



# GENDER ALERT ON COVID-19 LEBANON

June 3, 2020 | Issue No. 3

IN FOCUS: **ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE  
(SECOND ALERT ON THIS TOPIC)**

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The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are partnering to provide periodic Lebanon specific gender and COVID-19 alerts throughout the public health crisis, and its ensuing economic crisis<sup>1</sup>. These updates aim to a) provide observations from front line responders on issues of gender equality in Lebanon, b) compile available secondary data on these issues into one reference point, c) consolidate guidance and programmatic tools related to gender issues and d) offer recommendations to support a more gender equitable response.

This issue of the Gender Alert on COVID-19 focuses on Access to Justice and Gender-Based Violence, and has been prepared in partnership with the Inter-Agency Sexual and Gender Based Violence Task Force (SGBV TF) in Lebanon.

## CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Findings from assessments and research conducted in April and May 2020 indicate that the Covid-19 lockdown has contributed to an increase in different forms of gender-based violence<sup>2</sup>, in particular, as experienced by women and girls<sup>3</sup>. Prolonged periods of isolation, income insecurity and restricted access to medical and social services have created the opportunity for ongoing violence against women and girls to continue<sup>4</sup> and new forms to occur. Incidents of harassment, discrimination and verbal, physical and economic abuses have been seen amongst particularly vulnerable groups, including domestic house

1 This issue of the Gender Alert series aggregates trends from multiple of government and humanitarian sources in effort to provide a holistic overview of GBV issues in Lebanon. All LCRP humanitarian partners, health service providers, and other entities are encouraged to feed into trends and analyses for the COVID-19 Gender Alert series. Please contact: [Claire.wilson@unwomen.org](mailto:Claire.wilson@unwomen.org).

2 Gender-based violence can encompass a wide range of violence typologies, such as physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and/or psychological abuse, intimate partner violence, and sexual exploitation, including transactional or survival sex.

3 Inclusive of Lebanese nationals, foreigners, refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and other legal statuses.

4 Prevalence data finds that 1 out of 3 married women in Lebanon report ever experiencing gender-based violence. UN Women and Promundo, "Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) Lebanon," 2017, page 75, [https://imagesmena.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/12/IMAGES\\_Leb\\_Report\\_Final\\_Web\\_Dec13.pdf](https://imagesmena.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/12/IMAGES_Leb_Report_Final_Web_Dec13.pdf).

workers, LGBTQI+ communities, and youth<sup>5, 6</sup>. With GBV response services relying more heavily on mobile and online platforms, technology gender gaps have left some women and girls cut off from reliable sources of information and services, contributing to reporting challenges<sup>7</sup>. Efforts by national and international and governmental and civil society stakeholders continue to adapt in order to support survivors and people at risk in innovative ways to bring justice.

## **ISSUES FOR ATTENTION**

### **1. Rise in the number and concern for severity of gender-based violence recorded (throughout January 2020 to May 2020)**

- The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS)<sup>8</sup> reports increases of several forms of GBV during the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same period months of 2019. Since the lockdown measures under COVID-19, the GBV IMS has observed the following<sup>9</sup>:
  - Disproportionate violence against women and girls (99% female survivors)
  - 3% increase of violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member since the lockdown (69%). More than half were committed by current and former partners.
  - 5% increase of physical assault incidents
  - 9% increase of incidents that occurred in the survivors' home (65%)
- The Inter-agency SGBV Task Force Assessment (surveying 562 women and girls across Lebanon) finds that up to 54% of respondents have observed an increase of harassment, violence or abuse against other women and girls in their household or their communities.
  - 57% of the interviewees report feeling less safe in their communities, and 44% state feeling less safe in their homes, since the start of COVID 19<sup>10</sup>.
  - These findings were echoed by an ABAAD study undertaken in partnership with IPSOS. It found that 37% of women and girls, out of a total of 250, reported feeling less safe since the COVID-19 lockdown in Lebanon. As well, 10% of men and women, out of a total of 500, have observed an increase in harassment/violence/abuse against women and girls since the COVID-19 outbreak in Lebanon<sup>11</sup>.
- KAFA reports that during the month of May, the number of calls to their hotline has risen to 938<sup>12</sup>; twice the number of calls received in April, and four times in March, the beginning of COVID-19 confinement measures. This increase also represents a 40% increase in new cases supported by KAFA's services from March to April 2020; reporting of femicide is among them<sup>5</sup>.
- The 1745 ISF hotline received 151 calls in April 2020, compared to 97 calls in March 2020<sup>13</sup>.
- ABAAD's 24/7 Helpline received 1198 calls from January 2020 till May 11 2020, compared to 1193 calls in all of 2019<sup>14</sup>.

5 KAFA, "The Toll of Coronavirus on Domestic Workers in Lebanon: from Isolation to Confinement," May 01, 2020, <https://www.kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>.

6 Emily Lewis, "Coronavirus: Lebanon's LGBT+ community is locked down and unprotected," Al-Araby, April 17, 2020, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2020/4/17/coronavirus-lebanons-lgbt-community-is-locked-down-and-unprotected>.

7 Rana Aoun, "Covid-19 Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East," GBV AoR Help Desk, [http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1953/covid-19-and-impact-on-vulnerable-female-migrant-domesticworkers\\_english.pdf](http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1953/covid-19-and-impact-on-vulnerable-female-migrant-domesticworkers_english.pdf).

8 The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) enables those providing services to GBV survivors to effectively and safely collect, store, analyze and share data related to the reported incidents of GBV: <http://gbvims.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/Overview-of-the-GBVIMS2.pdf>.

9 GBVIMS, COVID-19 Quarter 1 2020, April 22, 2020, [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/c8prp4negm3qwlx/AAC1d-gNieODEmm-G9OrtGOVa/Plans%20%26%20Guidelines/Gender%20and%20SGBV?dl=0&lst=&preview=Quarter+1\\_2020\\_GBVIMS+and+COVID-19\\_Lebanon\\_22April2020docx.pdf&subfolder\\_nav\\_tracking=1](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/c8prp4negm3qwlx/AAC1d-gNieODEmm-G9OrtGOVa/Plans%20%26%20Guidelines/Gender%20and%20SGBV?dl=0&lst=&preview=Quarter+1_2020_GBVIMS+and+COVID-19_Lebanon_22April2020docx.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1).

10 Inter-agency SGBV Taskforce, "Joint Assessment: Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls in Lebanon," May 2020, <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/05/impact-of-covid19-on-sgbv-in-lebanon>.

11 ABAAD, "COVID-19 MENA Consumer Sentiment Trackers," <https://www.abaadmena.org/documents/ebook.1590135808.pdf>.

12 MTV Lebanon, June 2, 2020, [https://www.mtv.com.lb/Programs/Prime\\_Time\\_News/2020/videos/02\\_Jun\\_2020\\_/أرقام العنف الأسري يتصاعد مخيف](https://www.mtv.com.lb/Programs/Prime_Time_News/2020/videos/02_Jun_2020_/أرقام العنف الأسري يتصاعد مخيف).

13 Figures according to data collected by the NCLW from the ISF.

14 Reported by ABAAD Resource Centre for Gender Equality, <https://www.abaadmena.org>.

- Across the country, there have been dozens of alleged high profile GBV cases that led to female homicides. On May 4, it was reported that a soldier in the Lebanese army shot his girlfriend and then himself at a market in a gas station in Fanar, resulting in the deaths of both<sup>15</sup>. The same day in Baalbek, it was reported father poisoned his daughter because she attempted to escape from home in order to marry against his approval<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. Marginalized and underdiscussed forms of GBV may be emerging during the Covid-19 lockdown

- Spikes in technology communication is producing new types of gender-based violence, including online discrimination, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, blackmail, and hate speech worldwide<sup>17</sup>. ISF reports sexual harassment and blackmailing crimes to have increased by 184% through cyberbullying during Covid-19 lockdown<sup>18</sup>. The age breakdown of these survivors shows that 41% are aged 12-26 years old as compared to 27% that are 26 years or older<sup>19</sup>.
- Economic violence, which is abuse which causes economic harm to an individual, in the form of restricting access to financial resources, education or the labour market or otherwise<sup>20</sup>, could be on the rise. Of the women and girls reporting GBV, 53% reported a denial of resources based on their gender. Similarly KAFA reported 98 cases of economic violence between March and May 2020.<sup>21</sup>
- LGBTQI+ organization, Helem, has seen an increase in calls of violence against LGBTQI+ persons on their hotlines. LGBTQI+ people in Lebanon are considered criminalized under Article 534 of Lebanon's penal code. Routine support reduced due to stay-at-home measures in Lebanon have posed significant safety risks for LGBTQI+ persons, mirroring global trends<sup>22</sup>. Specific gender-based violence against LGBTQI+ persons can include corrective rape, forced heterosexual marriage, anal examinations, denial of access to hormones and conversion therapy. LGBTQI+ people have reported such abuses, leading to risks of suicide<sup>6</sup>.
- Domestic migrant workers in general (majority of whom are women), and specifically those whose work contracts have expired or have been fired by their employers due to economic crisis, are not able to recuperate their unpaid wages nor leave the country as a result of the Covid-19 border closures. They face increased risks of GBV, including working extreme hours and being denied rest days, communications, even food<sup>23</sup>.

## 3. Covid 19 lockdown: Challenges and Responses to GBV and SHRH service delivery

- According to GBVIMS data, case management agencies reported an 8% decrease in reporting of SGBV incidents in Q1 in Lebanon compared to the same period in February 2019<sup>8,24</sup>. These figures do not mean GBV is not happening. SGBV experts believe this decrease reflects barriers to reporting and seeking care, such as sharing the same house with several family members, including perpetrators and not being able to bear costs related to communication technology (i.e. Internet bundles)<sup>8</sup>.
- Despite challenges, findings from the joint SGBV TF assessment shows that 75% of the 562 respondents surveyed in the past month know where and when to access services for safety, 50% have been able to access multi-sectoral services, and of those, 71% on GBV case management, and 22% on MHPSS<sup>9</sup>.

15 Al Arabia, <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/last-page/2020/05/05/#-لبناني-يظهر-في-فيديو-وهو-يقتل-صديقته-بالرصاصة-ثم-ينتحر/>.

16 Sharika wa Laken Media, May 4, 2020, <https://www.sharikawalaken.media/2020/05/04/أب-يسمم-ابنته-ويقتلها-في-بعلبك/>.

17 "Technology facilitated gender-based violence," ICRW, 2018.

18 Lebanon Inter Security Forces, May 2020, <https://twitter.com/LebISF/status/1257215652995182592>.

19 Fatima Zein Al Dine, "أرقام صادمة حول العنف الإلكتروني ضد النساء والفتيات وناجيات يرفعن الصوت" Sharika Wa Laken, May 8, 2020.

20 European Institute for Gender Equality, <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1096>.

21 MTV Lebanon, June 2, 2020, [https://www.mtv.com.lb/Programs/Prime\\_Time\\_News/2020/videos/02\\_Jun\\_2020\\_/أرقام-العنف-الأسري-بتصاعد-مخيف](https://www.mtv.com.lb/Programs/Prime_Time_News/2020/videos/02_Jun_2020_/أرقام-العنف-الأسري-بتصاعد-مخيف).

22 Edge Effect, "Impacts of COVID-19 on LGBT People," 2020, [https://www.edgeeffect.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LGBTIQ-COVID19\\_EdgeEffect\\_30Apr.pdf](https://www.edgeeffect.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LGBTIQ-COVID19_EdgeEffect_30Apr.pdf).

23 Anti-Racism Movement, "Including Non-Lebanese in Your Covid-19 Response Plans is Not an Option, it's a necessity," April 6, 2020, <https://www.armlebanon.org/content/including-non-lebanese-your-covid-19-response-plans%C2%AO-not-option-it-s-necessity>.

24 "Preliminary Analysis of Gender-Based Violence trends during Covid 19," GBV IMS Taskforce Jordan, April 14, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report-jordan/preliminary-analysis-gender-based-violence-trends-during-covid-19-gbv-ims-taskforce>.

- Plan International reports that up to 83% of female respondents in a recent survey cite fear of coronavirus as a reason for not accessing sexual and reproductive health services (SRH), a critical and lifesaving service for GBV survivors<sup>25</sup>.
- During the Covid-19 response, women report facing increased risks as frontline aid and healthcare workers, including heightened exposure, including heightened exposure, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, and shame and stigma from the community based on their “perceived disease status or association with people who are [infected with Covid-19].”
- The National Domestic Violence hotline (1745) remains inaccessible to some survivors, as it is not free. NCLW has requested the Ministry of Communication and the Internal Security Forces to work together to make the hotline free of charge and is following up on this request with the concerned institutions.
- The GBV sector has temporarily switched to new remote and alternative modalities to continue ensuring the provision of priority GBV services in times of limited access. According to the SGBV TF’s Impact Assessment, of those who accessed GBV services, 86% said that remote services were ‘as helpful as’ or ‘more helpful than’ in person services, which shows the possibilities of providing quality services remotely<sup>9</sup>.
- In response to the increase of GBV during lockdown, NCLW held a meeting, together with the Ministry of Social Affairs, and GBV service providers to assess the urgent needs for the enhancement of the protection of women and girls. During this meeting, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers informed participants that governorates (Mount Lebanon, Beirut and Bekaa) were ready to provide buildings suitable for shelters, if needed.

#### 4. Adapted Judicial Access to Survivors in Lockdown

Courts around the world, as well as in Lebanon, have found innovative ways of handling cases of GBV including domestic violence through the use of technology for hearing cases remotely. A concern when shifting to online platforms relates to the extent to which women and girls are being able to safely access technology or to use it. Following a request from NCLW to the Ministry of Justice to facilitate judicial access to survivors in lockdown, the below policies were enacted:

- Generalization number 68/2020 was issued on April 16 to improve prosecution procedures for cases of domestic violence under lockdown. Under these procedures, judicial police were requested to open immediate records of all cases of domestic violence, even those without witnesses; the victim could testify via video call and the judicial officers could take statements remotely<sup>26</sup>.
- Generalization number 77/2020 issued by the President of the Supreme Judicial Council on April 21st, aims to formalize an online mechanism used to accept and rule on urgent complaints presented to judges by email. For this purpose, email addresses of the courts dealing with domestic violence cases have been disseminated to increase access to justice for survivors.
- The first online protection order in response to domestic violence was issued on April 23rd, protecting the survivor, her children and extended family from the perpetrator<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Plan International Lebanon, “Covid-19 Needs Assessment,” April 2020, <https://plan-international.org/publications/covid-19-multi-sectoral-needs-assessment>.

<sup>26</sup> تعميم للقاضي عويدات حول قضايا العنف الأسري, National News Agency (NNA), April 16, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Kafa, April 23, <https://twitter.com/KAFALebanon/status/1253375487054921736>.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **Government of Lebanon**

- Enable the ISF domestic violence hotline – 1745 – to be free of charge for all callers.
- Ensure the continued capacity of police personnel (with both men and women) to respond to cases of domestic violence as well as the exploitation of domestic workers twenty-four hours per day. Engage municipal police to proactively mitigate and reduce domestic violence at community level as well as facilitate referrals and/or reporting to the ISF.
- Continue to promote and expand provisions for domestic violence survivors (including domestic workers) to attend court proceedings, via accessible teleconference when needed.
- Continue to ensure freedom of movement for all staff providing GBV life-saving interventions, as part of the health services.
- Support gradual open-up of face-to-face SGBV services in line with global health guidance and overall government decisions.
- Continue to support MoSA's Social Development Centers to deliver services to those at risk of and surviving violence, as well as other vulnerable populations.
- Adopt the amendment of Law on protection of women and other family members from domestic violence No. 293/2014 to provide better protections for women survivors of violence and their children.
- Adopt a regulatory decree for the establishment of a special fund to assist survivors of violence.

### **Humanitarian Responders and Coordination:**

- Continue to support and dedicate sufficient funding for programmes that seek to protect against GBV (including expanding remote case management and MHPSS services, urgently increasing shelter capacity, and procuring internet and phone credit to allow for remote service access within the existing humanitarian coordination structures in Lebanon.)
- Prioritize emergency cash assistance and in-kind assistance to GBV survivors.
- Conduct remote training for staff (specialized and non-specialized GBV actors) on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in pandemics.
- Engage in upcoming Inter-Agency trainings on GBV safe identification and referral trainings to mainstream GBV into all humanitarian sector responses.

### **Healthcare Providers:**

- Strengthen the provision and access to mental health facilities and shelters equipped to receive cases of mental health for women vulnerable/survivors of GBV (a need particularly prevalent with women migrant domestic workers).
- Continue to provide access to life-saving care and medical support to GBV survivors, including clinical management of rape services.
- Disseminate information and publicize resources about gender-based violence services available across the country.
- Ensure that all persons, regardless, of age, physical and mental health capacities, nationality, legal status, socioeconomic background, gender and sexual orientation have access to GBV services.
- Strengthen the remote outreach to women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation through the dissemination of information on available services.

## RELATED LEBANON PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES:

- ABAAD, "Practical Measures to Take in GBV Case Management during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak":
  - Video in Arabic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN-XZZnk0Z0ABAAD>
  - Poster: <https://www.abaadmena.org/documents/ebook.1585917393.pdf>
- ABAAD, "Dealing with your Anger in a Healthy Way: A few tips for men during the COVID-19 lockdown":
  - English: <https://www.abaadmena.org/documents/ebook.1590059337.pdf>.
  - Arabic: <https://www.abaadmena.org/documents/ebook.1590047103.pdf>.
- Aoun, Rana, "COVID-19 Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East," GBV AOR Help Desk, [http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1953/covid-19-and-impact-on-vulnerable-female-migrant-domesticworkers\\_english.pdf](http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1953/covid-19-and-impact-on-vulnerable-female-migrant-domesticworkers_english.pdf).
- GBVIMS, Lebanon GBV IMS Thematic Report, Quarter 1 2020, April 22, 2020, [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/c8prp4negm3qwlx/AAC1d-gNieQDEmm-G9OrtGQVa/Plans%20%26%20Guidelines/Gender%20and%20SGBV?dl=0&lst=&preview=Quarter+1\\_2020\\_GBVIMS+and+COVID-19\\_Lebanon\\_22April2020docx.pdf&subfolder\\_nav\\_tracking=1](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/c8prp4negm3qwlx/AAC1d-gNieQDEmm-G9OrtGQVa/Plans%20%26%20Guidelines/Gender%20and%20SGBV?dl=0&lst=&preview=Quarter+1_2020_GBVIMS+and+COVID-19_Lebanon_22April2020docx.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1).
- Inter-agency SGBV Taskforce, "Joint Assessment: Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls in Lebanon," May 2020, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76729>.
- KAFA, "The Toll of Coronavirus on Domestic Workers in Lebanon: from Isolation to Confinement" May 01, 2020, <https://www.kafa.org.lb/en/node/413>.
- Safe Distributions: Guidelines for Reducing Protection Risks in In-kind Distributions, May 2020, [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6jpsm21d11xwjb2/AAAaJLYX\\_HKsTvfrQpxSxvFa?dl=0&preview=Final+Safe+Distributions+Guidance.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6jpsm21d11xwjb2/AAAaJLYX_HKsTvfrQpxSxvFa?dl=0&preview=Final+Safe+Distributions+Guidance.pdf).



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