

Gender-Based Violence Information Management System

Annual Overview of Incidents of GBV in Relation to Lebanon's Situation

2020

Background

Throughout the past year Lebanon faced a deterioration in its economic condition that resulted in the devaluation of the Lebanese pound, with estimates revealing that more than 55%¹ of the country's population is now trapped into poverty and struggling to meet primarily necessities. This is also the case of 89% of the Syrian refugee population who are living under the extreme poverty line². This situation comes at a critical period as the country continues to report increasingly high numbers of COVID-19 cases leaving health systems and frontline workers overwhelmed. In addition, the Beirut port explosions, on August 4th, which caused large human and material losses, left thousands of people of all ages and nationalities, in particular vulnerable groups, affected with post-traumatic stress disorders and emotional traumas. Vulnerable groups at risk from the host community, namely female refugees, migrant workers, women in prostitution and persons that identify as LGBTIQ+, in particular transwomen, face higher risks in 2020 in comparison with previous years.

In light of these adversities, the annual GBVIMS report aims to provide a situational analysis on the impact of the socio-economic situation, COVID-19 pandemic and Beirut port explosions on the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) situation in Lebanon. The data reflected in this report is provided by thirteen (13) data gathering organizations that coordinate the GBVIMS through a National Steering Committee in Lebanon³. The analysis has been triangulated with other sources including protection monitoring reports, various technical sector's data, surveys and impact assessments conducted in the period of this analysis.

Increase in GBV Incidents Against Women and Girls

Data reported through the GBVIMS indicates a 5% increase in female survivors in 2020 (98%) in comparison to 2019 (93%). Data collected in Quarter 2 of 2020 indicates the most disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls (99% female survivors) during this period. In addition, 9% increase in Lebanese survivors accessing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) case management services, amounting to

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

² <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2020/12/Postcards-VASYR-2020.pdf>

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 GBV IMS, please contact the Inter-Agency GBVIMS Coordinator, Dana Dib (dib@unfpa.org).



35% in 2020 in comparison to 26% in 2019. This increase of female survivors is not surprising, since during the early stages of the outbreak of COVID-19 many humanitarian organizations in Lebanon and various countries reported an increase in GBV incidents linked with lockdown restrictions and family confinement in the households. Analysis suggests that since the outbreak of COVID-19 more organizations have outreached to Lebanese nationals due to the emerging risks of GBV, including domestic violence, in comparison to the period prior to the outbreak in which most programme interventions targeted mostly Syrian refugees. From February to November 2020, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) reported to have a 102% increase in calls to their domestic violence hotline number⁴, mostly from Lebanese nationals. The COVID-19 pandemic, political uprising and the devaluation of the Lebanese pound compounded one of Lebanon's worst socio-economic crises since the civil war, high levels of unemployment and inflation is leaving individuals and families inability to meet their basic needs, including paying for rent. In addition, the Beirut port explosions further exacerbated the situation in the areas of Beirut/Mount Lebanon.

Gender-Based Violence incidents that occurred online have significantly increased following the outbreak of COVID-19. Case managers working with survivors reported that since the beginning of the lockdown, more women and girls, especially among Palestinians and Syrians refugees are being exposed to online sexual harassment and blackmail. **GBVIMS data indicates that 2% (2020) of survivors are Palestinian.** In addition, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) indicates that 143 incidents (threats and exploitation) were perpetrated online in the month of July and August 2020, with the majority being against women and girls, 70% (July) and 75%(August)⁵. Lockdowns and movement restrictions have led to an even greater reliance on the internet, particularly the use of social media, and cell phones for communication⁶, thus amplifying the likelihood of women and girls being exposed to GBV incidents online.

Increase in GBV Incidents of Intimate Partner Violence

GBV case managers report an increase of survivors in need for case management services, especially through their hotlines, since face-to-face case management services were significantly limited (focusing only on urgent and high-risk cases) due to the outbreak of COVID-19. **Data from the GBVIMS highlights this trend with a 3% increase in incidents perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member in 2020 (69%) in comparison to 2019 (66%).** In addition with the continuous lockdown measures in place, incidents of intimate partner violence continue to be on the rise. **This is noted with a 5% increase in incidents of intimate partner violence between Q3 (67%) and Q4 (72%), when lockdown measures imposed by authorities were more strict.** Triangulated data from the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) indicates that there has been a rise in incidents of domestic violence within Palestinian camps and children have reported to have witnessed these incidents within their households. Furthermore, according to data collected by a national non-governmental organization, KAFA (Enough Violence and Exploitation), the number of calls from their hotline increased 3 folds, reaching an average of 950 calls on monthly basis during quarter 4 of 2020.

⁴ COVID-19 magnifies issues of gender-based violence in Lebanon <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2020/Dec-08/515137-covid-19-magnifies-issue-of-gender-based-violence-in-lebanon.ashx>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/FeMaleComms/photos/a.915045695226593/3621351181262684/?type=3&theater>

⁶ Violence against women and girls and COVID-19 in the region https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/12/covid_and_vawg_un_brief_final.pdf?la=en&vs=5344



According to a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on GBV programming in Lebanon conducted by the SGBV Task Force in December 2020⁷, all persons have been affected by the shift to remote modality of service provision, however some of the most notable are, LGBTIQ+ (2%), persons with disability(10%), adolescent girls (12%) and adult women (8%).

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

Due to the prolonged confinement and ongoing lockdown measures the most reported type of incidents through the GBVIMS in 2020 were **physical assault 38% (2020) and psychological/emotional abuse 33% (2020)**. These two types of GBV incidents are linked to incidents of intimate partner violence and domestic violence. **Data from the GBVIMS indicates a 3% increase in 2020 (80%) compared to 2019 (77%) of incidents taking place at the survivor's and perpetrator's home.** Since the breakout of COVID-19 in Lebanon, 57% of women and girls have reported feeling less safe in their communities and 44% of women and girls reported feeling less safe in their homes⁸. Analysis indicates that the dire economic situation has resulted in high tensions within the household due to the inability of meeting basic needs, restriction of movement, increased debits and family members obliged to share small housing spaces. The pandemic has resulted in immediate exacerbation of gender inequalities. Data from the GBVIMS indicates a 9% increase in incidents of physical assault occurring in the survivors house in Q2 (21%), coinciding approximately by the time of the start of the pandemic, compared to Q4 2020 (30%). This increase was also notable among survivors of psychological/emotional abuse, accounting for a 4% increase, 18% (Q2 2020), and 22% (Q4 2020).

Increase of Incidents of Child Sexual Abuse Against Boys and Sexual Assault Incidents in the Areas of Beirut/Mount Lebanon

Six months have passed since the tragic Beirut port explosions that claimed the lives of nearly 200 people, injured over 6,000 and displaced more than 300,000⁹. People affected by the Beirut port explosions continue to experience post-traumatic stress, exhaustion, anxiety and distress, especially among street connected children. Data from the Protection Sector monitoring reports indicates that 96% of people have experienced mental health distress due to the socio-economic situation and 60% due to the outbreak of COVID-19. **GBVIMS data in Beirut/Mount Lebanon indicates that 21% (2020) of child sexual abuse survivors are boys under the age of 18.** Analysis suggests that the ongoing closure of schools has increased the risk of children being exposed to violence, especially street connected children and tensions within the household have increased due to the dire economic situation and high levels of unemployment. Furthermore, according to data collected by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) Protection Monitoring reports in December 2020, a higher percentage of boys were reported to be out of school in comparison to girls, this may be linked to the fact that more boys are being engaged in child labour, hence

⁷ Impact of COVID-19 on GBV Programming, SGBV Task Force, Lebanon, January 2021 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/84989>

⁸ Impact of COVID-19 on the SGBV Situation in Lebanon: Inter-Agency SGBV Task Force Lebanon- May 2020 <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/impact-covid-19-sgbv-situation-lebanon-inter-agency-sgbv-task-force-lebanon-may-2020>

⁹ <https://lebanon.unfpa.org/en/publications/beirut-explosion-situation-report-no5>



increasing the risks of being exposed to child sexual abuse. In addition, data collected through the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) for 2020 indicates that 4.4% of Syrian children were engaged in child labour in 2020 in comparison to 2.6% in 2019.

The Beirut explosions impact continues to ripple across of all populations, regardless of age, sex, nationality and especially among vulnerable groups, women and children at risk, LGBTIQ+ and persons with disabilities. **Data from the GBVIMS in Beirut/Mount Lebanon indicates that 1% (2020) of survivors who have some form of disability.** In addition, triangulated data from UNRWA indicates that persons with disabilities have struggled to access available services especially livelihoods and living space is not adapted due to design and over crowdedness of camps and they continuously face discrimination and isolation.

Data from the GBVIMS in Beirut/Mount Lebanon indicates a 3% increase of sexual assault incidents occurring in the street between Q2 2020 (4%) and Q4 2020 (7%). Analysis indicates that this increase is a result of empty and dark streets at night after the Beirut explosions, poor lighting conditions and abandoned buildings. The increase in incidents has also resulted in a higher number of referrals to GBV services as a result of the explosions. This is highlighted by data collected through the Referral Information Management System (RIMS), 265 (July – October 2020) in comparison to 152 (March- June 2020)¹⁰.

Furthermore, data from the GBVIMS highlights a 3% increase in survivors reporting having no relation with the perpetrator, 15% (Q2 2020) compared to 18% (Q4 2020).

Risks of Sexual Exploitation

Incidents of sexual exploitation often go unreported, especially among female refugees and migrant workers due to the fear of retaliation, lack of information on reporting mechanisms and many are not able to report incidents to the authorities due to the absence of a legal residency. **This is further supported by data collected through the GBVIMS which indicates that 40% (2020) of survivors have declined accepting referrals to legal assistance services. According to data collected through the GBVIMS in 2020, 1% of survivors reported incidents of exploitation and nearly 4% reported incidents perpetrated by landlords.** Protection sector data reported through Protection Monitoring reports indicates that due to the unaffordable rent prices and increased tensions with landlords, 15% of head of households have changed accommodation in the last year. In addition, data from the IRC Protection Monitoring reports for the month of November 2020 indicates that, 66% of female headed households reported that their levels of debt had significantly increased, in comparison to 57% of male headed households. The increased levels of debt are more likely to expose women and adolescent girls to various forms of violence such as physical assault, child marriage, harassment and sexual exploitation.

Preliminary findings from VASyR in 2020 indicates that 3% of refugee women and 2.5% of refugee men worry about family members being sexually exploited in relation to paying rent, 4% of refugee women and 3% of refugee men worry about exploitation in relation to accessing food. Protection sector data indicates that there has been an increase in eviction or threats of eviction due to the inability to pay rent. Data from Protection Monitoring reports for the month of November 2020 indicate that 79% of people,

¹⁰ Referral Information Management System (RIMS), Preparing for and responding to emergency crises with efficient and accountable referral pathways ,November 2020
https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RIMS%20Nov%20report_2020.pdf



majority of which are refugees, were not able to pay their rent and 55% had to reduce spending/not pay their rent.

Landlords have increased pressure and threats to pay rent through verbal abuse and harassment. These circumstances have pushed people towards harmful coping mechanisms as the vast majority of persons especially among the most vulnerable groups are facing extreme difficulties in paying for food, rent and health services including testing for COVID-19 and treatments.

Challenges to Reporting GBV Incidents and Effect of Remote Modality of Service Delivery

Incidents of Gender-Based Violence have been on the rise this year in comparison to 2019, nevertheless, many incidents continue to go under-reported. **GBVIMS data indicates that 43% (2020) of survivors reported incidents of GBV more than one month after it occurred.** The conditions and restrictions in place due to COVID-19 have directly impacted survivors of GBV, especially among women and girls. Analysis suggests that this is due to the following; 1) survivors sharing the house with the perpetrator, in the majority of the time, being an intimate partner or family member, 2) restriction of movement and difficulty in accessing communication means due to the sharing of phones among several family members, 3) lack of privacy and 4) lack of resources to afford related communication costs.

Furthermore, according to a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on GBV programming in Lebanon conducted by the SGBV Task Force in December 2020¹¹, indicates that GBV services were affected by the pandemic, 50% of the respondents stated that their organization was not able to reach the same number of people in need in 2019 (with the comparable level of resources and funding). Moreover, respondents also mentioned that some illiterate people, women and girls are facing very hard socio-economic conditions and survivors of intimate partner violence obliged to live with their perpetrators during lockdown periods were also affected by the shift to the remote modality.

Recommendations

- Ensure that quality case management services continue to be available through remote modality, regardless of lockdown measures, with exceptions to urgent and high risks cases for in person case management modality.
- Strengthen community protection mechanisms to ensure that vulnerable populations, especially persons that identify as LGBTIQ+, persons with disabilities, women head of households and street connected children have access to required services, such as health care, livelihood and case management.
- Strengthen coordination efforts to ensure availability of services to persons with disabilities and elderly including in informal settlements and Palestinian camps and gatherings.
- Strengthen the collaboration with the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support sector for the availability of Mental health and Psychosocial services to all persons, including those most affected in the areas of Beirut/Mount Lebanon.
- Foster collaboration and promote joint initiatives with Child Protection actors to mitigate the risks of GBV against children including adolescent girls/boys and in particular against sexual abuse and exploitation.

¹¹ Impact of COVID-19 on GBV Programming, SGBV Task Force, Lebanon, January 2021
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/84989>

- Ensure wide dissemination jointly with the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) Sectors (i.e. Health, WASH, Livelihood and Basic Assistance) of information on Protection (hotline, available services and legal aid) from sexual exploitation and abuse and safety messages in particular to women, girls and groups at risk.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of access to remote activities for women, girls and marginalized groups and develop a plan to improve inclusiveness of remote activities.
- Increase efforts to raise awareness on online safety, harassment and blackmail especially among women and girls.
- Increase of capacity building efforts to the Internal Security Forces (ISF) who are responding to the domestic violence (1745) hotline by ensuring that protective measures are put in place for all survivors including the process of referrals.
- Increase capacity building efforts to front line staff on the modality of remote Case Management Services and Psychosocial services in particular to women, girls and vulnerable groups at risk.