

Humanitarian Impact Assessment of Lebanon's Ongoing Social Unrest and Possible Economic Crisis on Women and Girls

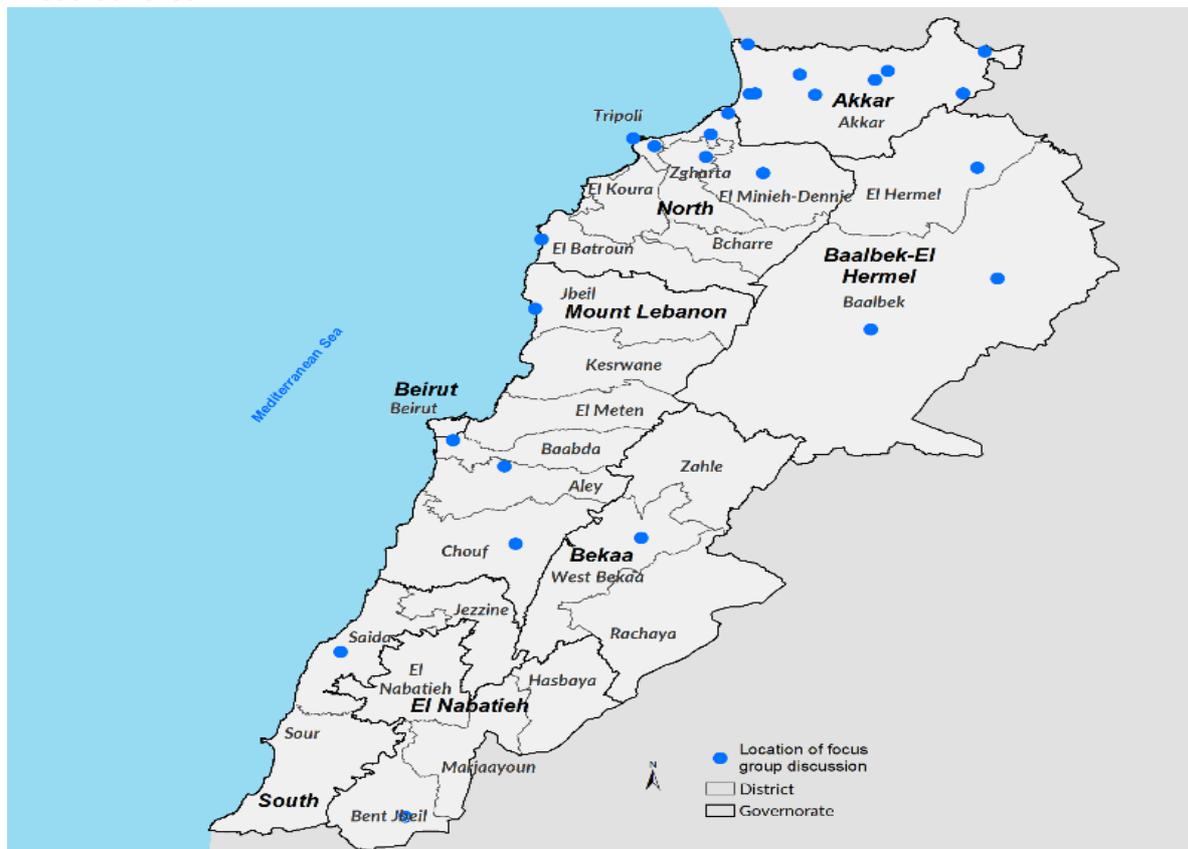
A. Introduction

This assessment was designed to understand the gendered impact of the Lebanon's on-going social unrest and possible economic crisis on women and girls. Coordinated by the Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Task Force, the assessment seeks to highlight specific gendered concerns and needs of women and girls in the current context. While the current situation has impacts on all individuals in the country, the assessment informs that gender integrated interventions are necessary to mitigate specific vulnerabilities of women and girls. This also reflects the wider impact of gender within the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon, where women and girls continue to confront widespread and systemic gender inequality, which manifests in less access to resources, services, and opportunities, as well as higher risks of violence, abuse, and exploitation.¹

B. Methodology

Four humanitarian partners (Abaad, Care, DRC, and IRC) conducted 31 Focus Group Discussions and phone interviews between 14 and 21 November 2019, reaching a total of 264 Syrian women and girls (150 women, 114 girls) in six field locations of Akkar, Tripoli, Bekka, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, and the South.² Eighty-seven Lebanese women were also interviewed through Focus Group discussions. Qualitative data was collected, recorded and analyzed to inform this report.

Areas Covered



¹ FMI: UN Women, September 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/72394>

² 28 locations were covered: Tebbeneh, Jabal Mohsen, Mashasha, Bireh, Miryata, Denieyh, Mokhtara, Bourj Hoodamou, Aley, Jbeil, Ghobeiry, Bint Jbeil, Baysarieh, Mhamara, Akroum, Magdal, Mina, Batroun, Miniey Nabi Yousheeh, Hwesh, Wadi Khaled, Semakiyeh, Qobbet Shamra, Semmakli, Aarsal, Ghazze, Hermel, MAQ

C. Key Situation Overviews

- Women and girls defined the current situation as the further deterioration of the already existing economic hardships due to bank closures, inflation, road blocks, and reduced availability and access to essential commodities, such as food, fuel, medicine, and other goods. The ongoing social unrest was mostly viewed as the direct consequence of the economic difficulties in the country and not considered as the main cause of their vulnerabilities.
- The deteriorating economic conditions have led already vulnerable households in the community to depend on harmful coping mechanisms, including further restriction of movement, reduction of food consumption and food diversity, limited use of medicine, increased debts, heightening protection concerns.
- The risk of child labor, child marriage, domestic violence, and harassments in the public areas were identified as the direct impacts on women and girls. In addition, the risk of survival sex and further exploitation was noted in relation to their increased economic vulnerabilities.
- In case of the difference between Syrians and Lebanese, security and safety concerns were mostly relevant to Syrians, in particular relation to the increasing intercommunal tension, possibility of evictions, and fear of arrest and/or deportation due to the delayed renewal of residency permits caused by increased transportations costs and the unpredictability of the governmental and humanitarian services. In case of Lebanese, most of their vulnerabilities were related to economic hardships.

D. Gendered Effect

D.1. Increasing Stress, Pressure, and Anxiety

Women participants emphasized that they feel much more pressure and stress in the family due to the increased domestic and care work, including providing food and caring for family members. For instance, in Bint Jbeil (South), about **30% mentioned increased pressure** on them in the household and **some 25% reported that their mental health was also affected**. The current situation led men to stay at home, due to the reduced livelihood opportunities and fear of arrest/violence. In several cases, women mentioned that they saw their husbands much 'angrier' than before, and they mostly became the targets of those frustrations through verbal or physical assaults. While both men and women have been experiencing frustrations, **most women mentioned that there is a need to increase psychosocial support for them as unlike men, they do not have a place to vent and in some cases, they become taking out their frustrations onto their children in the form of verbal or physical abuse, which in turn leads to the feeling of remorse and guilt**. Especially, for Syrian participants, the **increased telecommunication costs further limited their access to phones, making their communication with the families in Syria more challenging, which added more anxiety and stress when their communication with friends and relatives in Lebanon was also restricted due to the restricted movements**. Additionally, **the trauma caused by the conflicts in Syria** seemed to have increased their anxiety level for fear of any political or conflict escalation of the current situation in Lebanon.

Girls mostly mentioned that they felt discouraged to move outside due to the fear of harassment or violence in the streets and have been ordered to stay home by their parents/caregivers due to the fear of kidnapping and exploitation. Although no kidnapping cases were reported during the FGDs, the fear was found to be high amongst women and girls. **They stay home most of the day and feel anxious about their parents' struggle with financial difficulties and any possibility of evictions**. For instance, in Al Mina, Tripoli, one mentioned that they were threatened by landlords of evictions due to the delay of the payment of rent, which made girls feel anxious.

"We are the ones in charge of distributing food, caring about the family's health, and keeping everyone happy and satisfied. We feel desperate and we don't know how to cope and provide for our families" - Boorj Hamood, Mount Lebanon

"We have seen this happening before, This is how all started in Syria" – Jbeil, Mount Lebanon

"My husband is recently staying at home. He is always angry because of the financial situation. So his emotional burst is always on me. And I throw my feelings and anger onto my children. We, women, always take responsibility of everything that's happening" – Tebeneh, Tripoli

D.2. Heightened Safety and Security Concerns

More than half of the Syrian women participants mentioned that the hostility towards Syrians, in general, has increased and they came across more incidents of harassments, verbal insults, money extortion, or robberies. **In Akkar and Bekaa, some 41% and 83% have either heard of assaults towards Syrian population or have been exposed to verbal assaults themselves or their families.** In Tripoli, in some cases, women and their children were either verbally assaulted or attacked in the streets by unknown men. In addition, in Akkar, in a number of cases, women stated that Syrian children have been prevented from going to school by local residents. Some also mentioned that the crime rate may increase, and they fear of being targeted if the situation gets further deteriorated in Lebanon. They further mentioned that their key community members (mostly, taxi drivers) tell them not to move around and they **feel less safe mostly in the market, public roads, and public transportations (taxies and buses), which however are essential for their daily lives.** In case of working women, it was mentioned that they were pushed to work longer hours at lower wages and sometimes were not paid properly due to the limited working opportunities and limited cash on the employers' side. It was further mentioned that **while men also face such exploitation in the workplace, women experience it to a greater extent due to gender discrimination.** At the family level, they mentioned increased tensions and violence from their husband, be it verbal or physical.

Girls mentioned similarly about their fear of harassment in the streets. In case of Syrian girls, they mentioned that seeing more checkpoints and army in the streets reminded them of the violence in Syria. However, there was an indication that such fear was also passed onto them from their parents' own fear. **Fear of kidnapping** was also mentioned both by the Syrian and Lebanese participants.

"People sing a song in Miniyeh like "Thawra, Thawra, Syria Out" – Miniyeh, Tripoli

"I was in a taxi and the driver asked about my origin. He immediately said that all of these in Lebanon were happening because of us, Syrians" – Tripoli

D.3. Harmful Coping Mechanism

Basic needs

Food items are not timely available in the market and the quantity, quality and diversity of food items have decreased, while the price has gone up (e.g. the price of 1 kg of rice has increased from 2,000 to 3,000 LBP in Tebeneh, Tripoli). Unfortunately, the participants mentioned that their coping mechanism has been to reduce the food consumption and diversity. The limited or unavailability of fuel in some areas and its increased price also led women to reduce cooking and food consumption. This situation was mentioned to **heavily affect pregnant women and lactating mothers as well as those having new born babies, who have significant more risks without adequate nutrition.**

Medicine are mentioned to be limited and not readily available or too expensive. **During the road blockage, some women could not even reach hospitals for delivery.** **Rent** was mentioned as one of the biggest difficulties in the current situation. The coping mechanism was to either borrow money

from the others or to resort to additional debts. However, some further mentioned that **adding a new debt to their existing debts has not been easy. And thus, in some cases, children dropped out of school in support of families, accepted to work in exchange of money, and girls got married earlier in order to release the burden on families.** And while **survival sex was not mentioned during the FGDs, the current situation was observed to increase the risk of the survival sex and other types of sexual exploitation.**

“I cannot afford buying milk for my child because of the increased price” – Tebeneh, Tripoli

“We could go to the health centers, but the pharmacy at the hospital said that they were not giving medicines to Lebanese, either” – Miniyeh, Tripoli

Access to Services

Increased inter-communal tensions, fear of arrest and/or deportation, and high transportation costs resulted in the further restriction of movements. Most of the women participants mentioned that one of their coping mechanisms in this regard has been just restricting their movements, which highly affected their access to services as well as livelihoods. In **Akkar and Bekka, some 71% said that they reduced their movements in general.** It was further mentioned that they do not have any other coping mechanism and the only way to survive the current situation has been to do nothing. In Wadi Khaled, Akkar, even when they received cash assistance and relevant services were open, due to the distance from ATMs, women mentioned that they had to give their cards to the others (often men) to withdraw money for them, paying up to 20,000 LBP. This is an example of how women and girls coped with the situation. However, it also shows **how women and girls became more dependent on the others, making them more vulnerable under volatile situation.**

In terms of the SGBV specific services, while most of the women reported that there has been increased tension in their families and that they have heard about more domestic violence incidents, they were discouraged to contact service providers due to their other competing priorities, especially basic needs and road blockage, increased transportation costs, and safety concerns. This is further corroborated by the data collected through ActivityInfo, which showed the decrease in the number of women, girls, men and boys at risk and survivors accessing SGBV prevention and response services in safe spaces from average 5,955 (Jan-Sep) to 3,033 (Oct).

“This is more of a financial violence.” - Al mhamara, Akkar

“We know that domestic violence is happening. But we cannot do anything because this is a family matter” – Mokhtara, Mount Lebanon

“The health center is 200 meters away. I don’t feel safe walking there” - Akkar

D.4. Sense of Empowerment

Some positive impacts were, however, also noted during the FGDs. In Magdal, Akkar, one Syrian woman participant mentioned that she was not afraid of the changing situation, as she saw many women actively participating in the protests and it felt like real women empowerment. Also, in Mount Lebanon, both Syrian and Lebanese women mentioned that they felt that the demonstrations gave women more opportunities to express their opinions openly, while in a separate interview with some Lebanese women, frustrations over insults or harassments towards female protesters were also noted.

“This is all to change the country, The economic situation was already bad. Still, now, we have an opportunity to at least change something. And we can express those freely” – Mount Lebanon, Lebanese woman

E. Recommendations

- To maintain safe spaces for women and girls and to increase, to the extent possible, outreach activities through mobile units, in particular in remote and underserved areas and to reach out to highly vulnerable groups of women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities, older women, female headed households, widows, separated and divorced women, unaccompanied girls, pregnant and lactating mothers, and so on.
- To ensure hotlines are functioning 24 hours/7 days a week.
- To support community-based networks further and to increase the dissemination of the service referral pathways amongst women and girls.
- To strengthen PSS programs to help with stress, anxiety, and trauma for both women and men and to include PSS and psychological first aid programs for women and girls in partners' contingency plans. To establish a close referral and response mechanism with mental health task force.
- To mainstream gender in all other sectors' contingency preparedness and response plans and to engage with, amongst others, basic assistance, livelihood, and health sectors to discuss more inclusive approach to vulnerable women and girls.
- To advocate for discussion with development actors on the issue of vulnerable Lebanese women and girls and to connect current SGBV issues to their plans.
- To strengthen the monitoring of harmful coping mechanisms, including child marriage, child labor, survival sex, exploitation, extortions, nutritional, antenatal and postnatal health, in close coordination with other sectors.
- To ensure that PSEA mechanism, especially complaints and referrals, function properly through close coordination with the PSEA task force. To ensure that UN/NGOs staff wear their badges and vests and communicate to the visiting sites in advance, in order to avoid any possible fraud or exploitation. To enhance information sharing on the working days/hours of government and humanitarian services through different medium.
- To advocate for in-kind or other modalities in place of cash assistance, in particular relation to food, medicine, school fees, and transportation costs if the current situation continues and to discuss the distribution of dignity kits.