

Gender-Based Violence Information Management System

Ongoing Impact of the compounded crisis (COVID-19, financial and economic crisis) on the GBV

Mid-year – 2021

Background

For over a year and a half, Lebanon has been facing a compounded crisis: the progressive collapse of the economic and financial system, the COVID-19 and political and social instability. In the last six months the crisis deepened with further deterioration of the poverty levels that have drastically increased. According to the latest Study on Multidimensional Poverty from ESCWA: considering dimensions other than income, such as access to health, education, public utilities, housing, assets and property and employment, 82% of the population in Lebanon is currently living in multidimensional poverty (this rate has nearly doubled from 42% in 2019 to 82% in 2021)¹.

In May and June, in addition to the rapid deterioration of the economic situation all over the country and the collapse of the local currency, Lebanon has been plunged into further turmoil caused by shortage of fuel, coupled with rising community tensions. The fuel crisis, if not resolved, is anticipated to further impact on the electrical supply in Lebanon².

The current situation compounded with the COVID-19 continuous crisis worsened the overall protection situation of Syrian refugees, refugees from other nationalities as well as deepened the vulnerability of the Lebanese host community, with serious impact on the most marginalized groups including women at risk, LGBTIQ+ persons and older persons, vulnerable children, in addition to persons with disability and persons with mental health conditions.

In light of this situation, this GBVIMS report aimed at analyzing the impact of the current compounded crisis on the GBV risks. The data included in this report provided by the thirteen (13) data gathering organizations that use the GBVIMS³ system. The analysis has been triangulated with several sources including, protection monitoring reports, studies, surveys and assessments conducted in Lebanon.

¹ ESCWA: Multidimensional Poverty <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/multidimensional-poverty-lebanon-2019-2021-painful-reality-and-uncertain-prospects>.

² IRC protection monitoring report for May 2021.

³ The data quoted above is only from reported cases and does not represent the total incidence or prevalence of Gender-Based violence (GBV) in Lebanon. These statistical trends are generated exclusively by GBV service providers who use the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) for data collection in the implementation of GBV response activities across Lebanon and with the informed consent of survivors. Thirteen organizations contributed to the trends. This data should not be used for direct follow-up with survivors or organizations for additional case follow-up. This information is confidential and must not be shared outside your organization/agency. Should you like to use this data or access more information on the GBVIMS, please contact the Inter-Agency GBVIMS Coordinator, Lamis Delbani (aldelbani@unfpa.org).

Profile of the survivors seeking assistance

In the first two quarters of 2021, data reported by the GBVIMS shows that 97% of survivors seeking the case management service are females and 3% are males. Compared to 2020 reports, there is a very slight 1% increase in the percentage of female survivors seeking GBV services.

Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by all types of incidents of GBV and the current economic crisis have further impacted gender inequality while exposing women and girls to additional risks of GBV. Women's participation in the labor force and employment has fallen drastically in Lebanon. The quality and types of employment women will have access to will deteriorate during the crisis⁴. This affects a significant range of factors from their food security to their risks of violence. Women, girls and marginalized groups are facing increasing challenges in accessing food and basic goods, paying for their accommodation and accessing services, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and mental health and psychosocial support (MH-PSS) services.

Data reported in the first half of 2021 shows that 9% of the reported cases are children, with 2% decrease in comparison with the same period of 2020. Despite this decrease, anecdotal evidence from GBV partners show that more girls face the risk of **being deprived of the opportunity to attend schools during the crisis**. This is both due to loss of incomes within families and discriminatory coping strategies that favor boys' education over girls⁵. Furthermore, girls out of school may be mostly subjected to child marriage, as they have less access to information and awareness that can be provided in schools. According to UNICEF report: **COVID-19, A threat to progress against child marriage** issued in March 2021 that shows the impact of the COVID pandemic on child marriage, interrupted education is highlighted as one of the main impacts of the pandemic. School closures increase marriage risk by 25% per year, and closures result in a loss of 0.6 learning adjusted years of schooling per child. The report also shows that 2% of out of school girls will never return to school and will continue to face a higher marriage risk throughout childhood.

Syrian refugees continue to be the main group seeking GBV services, 65% of all the individuals seeking support in the first half of 2021 are Syrian. The dire economic situation is strongly affecting refugees. According to Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugee population in Lebanon (VaSYR) preliminary findings of 2021, the economic and COVID-19 crisis pushed almost the entire Syrian refugee population to below the SMEB (Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket), with 9 out of 10 households still living in extreme poverty. Additionally, reports from the Vulnerability Assessment of Refugees of Other Nationalities in Lebanon (VARON 2020) show that 72%⁶ of surveyed refugees of other nationalities are living in poverty with expenditures below MEB, with 17% increase compared to 2019. Over half the population surveyed is comprised of Iraqis with 54%.

⁴ Facing Multiple Crises, Rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable workers and small-scale enterprises in Lebanon, International Labour Organization and Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research in collaboration with: United Nations Development Programme, UN Women, International Rescue Committee, Danish Refugee Council, Save the Children International, Oxfam, and Mercy Corps. While official disaggregated employment data is not available, a UN Women analysis from June 2020 estimated that a 25 percent contraction in real GDP will have translated into a 63 percent increase—from 81,200 to 132,500—in the number of women unemployed—or 51,300 more women unemployed from 2018/2019 to June 2020. In real terms these numbers are likely higher given that the World Bank estimates a 30% GDP contraction rate as of April 2021.

⁵ Women on the Verge of an Economic Breakdown: Addressing the differential impacts of the economic crisis on women in Lebanon, UN Women, 2020

⁶ Vulnerability Assessment of Refugees of Other Nationalities in Lebanon (VARON 2020): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88157>



33% of survivors seeking services are Lebanese, the percentage of Lebanese seeking GBV services increased in the last three years (from 21% in 2018 to 26 % in 2019, 35% in 2020). Lebanese nationals have been also facing a **multitude of rapidly escalating socio-economic crises**, represented mainly by the inadequacy of basic social services which the government would normally be responsible to provide, in addition to the rapid deterioration of the economic situation all over the country, the collapse of the local currency, and the impact of the health / COVID 19 crisis.

In addition to the increase in Lebanese population seeking services, there is a low but increasing percentage (4%) of migrant and foreign nationals from different nationalities seeking the case management service. Reports from the field show the increase in the vulnerabilities of migrants and migrant workers, particularly in terms of reduced access to their salaries in dollars, sponsors unable to provide for their return to their countries of origin, access to COVID-19 medical care (IOM, 2020).

Most Prominent Type of GBV Incidents Reported: Physical Assault and Psychological/Emotional Abuse

The most reported type of incidents through the GBVIMS in the first two quarters of 2021 were physical assault 40% (with a 2% increase from 2020) and psychological/emotional abuse 32% (with a 5% increase from 2020). These two types of GBV incidents are linked to incidents of intimate partner violence and domestic violence. Data from the GBVIMS indicates that 78% of incidents taking place at the survivor and perpetrator's home. The most reported types of Gender-Based Violence incidents remain physical assault and psychological/emotional abuse.

However, Analysis of the recent trends and reports from the field may indicate that parents are resorting to child marriage as a negative and harmful coping mechanism due the harsh economic conditions. The economic situation has left many people unable to pay rent or repay debt pushing families to resort into to child marriage as one of the negative coping strategies. The percentage of **child marriage incidents in 2021** validates the above point. GBVIMS data reported in the first two quarters of 2021 shows that **Bekaa** reported the highest percentage of child marriage cases (6%) among all areas, with 1% increase compared to 2020.

Additionally, according to VaSYR preliminary findings of 2021⁷, 20% of the assessed girls aged 15 to 19 were married at the time of the survey. This shows a slight decrease from 2020 at 24% and 2019 at 27%. South Lebanon governorate reported the highest rate at 34%, compared to being the lowest governorate on early marriage in 2020.

The impact of the economic crises on GBV Risks

- **Increase in reported perpetrators being landlords and employers**

The most common type of alleged perpetrators remains the Intimate partner with 56% and family other than spouse and caregiver with 9% similar to 2020. However, GBVIMS data reported in the first two quarters of 2021 indicated that 4% of the perpetrators are landlords and 4% are employers, with a slight increase from 2020. Furthermore, looking specifically at the incidents reported in Akkar, 5% of the perpetrators are landlords and 10% are employers which is the highest percentage reported in 2021 among all field locations.

⁷ Vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugee population in Lebanon (VaSYR) preliminary findings of 2021.



Syrian refugees are mostly affected by eviction threats by landlords and authorities. For women and girls as well as other marginalized groups evictions represent additional GBV risks. Data triangulated from the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugee population in Lebanon (VaSYR) preliminary findings of 2021 shows that 9% of the households are living under the eviction threat in Akkar, which is the highest percentage among all localities. On another note, data received from UNHCR collective eviction Q2 report⁸ shows that the tension with the landlord is one of the key drivers to eviction, as it was the direct reason for eviction for almost 14% of the evicted population.

- **Increase of incidents perpetrated at the workplace**

GBVIMS data reported through GBV partners witnessed increased risk of GBV at the workplace across the refugee population, Lebanese and migrants from other nationalities, **with more women facing sexual harassment at their workplace** because they most probably cannot afford to lose their jobs.

According to the GBVIMS Report of quarter 1 and 2 in 2021, **22% of sexual violence incidents reported happened at the workplace**. This increased percentages are in line with the increased percentage of women and girls working in vulnerable jobs, like domestic work and working in the agricultural field as a result of the socioeconomic deterioration in Lebanon.

- **Risks of Sexual Exploitation**

Incidents of sexual exploitation often go unreported, especially among female refugees and migrant workers due to stigma, the fear of retaliation, lack of information on reporting mechanisms and limited legal support available. For refugees, this can also be related to the lack of legal residency. The **increased levels of debt and difficulties in paying rent or purchasing basic items might increase the risk of various forms of violence, including sexual exploitation among the most vulnerable populations, especially refugees and marginalized members of the host community**.

This is further supported by data collected through the GBVIMS in 2021 which indicates that the percentage of incidents of possible sexual exploitation reported is 2%, while in 2020 never exceeded the 1% of the total reported cases.

According to data collected through the GBVIMS in 2021, 4% of reported incidents are perpetrated by landlords. This might show an increasing risk of sexual exploitation related to access to shelter options, especially for the population cohort more at risk of eviction. Data triangulated from the vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugee population in Lebanon (VaSYR) preliminary findings of 2021 indicates that due to the unaffordable rent prices, lack of documentation, eviction notice and increased tensions with landlords, 15% of Syrian refugee head of households have changed accommodation in the last year.

- **Increase in GBV Incidents of Intimate Partner Violence**

Data from the GBVIMS highlights this trend even with a 6% decrease in incidents perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member in the first half of 2021 (63%) in comparison to 2020 (69%). In addition, incidents of intimate partner violence continue to be on the rise. This is noted with a 4% increase in incidents of intimate partner violence between 2020 (52%) and the first half of 2021 (56%).

GBV case managers report an increase of survivors in need for case management services. Analysis indicates that the dire economic situation has resulted in increasing family tensions within the households due to the growing challenges in accessing basic items and to limited movements as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns in the first quarter. For refugee families, tensions around increased debts, the risk of

⁸ Collective Evictions and Notices report: 2021 Q2 Dashboard: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88474>



eviction, and the general challenges in accessing basic items and food might have further increased family tension and domestic violence.

- **Challenges in accessing services**

Data reported by GBVIMS in 2021 showed that only 2% of the clients were referred to the psychosocial services and 1% of the clients declined being referred to this service. This low percentage might be related to the pressure of the socioeconomic crisis and the fact that women and girls might be deprioritizing their wellbeing needs. According to the latest report developed by the NGO “Embrace” running a hotline for MHPSS and suicide prevention, the number of people (mostly Lebanese) calling to receive support tripled from 2019 to 2020 and keeps increasing in the first quarter of 2021⁹.

In the current situation, **survivors of family violence have less opportunities to escape from their perpetrators** because of the restricted movement imposed by Covid-19, and more recently by the fuel and electricity crisis, coupled with the very limited livelihood opportunities that they can benefit from, and without support they have no other choice to remain in the abusive situation. This point is backed up with the GBVIMS data reported in 2021, showing that 6% of clients in need for livelihood services weren't referred to the service due to the unavailability of livelihood services in their region. This is also related to the difficulties in **accessing free legal counselling and representation during COVID** which has been identified by GBV partners as one of the main gaps in service provision and as one of the most underfunded activities. The limited available legal services have an impact for both Lebanese, especially the poorest and LGBTIQ persons and on migrants (who often do not have legal papers and might fear to report incidents to authorities).

Recommendations

- Supporting safe housing options, including safe houses/mid-way house/safe shelters for GBV survivors seeking shelter from life threatening abusive situations.
- Ensuring the provision of emergency and recurrent cash assistance for GBV survivors and individuals at risk who are not benefiting from other cash assistance programs to escape from situations of abuse or prevent the abuse from happening.
- Strengthening timely and safe referrals across sectors and to the GBV sector in specific, through capacity building on GBV core concepts, dealing with disclosures, safe and ethical referrals and other areas where relevant.
- Increasing the availability of Mental health and Psychosocial services through a strengthened coordination mechanism between the GBV and MHPSS sector. This can include mapping of the fields in the aim of advocating for increased presence of MHPSS activities in vulnerable locations and joint activities between the two sectors that can encourage people to request and access the mental health services.
- Strengthening community protection mechanisms and inclusion activities to ensure that vulnerable populations, especially persons that identify as LGBTIQ+, persons with disabilities and

⁹ WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF AN ECONOMIC BREAKDOWN: Assessing the differential impacts of the economic crisis on women in Lebanon, UN Women 2020

women head of households have access to required services, such as health care, livelihood and case management.

- Strengthening coordination efforts to ensure availability of services to persons with disabilities, such as up to date service mapping, surveys aiming at gathering information about people with disabilities, and rehabilitation of safe spaces and community centers to host people with disabilities.
- Collaborating and promoting joint initiatives between GBV, child protection actors and MoSA in working groups and coordination platforms to mitigate the risks of GBV against children including adolescent girls/boys, particularly against sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Strengthening the provision of integrated package of GBV/ livelihood and cash services for women and girls in the safe spaces.
- Strengthening the adolescent girls focused programing and working on messaging that shows the importance of education for girls after two years of remote learning.
- Scaling up GBV mainstreaming and risk mitigation in target sectors especially food security, nutrition, and WASH with key initiatives that can mitigate the risk associated with GBV and SEA.
- Supporting vulnerable population living under dire economic conditions to be self-reliant through the provision of adequate levels of basic assistance to meet their needs, strengthened support networks to develop positive coping mechanisms, and the promotion of income generating activities that are viable in the current context.
- Strengthening the coordination between protection and GBV sectors especially on eviction issue targeting GBV survivors through active referral system.
- Advocating for the implementation of the law on sexual harassment in the workplace and domestic violence affecting survivors of GBV.