point from RDFL

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

Moreover, the multiple crises have also **negatively influenced women and girls' mental health and psychosocial well-being**. One study conducted by the SGBV taskforce in December 2019 (prior to the pandemic) looked at the **specific impacts of the socio-political unrest and a possible economic crisis** (the devaluation only just begun at that time) on women. Participants in the study mentioned the additional pressure and stress they face due to increased domestic chores and care work for family members, as they were forced to stay home due to the protests and road blockages. Many participants noted that **men were forced to stay home with reduced livelihood opportunities** which led to them being "angrier than before" and more prone to violent verbal or physical outbursts.<sup>21</sup> The same participants expressed a need for **additional psychosocial support for women**. In their view, without a place to vent like men have, they would often take out their frustrations on their children, leading to deep remorse and guilt later on.

With the **pandemic and the social-unrest, more women are avoiding to travel alone in both urban and rural settings** in fear of abuse or harassment. This particularly affects working women without a personal means of transportation, especially women migrant domestic workers who rely on public transportation to move around.<sup>22</sup>

Multiple sources have shown that women from disadvantaged and marginalized groups face additional and are particularly at risk of experiencing gender-based and sexual violence due to the multiple crises. For example, many **women migrant domestic workers** work in less than favorable conditions, where their basic rights are not granted since they are not governed under the Lebanese Labour Law, but under a separate sponsorship or "Kafala" system.<sup>23</sup> With the current situation in Lebanon, women workers face additional pressure as they are physically away from their family members, have had their income decrease due to the lock down (for daily cleaning workers) and are at a higher risk of unemployment for those working in individual households.<sup>24</sup>

More recently, a large number of **women domestic workers** have been **abandoned by their employers** who are no longer able to pay their salaries in USD. The workers were left stranded at the doors of their respective national embassies with no money, shelter or means of communication.<sup>25</sup> This was further confirmed by one of the interviewees, who reported that the most recent form of violence faced by migrants domestic workers is that they are left in the streets by their employers<sup>26</sup> potentially putting them at risk of exploitation and abuse.

---

<sup>21</sup> SGBV Taskforce. 2019. "Humanitarian impact assessment of Lebanon's ongoing social unrest and possible economic crisis on women and girls." Inter-Agency Coordination. December 10. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/72847>.

<sup>22</sup> UN Women. (2020). Women's Needs and Gender Equality in Lebanon's COVID-19 Response. UN Women | Arab States. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/gender-equality-in-lebanon-covid-19-response#:~:text=Publications-,Women's%20Needs%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20Lebanon's%20COVID%2D19%20Response,contribute%20to%20shaping%20the%20response>.

<sup>23</sup> Lebanese National Gender Observatory (December, 2020) "Policy Brief Two: Gender Analysis of the Lebanese Legal System"

<sup>24</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Amnesty International. (2020, June 3). Lebanon: Abandoned migrant domestic workers must be protected. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/lebanon-abandoned-migrant-domestic-workers-must-be-protected/>

<sup>26</sup> Focal Point from Lebanon Legal Action

*They can't pay their money so they just throw them on the road. It's not COVID that led to these problems, it's the financial situation that was exacerbated during COVID*

**Focal point from Lebanon Legal Action**

Additionally, firing of migrant workers due to the dollar exchange rate has been associated with an increase in child labor, as employers seek to fill household roles with people that can hire domestically and pay in LBP. One interviewee noted girls aged between 8 and 14 working in households cleaning due to this.

**Syrian refugee women** have also suffered particular consequences as a result of the crisis. In addition to the aforementioned risks faced by other women due to the lockdown, refugees have been targeted with movement restrictions and curfews by multiple municipalities limiting their ability to move around.<sup>27</sup> Another assessment noted verbal abuse and discrimination against Syrian women and non-Lebanese in aid distribution access.<sup>28</sup> This leaves families economically vulnerable and resulting in negative coping mechanisms.

*For the South for example, there has been an increase in the level of GBV (physical abuse) at the household level. Other trends have also been observed in relation to child labour. Syrian girls in the North, Palestinians in the South and Lebanese in Beirut (increased following the Blast)*

**Focal point from Himaya**

### **Increase in SGBV cases due to the different crises, particularly the COVID-19 lockdown**

Interviewees noted that two women focused local NGOs (Kafa and Abaad<sup>29</sup>) have reported a significant increase in the numbers of calls received on their SGBV hotlines during the lockdown. In April 2020, Kafa received 562, which is double to those in March when the lockdown began.<sup>30</sup> UN Women statistics support this finding, as since the lockdown measures, there has been a 3% increase in domestic violence, 5% increase in physical assault and a 9% increase in violent incidents occurring at the victims' home.<sup>31</sup> The increase in calls, as mentioned by the interviewees, is mainly due to the fact that abuse has significantly increased, as they are stuck at home with the perpetrator for extended periods of time,<sup>32</sup> but also because of the increased awareness on SGBV.<sup>33</sup>

*A lot of women are afraid to talk about their situation because of the social pressure, so they prefer to stay silent.*

**Focal point from RDFL**

<sup>27</sup> Idem

<sup>28</sup> UN Women, CARE, UN ESCWA, ABAAD, UNFPA (2020) Rapid Gender Analysis of the August 2020 Beirut Port Explosion: An Intersectional Examination

<sup>29</sup> Focal point from Himaya and Embrace

<sup>30</sup> Kafa. (2020, May 8). Calls Have Doubled Due to Lengthy Confinement and Crimes against Women: Kafa's April Report. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>

<sup>31</sup> UN Women. (2020b, June). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20of-fice%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/lebanon%20gender%20alert%20issue3/update%20652020/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%203english.pdf?la=en&vs=3305>

<sup>32</sup> Kafa. (2020, May 8). Calls Have Doubled Due to Lengthy Confinement and Crimes against Women: Kafa's April Report. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>

<sup>33</sup> Focal point from Embrace and Lebanon Legal Action

It should be noted, that Kafa has also observed that the number of calls received often increases after crimes against women are reported on national news sources. These women who have kept silent about the abuse they have faced (at times for years), and only spoke out when in fear for their lives.<sup>34</sup>As such, there is evidence to say that the reported numbers underestimate the actual cases of abuse faced by women.

Given the confinement, many women are resorting to texts and reaching out through social media, trying to prevent the abusers from knowing<sup>35</sup>, whenever the phone is not confiscated from them.<sup>36</sup> Women who are confined with their abusers have reported that their perpetrators often use the pandemic as a justification for increased harm, and many cannot flee due to the lack of a better alternative.<sup>37</sup>

As for Syrian refugees, Kafa report that the number of calls received have decreased during the lockdown. Their experts view that the decrease does not necessarily mean that violence has decreased, but that women living in camps face greater isolation as their confined living spaces limits their privacy and ability to report abuse without the knowledge of the perpetrator. They also face dire restrictions to their movement, as they are unable to go out even for their basic needs (e.g. withdrawing money, buying food or medicine etc.).<sup>38</sup> Refugees also suffer from the additional burden of sub-par living conditions as their homes may lack running water or efficient heating sources.<sup>39</sup>

### **Overlooked forms of SGBV emerging during the COVID-19 lockdown**

UN Women and the Issam Fares Institute<sup>40</sup> have both noted in recent studies that the COVID-19 lockdown has made **undiscussed forms of SGBV come to light**. According to the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF), **online sexual harassment and blackmailing** using intimate content have increased by 184% during the lockdown. These cases have **disproportionately affected girls and young women**, as 41% of the total cases were related to 12 to 26 year olds, and 27% were related to women older the 26.<sup>41</sup> As a response to this, the ISF has been working on a campaign for cyber bullying and abuse in addition to the hotline (01/293293). Those platforms would allow the victim to report any cyber bullying or abuse.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Al Arabiya English. (2020, May 20). Coronavirus: Domestic violence grows under Lebanon's lockdown. <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2020/04/13/Coronavirus-Domestic-violence-grows-under-Lebanon-s-lockdown>

<sup>36</sup> Focal point from RDFL

<sup>37</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Kafa. (2020, May 8). Calls Have Doubled Due to Lengthy Confinement and Crimes against Women: Kafa's April Report. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>

<sup>39</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> UN Women. (2020b, June). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/-/field%20of-ice%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/lebanon%20gender%20alert%20issue3/update%20652020/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%203english.pdf?la=en&vs=3305>

<sup>42</sup> Focal point from ISF

Lebanon has one of the highest gender gaps in the world ( ranking 139 out of 153 countries in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap report 2020), and amongst the lowest global rates of women's labor market participation, hovering at 29% for women and 76% for men<sup>43</sup>. As such with the economic crisis and COVID 19, more women are experiencing **economic violence** and financial dependency<sup>44</sup>; that include when perpetrators limit their access to money, education and/or employment. A total of 53% of all SGBV cases included denial of resources, and KAFA received 98 cases of economic violence during the lockdown (March and May 2020).<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup>UN Women (2020, May 15). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. <https://www2.unwomen.org//media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/05/gender%20alert%20lebanon%20may/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%202%20english.pdf?la=en&vs=5557>

<sup>44</sup>Focal point from Lebanon Legal Aid

<sup>45</sup>Ibid

# 03

## Barriers to women accessing SGBV Services

### **COVID-19 lockdown and economic crisis hindering women and girls' access to protective services**

Women and girls **access to essential and protective services** (i.e. health, centres, hotlines, shelters) has been **decreased by lockdown and social distancing measures**. According to Plan International, 83% of women who took part in a study reported that “fear of coronavirus” as a reason for not seeking sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services.<sup>46</sup>

Local and international NGOs have attempted to **continue their work through remote modalities**, such as keeping their hotlines running 24 hours per day. However, even the hotlines have their limitations, as the National Domestic Violence hotline (1745) is not free, making it inaccessible for impoverished women and girls.<sup>47</sup>

There also remains **a strong need for in-person services crucial for women facing SGBV**.<sup>48</sup> Interviewees<sup>49</sup> reported difficulties in assessing the risk level of cases through remote means. Although remote assessment allowed the victim to partially access the service, for local and international NGOs this created another challenge. One example noted by interviewees, was a woman who was suffering from sexual abuse, but could not report it during her assessment, as the perpetrator was sitting with her. The abuse was identified later on during the face to face assessment. The face to face assessment was also reported to be the preferred way of communication between the victim and the organization.<sup>50</sup>

Many women have escaped abuse in their homes, only to find nowhere to stay as **shelters and safe houses have suspended new admissions** due to the virus, or have required PCR tests to be conducted<sup>51</sup>, which not all women were able to afford. In addition, women who used to resort to seeking refuge in their parents' homes find themselves incapable to do so, for fear of infecting their elderly parents with the virus.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, overcrowding in medical facilities and fear of infection deter many women from seeking medical support for physical abuse they suffered.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> UN Women. (2020b, June). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/-/field%20of->

<https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/-/field%20of-fice%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/lebanon%20gender%20alert%20issue3/update%20652020/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%203english.pdf?la=en&vs=3305>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Al Arabiya English. (2020, May 20). Coronavirus: Domestic violence grows under Lebanon's lockdown.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2020/04/13/Coronavirus-Domestic-violence-grows-under-Lebanon-s-lockdown>

<sup>49</sup> Focal point from RDFL and Himaya

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Focal point from Himaya and Lebanon Legal Action

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

Additionally the LGBTQ+ community has also been affected by the Blast which has displaced many from safe neighborhoods, made worse with the absence of specific LGBTQ+ shelters in Lebanon.<sup>54</sup>

Additionally, the **socio-economic crisis has discouraged many women from reporting abuse** due to the prioritization of basic needs, limited transportation due to road blockages and increased costs, in addition to safety concerns.

**“People don't want to listen to this (SGBV). It is not a priority. “I can't feed my children they are having to drink water and corn flour instead of milk and you are talking to me about violence”**

**Focal point from Himaya**

More broadly, there is a concern that this same logic could be applied to service provision, with Salti and Mezher (2020) noting that gender equality tends to be perceived of lower priority during economic crisis.<sup>55</sup>

This is confirmed by recent statistics through Activity Info, which show a decrease in the number of SGBV survivors accessing services from around 6,000 in September 2019, to almost half that in October.<sup>56</sup> As mentioned earlier, the worsening socio-economic conditions leave many women unable to leave their abusers as they would not be able to sustain themselves on their own,<sup>57</sup> or because they were unable to pay the cost of forensic doctors which costs 800,000 LBP.<sup>58</sup>

### **Shut down of courts during the pandemic limiting women's access to justice**

One of the most significant barriers identified through the literature review and by key informants is the **paralysis of governmental service providers during the pandemic**. This includes disruptions in the services provided by police, and the total shut down of courts.<sup>59</sup> Police services made available through the ISF includes Emergency hotline 112, 1745 specialized for domestic violence and on the website, on the services called “Balligh”<sup>60</sup> As noted by Kafa and all interviewees, all Personal Status Courts were closed throughout the duration of the lockdown, and not one case was filed.

---

<sup>54</sup> Harb, M., & Fawaz, M. (2020). Leave No One Behind: For an Inclusive and Just Recovery Process in Post Blast Beirut. UNDP

<sup>55</sup> Salti, N., & Mezher, N. (2020). Women on the verge of an economic breakdown: assessing the differential impacts of the economic crisis on women in Lebanon . UN Women.

<sup>56</sup> SGBV Taskforce. 2019. "Humanitarian impact assessment of Lebanon's ongoing social unrest and possible economic crisis on women and girls." Inter-Agency Coordination. December 10. Accessed May 16, 2020. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/72847>.

<sup>57</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Focal point from Lebanon Legal Action

<sup>59</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> Focal point from ISF

This is an additional challenge to the hardships imposed on women by the Lebanese legal system<sup>61</sup>. More specifically, there is not unified civil code that governs issues such as divorce and child custody, but instead they are handled by 15 religious courts that heavily rule in favor of men.<sup>62</sup>

The courts have refused to hear the cases of mothers looking for the right to see their children, while others were unable to request the needed alimony to help them survive the dire economic situation, and many more were stuck in abusive relationships without the ability to file for divorce.<sup>63</sup> The same source also noted multiple cases where divorced or separated mothers were denied their visitation rights, as their [former] spouses used the pandemic as a pretext.<sup>64</sup>

### **Focus Box 1 – Civil courts intervene to alleviate the suffering of a few women who faced abuse during the pandemic**

During the shutdown of the personal status courts some civilian judges have used their legal prerogatives under the Domestic Violence Law 293 to protect the rights of women.

On April 21, Hala Naja the Urgent Matters judge in Beirut used video conferencing software to circumvent the restrictions in movement due to the pandemic. She was able to listen to the cases of two women victims of domestic abuse remotely, and also issue protection orders.

This initiative has been met well by many parts of the legal system, including the Supreme Judicial Council which called for the submission of domestic abuse cases before the Urgent Matters judges through e-mail. Also, on March 20th, the Public Prosecutor of the Court of Cassation instructed Lebanese instructed judges to capture the testimony of victims of abuse through video call, instead of requesting their presence at court.<sup>65 66</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> National Gender Observatory Website – Policy Brief 2

<sup>62</sup> Al Arabiya English. (2020, May 20). Coronavirus: Domestic violence grows under Lebanon's lockdown. <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2020/04/13/Coronavirus-Domestic-violence-grows-under-Lebanon-s-lockdown>

<sup>63</sup> Kafa. (2020, May 8). Calls Have Doubled Due to Lengthy Confinement and Crimes against Women: Kafa's April Report. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>

<sup>64</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> Kafa. (2020, May 8). Calls Have Doubled Due to Lengthy Confinement and Crimes against Women: Kafa's April Report. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>

# 04 Recommendations

Based on the desk review conducted and interviews with experts and practitioners, barriers to accessing SGBV services have increased with the multiplicity of the crisis in Lebanon. This includes inability to report cases, to move ahead with court processes and to access shelters in addition to the inability of service providers to respond to the increased needs. As such, the following recommendations are offered to help improve the prevention and response to SGBV in addition to reducing barriers.

## Government

- 1-** Develop stronger punitive actions for perpetrators, in order to avoid impunity.
- 2-** Proceed with the approval on the amendment on the Law 293 (article 12) that provides protection for women and does not include to date the protection of preschool age children;
- 3-** Repeal Article 534 of the Penal Code that discriminates against members of the LGBTIQ+ community;
- 4-** Provide more awareness to hotline officers to ensure that the adequate service and messages are conveyed to the victim. Currently, some NGOs are filling the gap and training hotline staff, however this needs to be institutionalised as a government function;
- 5-** Make the ISF domestic violence hotline (1745) more accessible by making it free of charge for all callers;
- 6-** Recruit and assign more women to answer the hotline and manage SGBV cases (inspections);
- 7-** Create a SGBV focused department within ISF to increase the capacity to respond to the needs (increased reported cases of SGBV);
- 8-** Continue to promote remote court proceedings through teleconference to support victims of SGBV;
- 9-** In partnership with MOSA, provide emergency shelters for victims of SGBV as the need is high, ensuring accessibility outside of urban centres

## NGOs and Service Providers

- 10-** Strengthen the provision and access to mental health facilities through opening more facilities and increasing the number of trained professionals;
- 11-** Work with perpetrators (when the abuse is not sexual) to set an action plan for rehabilitation and mental health support sessions. This has already been initiated by some organisations like Himaya;
- 12-** Incorporate an emergency fund in programming to respond to emergency SGBV cases (remote assessment, phone credits);
- 13-** Ensure non-protection response staff are trained on principles of SGBV and survivor centric responses and understand how referral mechanisms should be used
- 14-** The SGBV Taskforce and NGOs to lobby to allow for specialized staff from ministries and NGOs to proceed with the referral to case management, when victims are in high risk without receiving their consent in the aim of preserving their life

## Donors and UN agencies

- 15-** Mobilize SGBV Emergency Response fund
- 16-** Consult with main SGBV service providers about main needs and gaps for improved longer term SGBV response
- 17-** Advocate to government for amendment of Law 293; repeal of Article 534 of the Penal Code
- 18-** Fund a mechanism to strengthen the monitoring of harmful coping mechanisms, in line with recommendations from SGBV Taskforce.

# 05 References

Al Arabiya English. (2020, May 20). Coronavirus: Domestic violence grows under Lebanon's lockdown.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2020/04/13/Coronavirus-Domestic-violence-grows-under-Lebanon-s-lockdown>

Amnesty International. (2020, June 3). Lebanon: Abandoned migrant domestic workers must be protected.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/lebanon-abandoned-migrant-domestic-workers-must-be-protected/>

Barkawi, Ben, "Coronavirus lockdown exposes LGBT+ people to family abuse in Middle East," Openly, March 18 2020,

<https://www.openlynews.com/i/?id=0880b357-da90-43a4-8ac7-36009a699482>

Gharib, S. E. (2020, October 28). Women in Beirut at Increased Risk of Violence and Unable to Access Care After Port Explosion: Study. Global Citizen.

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/women-beirut-explosion-gender-based-violence/>

Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, & Chebaro, A. (2020, May). The Gendered Dimension of COVID-19 in Lebanon. AUB.

[https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy\\_briefs/2019-2020/20200515\\_gender\\_dimension\\_of\\_covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/policy_briefs/2019-2020/20200515_gender_dimension_of_covid_19.pdf)

Kafa. (2020, May 8). Calls Have Doubled Due to Lengthy Confinement and Crimes against Women: Kafa's April Report. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>

Lebanese National Gender Observatory. (December, 2020). "Policy Brief Two: Gender Analysis of the Lebanese Legal System"

Salti, N., & Mezher, N. (2020). Women on the verge of an economic breakdown: assessing the differential impacts of the economic crisis on women in Lebanon .

UNDP. (2020). Leave No One Behind: For an Inclusive and Just Recovery. Harb, M., &Fawaz.

UN Women. (2020a). Women's Needs and Gender Equality in Lebanon's COVID-19 Response. UN Women | Arab States.

<https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/gender-equality-in-lebanon-covid-19-response#:~:text=Publications-,Women's%20Needs%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20Lebanon's%20COVID%2D19%20Response,contribute%20to%20shaping%20the%20response.>

UN Women and Promundo, "Understanding Masculinities: Results from the INTERNATIONAL MEN AND GENDER EQUALITY SURVEY (IMAGES) - MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine," 2017, <https://imagesmena.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/05/IMAGES-MENA-Executive-Summary-EN-16May2017-web.pdf>

UN Women. (2020b, June). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/lebanon%20gender%20alert%20issue3/update%20652020/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%203english.pdf?la=en&vs=3305>

UN Women. (2020, May). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. <https://www2.unwomen.org//media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/05/gender%20alert%20lebanon%20may/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%202%20english.pdf?la=en&vs=5557>

## 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'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.