



Inter-Agency
Coordination
Lebanon



In partnership with
Canada



MAPPING AND SUPPORTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND WOMEN-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN LEBANON:

A Call to Action for Inclusive
Interventions Amidst Crises



#EqualityInAction

Abstract

Women’s rights and women-led organizations (WROs and WLOs) play a crucial role in responding to crises, especially for women and girls who are disproportionately affected. Despite their vital role, these organizations are often under-resourced, and their priorities and concerns are not often prioritized in key decision-making spaces. Building on the recognition of the unique role played by WROs and WLOs, this report was developed under the framework of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), which has prioritized engagement with these organizations across all its sectors. The report was jointly developed with a mapping of WROs and WLOs in humanitarian action and stabilization efforts in Lebanon. It presents the landscape of WROs and WLOs mapped and delves into their challenges, support needs, and priorities. Most importantly, the report offers guidance and recommendations for national and international partners on how best to engage and support WROs and WLOs to ensure contextualized, relevant, and accountable interventions that are inclusive and gender-responsive.

Suggested Citation

El Asmar, F. (2024). Mapping and supporting women’s rights and women-led organizations in Lebanon: a call to action for inclusive interventions amidst crises. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Copyright © 2024 By the United Nations Development Programme.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP, or the UN Member States.

This research report has been prepared under the project “Integrating Gender into Lebanese Institutions” funded by the Government of Canada and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme – UNDP

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Acronyms	5
Executive Summary	6
I. Introduction	11
A. Women and their organizations in times of crises in Lebanon	11
B. Rationale for this report: objectives and scope	13
II. Methodology	14
III. Findings	16
A. Landscape of WROs/WLOs working in Crisis Response in Lebanon	16
i. Self-defined organization types	16
ii. Leadership	18
iii. Size	19
iv. Geographical distribution.	20
v. Type of work and relevance for sectors.	21
B. Challenges, support needs and recommendations for engagement and support	25
i. Technical and capacity-building gaps and challenges	25
Capacity building opportunities	25
Digital and language skills	26
Thematic issues: knowledge, tools and approaches	26
Organizational development and growth	27
What to do to address technical needs and capacity-building gaps and challenges.	28
ii. Systemic and operational challenges	29
Economic crisis and volatility of the context	29
Retaining and supporting staff and volunteers.	30
Resistance and backlash	30
What to do to address systemic and operational challenges: Crisis-responsive support	31
iii. Funding challenges.	32
What to do to address funding challenges	33
iv. Partnerships and coordination challenges	33
What to do to build more equitable partnerships and coordination structures	34
a. Tailored engagement	34
b. Access to partnerships and coordination	35
c. Equal partnerships	36
d. Learning and Accountability	36
C. Why supporting and partnering with women's organisations will improve programming quality, impact and accountability	37
IV. References	40
Annex I: LCRP Mapping of Women's Rights and Women-Led Organizations in Humanitarian Action and Stabilization in Lebanon	43

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Francesca El Asmar, Gender Consultant.

We extend the deepest gratitude to the organizations interviewed for this exercise, and to the women leading them, who generously gave their time, shared their stories and experiences and provided invaluable insights for this report. Their dedication and commitment to promoting gender equality and supporting women and girls, especially in the face of multiple crises, is commendable.

We also extend our thanks to the organizations and individuals who were interviewed as key informants for this report. Their knowledge and expertise have helped shape the analysis and recommendations presented here, and their contributions are greatly appreciated.

Finally, we would like to thank those who reviewed the report and provided valuable feedback. We are grateful for their insights and suggestions, which have helped improve the quality, robustness and relevance of this work. Reviewers included Simona Pari, UNDP; Elina Silen, UNDP; Sawsan Nourallah, UNDP; Rania Tarazi, UNDP; Leena Taha, UNDP; Olivia Schmidt, UN Women; Sophie Etzold, UNHCR; Pamela DiCamillo, UNFPA, Rana El Khawand, UNDP; Mariam Balhas, UNDP.

Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organization
FTL	Fair Trade Lebanon
GBV	Gender-based violence
GWG	Gender Working Group
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KtK	Kvinna till Kvinna
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LRP	Lebanon Response Plan
LHDF	Lebanon Humanitarian and Development NGOs Forum
OPD	Organization of People with Disabilities
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WLO	Women-led organization
WRO	Women's rights organization

Executive Summary

In Lebanon, as is the case around the world, women's organizations are often the first and most active responders to their communities' needs in times of crisis. They play a critical role in delivering interventions that are conscious of the distinct needs of women and girls and provide life-saving services. Their work supports women in building leadership and challenging harmful social norms and practices. They facilitate women's entry into the labour market and offer opportunities for strengthened knowledge and skills, while amplifying their voices in key decision-making spaces. In fact, **women and girls are disproportionately affected by crises. During such crises, patriarchal social norms and gendered inequalities are exacerbated, and gender-based violence and exploitation rise exponentially.** This is further exacerbated for women from particularly vulnerable groups, including displaced Syrian and Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon. However, despite the crucial role they play, **women's rights and women-led organizations (WROs and WLOs) are often chronically under-resourced. Their priorities and concerns, as well as those of the women they support and represent, are often missing from key humanitarian and stabilization decision-making spaces, strategies and plans.**

Building on the recognition of the unique role they have to play, sectors under the 2022-2023 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan¹ (LCRP) and under the upcoming 2024 - 2025 Lebanon Response Plan (LRP) have highlighted that engagement with WROs and WLOs should be prioritized. This will ensure the delivery of a response that adequately responds to the distinct experiences of women and girls. Additionally, it will strengthen their influence and participation in the design and implementation of interventions, assessments and feedback mechanisms.

Why is it important to engage WROs and WLOs under the Lebanon Response Plan?

Engaging WROs and WLOs would ensure that responses to crises are contextualized, relevant and accountable:

- WROs and WLOs hold an intrinsic understanding of communities' needs and the contexts they navigate, founded on their own lived experiences of crises. This allows them to identify the most relevant forms of support and to design and deliver interventions that respond to the distinct needs of women and girls;
- WROs and WLOs play a strategic role in strengthening accountability of humanitarian action and stabilization. They contribute to building trust while centring women's experiences, voices and priorities, as well as ensuring timely and contextualized responses;
- Consultations and coordination with WROs and WLOs around cross-sectoral needs assessments, research, gender analyses are critical to ensure gendered dynamics are captured and women's needs and concerns are highlighted – thereby informing gender-responsive interventions, cognizant of women and girls' distinct needs and experiences.

¹ The LCRP is an integrated humanitarian and stabilization strategy that brings together the Government of Lebanon (GoL) and international and national partners to jointly respond to the impact of the Syria crisis, in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner.

Greater support and engagement with WROs and WLOs would contribute to promoting more inclusive and gender-responsive interventions:

- WROs and WLOs can facilitate meaningful participation of women and girls across the project cycle. Thus, they guarantee opportunities for gender-responsive and transformative change; WROs and WLOs have access to groups and areas that can be difficult to reach for partners, especially women and girls from such groups;
- Through coordination and partnerships with local and international actors, WROs and WLOs can design, implement and facilitate accessible and relevant interventions for particularly marginalized groups. These groups include women and girls at the intersections of different vulnerabilities, including age, disability, social class and status etc.

Engaging WROs and WLOs would provide unique insights into the needed actions and approaches for gender-mainstreaming across sectors, with an outlook for sustainable and transformative change:

- WROs' and WLOs' interventions address both women's immediate practical and emergency needs, AND their more strategic and medium to longer-term priorities;
- WROs' and WLOs' work is founded on the understanding that change around gender equality is a long-term non-linear process. They can therefore provide insights into needed actions to contribute to such change;
- WROs and WLOs often operate at the intersection of sectors and across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. They offer opportunities for consistent, yet adaptive interventions and long-term cumulative change.

Objectives and methodology

This report, together with a mapping of WROs and WLOs working on humanitarian action and stabilization interventions in Lebanon, were jointly conducted to provide guidance and recommendations for national and international partners around engagement with and support to WROs and WLOs. A qualitative approach was primarily adopted, complemented by quantitative data from the mapping exercise to characterize the landscape of these organizations in the country. In addition to a thorough review of existing literature, the methodology for this exercise involved the following:

- **9 semi-structured interviews with Lebanon Humanitarian Development Forum (LHDF) as well as INGOs and UN Agencies** working on gender across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and regularly engaging with WROs/WLOs through partnerships or other approaches.
- **64 semi-structured interviews with WROs and WLOs** from across the country, contributing to humanitarian action and stabilization efforts, with a commitment to reach out to smaller, community-based and grassroots organizations.
- **4 validation sessions**, including 2 with WROs and WLOs who participated in the process, 1 with Gender Working Group (GWG) members and 1 with the Gender-Based Violence Working Group members.
- **A round of review** by key stakeholders was conducted, in addition to an **internal peer review committee**, which was formed to provide feedback and ensure the robustness of the findings and recommendations of this report.

What does the landscape of WROs and WLOs in humanitarian action and stabilization look like?

The landscape of WROs and WLOs working on humanitarian action and stabilization in Lebanon is very diverse; these groups make up a large share of frontline responders in emergencies and implement impactful interventions:

- **Self-defined organization types:** These vary between WROs, feminist or intersectional feminist organizations, organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs), local civil society organizations (CSOs), legal actors, service providers, women's groups and initiatives – including youth-led and faith-based groups, feminist groups and collectives and women's cooperatives.
- **Leadership:** all 64 organizations and groups have a minimum of 50% women as board members and in senior management, with the great majority being mostly (over 75%) or entirely (100%) women-led. 67% of WROs and WLOs interviewed are Lebanese women-led. The remaining 33% are led by displaced Syrian or Palestinian refugee women, or jointly led by Syrian and Lebanese women.
- **Size:** 78% of WROs and WLOs interviewed are micro, small or medium organizations, who tend to be less visible and under-resourced. Syrian women-led organizations and those led jointly by Syrian and Lebanese women, tend to be micro or small in size.
- **Geographical distribution and areas of operations:** WROs and WLOs interviewed are distributed across all areas of the country. They implement interventions in their own areas and beyond.
- **Registration status:** A quarter of WROs and WLOs reported being in the process of seeking registration in Lebanon, or interested in doing so, but not always having the capacity or needed requirements to do so. Some of them are informal community-led groups who are offering support to their communities on a volunteer-basis.
- **Type of work and relevance for sectors:** WROs and WLOs vary in terms of the type of work they implement. While many often have specific areas of expertise, they also tend to work at the intersection of various sectors, and across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Most of their current interventions fall under the protection and livelihoods sectors, with large gaps across other sectors – particularly WaSH, Shelter and Social Stability.

For crisis response interventions to be truly responsive to communities' needs, and to unlock the potential for gender-transformative change, sectors must prioritize engagement with WROs and WLOs.

What are the main challenges faced by WROs and WLOs?

Some of the challenges reported by interviewees may be shared by other types of organizations. However, WROs and WLOs' work and the systems within which they operate, distinctively position them at a disadvantage within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. This creates challenges unique to them - as an extension of restrictions imposed on women more broadly, and due to the structural nature of the issues that many of these WROs and WLOs address. Evidently, these vary between larger, more established organizations and smaller groups. It is worth noting that the latter have greater challenges related to operations, sustainability and access to opportunities and spaces. Challenges and support needs include:

- 1. Access to capacity-building opportunities** was raised as a particular need for smaller organizations based outside of Beirut. A preference for tailored training and mentoring was raised by most interviewees, who also stressed the importance of practical and useful support and tools that can be directly integrated into their work. Specific support areas were highlighted around gender-focused tools, organizational development and digital and language skills.

Recommendations for technical support and capacity-building: Prioritizing tailored, useful and relevant forms of support is crucial. These include one-on-one opportunities such as mentorship, as well as close support for organizational development, guidance on global funding and partnership requirements, and promoting collaborations among WROs and WLOs. It is also important to adapt tools and approaches to be gender-sensitive. Moreover, it is imperative to invest in networking and learning spaces for WROs and WLOs, with a particular focus on disability inclusion and gender mainstreaming.

- 2. Systemic and operational challenges:** Similar to other organizations, the economic crisis and volatility of the context pose significant challenges to the work and operations of WROs and WLOs, who are already under-resourced. Securing and retaining quality staff is also becoming a difficult task for many due to competition over salaries, challenges in sustaining staff in-between grants and brain drain resulting in limited specialized professionals. Engaging volunteers is also increasingly challenging as a result of the crisis, on which many WROs and WLOs rely to sustain their work. Moreover, resistance and backlash to work on gender and women's issues is reportedly increasing, making it more difficult for WROs' and WLOs' to operate. Finally, women-led OPDs stressed a distinct concern around the lack of inclusive and accessible spaces within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus for people with disabilities.

Recommendations for crisis-responsive support: This involves supporting WROs/WLOs' risk mitigation, addressing resistance and backlash that they face, promoting staff well-being and supporting volunteering. This also calls for coordinated efforts among operational partners, sector coordinators, and donors to provide resources and invest in interventions that meet both women's practical and strategic needs, aiming for sustainable change across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

- 3. Funding challenges:** Most interviewed organizations raised challenges around the funding landscape and agendas, the type of grants available and access to the calls for proposals themselves. Key challenges relate to short-term and sporadic funding, limited resources for institutional or organizational development, and funding priorities diverging from lived realities on the ground. Lack of complementarity and rigidity of funding requirements were also highlighted.

Funding recommendations: Improving access and inclusivity of smaller and emerging WROs/WLOs is essential to ensure sustainable and impactful engagement. This requires simplifying funding application processes and widely disseminating information about available opportunities, including in Arabic. This also entails advocating for increased partnerships and diversified funding models. Extending funding to rural and underserved areas, and investing in alternative funding models for smaller and emerging groups, as well as in fairer funding modalities, is also necessary to ensure inclusive, equitable and impactful interventions.

4. Partnerships and coordination challenges: Many organizations highlighted positive partnership experiences with international NGOs or donors, usually involving shared values and visions, equitable divisions of resources, equal decision-making power and mutual sharing of expertise and capacities. However, challenges were raised around different partnership models, including those with limited recognition of the capacity of smaller WROs and WLOs, extractive forms of collaborations, and those that did not involve trust and equal decision-making. Micro to medium organizations reported barriers in accessing coordination meetings, limited information sharing and confusion and unclarity around certain coordination processes and membership requirements. Shortages in services and slow referral mechanisms were also reported as a coordination challenge by service providers specifically.

Partnerships and coordination recommendations: Building more equitable partnerships and coordination structures requires tailored engagement and strategic partnerships with WROs and WLOs of diverse types and sizes, and dedicated outreach and coordination efforts to strengthen links with these groups. Equal partnerships founded in transparency, mutual accountability and shared values are key, and entail investment in long-term collaborations, equitable distribution of resources and burdens, and alternative and simplified partnership processes. Learning and accountability mechanisms are essential to foster innovation and best practices, with insights from non-humanitarian actors supporting WROs/WLOs offering valuable perspectives for impactful interventions across sectors.

I. Introduction

A. Women and their organizations in times of crises in Lebanon

In recent years, Lebanon has been facing a series of intersecting crises, with deep implications for Lebanese and non-Lebanese communities across all areas in the country. Systemic gendered inequalities that existed before the crisis are now significantly exacerbated. Women are facing higher risks of poverty, job loss, food insecurity, violence and exploitation². In his 2022 visit to Lebanon, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and Human Rights found that among other vulnerable groups, women are particularly affected by the crises. He highlighted significant rises in gender-based violence in correlation with the economic crisis³. In fact, as has been widely documented⁴ and mirrored in Lebanon's crisis context, women and girls are disproportionately affected by crises. During such conditions, patriarchal social norms and gendered inequalities are exacerbated, and gender-based violence and exploitation rise exponentially⁵. Women and girls tend to make up high proportions of displaced populations⁶. In emergencies, their needs are not often prioritized, including within households and related spending, in communal decision-making, as well as in national crisis response strategic plans⁷.

As is the case around the world, women and their organizations in Lebanon are often the first and most active to respond to their communities' needs in times of crises. For example, as an extension of their care work responsibilities, women have supported their families and communities in surviving and overcoming health crises, by caring for the sick and ensuring hygiene measures are followed – such as during the COVID-19 pandemic⁸. Women's rights organizations have also played a critical role in sustaining the delivery of essential services, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence (GBV) services during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when resources and support were being shifted away towards the health response⁹. Moreover, despite heavy restrictions on their mobility¹⁰ and freedoms of assembly¹¹, Syrian and Palestinian women have been coming together over their shared struggles and experiences of displacement and acting as frontline responders to the needs of women in their communities through local-level groups, initiatives, activities and service provision. For example, Palestinian refugee women-led organizations have long been key actors consistently delivering GBV services across camps in the country. Displaced Syrian women's groups have also been addressing priority needs in their communities. This includes creating spaces for women to increase their knowledge and literacy – including digital literacy; offering education activities for out-of-school children using gender-responsive curricula; supporting

2 Kvinna till Kvinna. (2020). Women at great risk in Lebanon's deepening crisis. <https://kvinnaillkvinna.org/2020/08/17/women-at-great-risk-in-lebanons-deepening-crisis/#:~:text=With%20many%20houses%20left%20without,from%20the%20most%20vulnerable%20communities>

3 Human Rights Council. (2022). Visit to Lebanon: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter. United Nations General Assembly. <https://lebanon.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/FINAL%20SR%20Report%20on%20his%20Visit%20to%20Lebanon-ENG-Published%20May2022.pdf>

4 Lafrenière, J., Sweetman, C. & Thylin, T. (2019) Introduction: gender, humanitarian action and crisis response, *Gender & Development*, 27:2, 187-201, DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2019.1634332; UN Women. Facts and figures: Humanitarian action. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/facts-and-figures>; OCHA. Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls. <https://www.unocha.org/fr/themes/gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%20have%20historically,%2C%20and%20gender%2Dbased%20violence>; OCHA. (2022). Global Humanitarian Review. <https://2022.gho.unocha.org/trends/humanitarian-crisis-continue-exacerbate-gender-inequalities/>

5 UNICEF. Gender-based violence in emergencies. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies>; OCHA. (2021). Global Humanitarian Review. <https://2021.gho.unocha.org/global-trends/gender-and-gender-based-violence-humanitarian-action/#:~:text=Humanitarian%20contexts%20affect%20women%20more,with%2035%20per%20cent%20worldwide>

6 UN Women (2020).

7 El Asmar, F., Shawaf, N. & Mikdashi, D. (2019). 'No One Asked': Amplifying the voices of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon on their power to decide. Oxfam: <https://bit.ly/33DzySm>, doi: 10.21201/2019.5310, ISBN: 978-1-78748-531-0; UN Women. Facts and figures: Humanitarian action.

8 UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, NCLW (2020). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. Issue No.4. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Arab%20States/Attachments/Publications/2020/07/GA%20Lebanon%20No4/Gender%20Alert%20on%20COVIDLebanon%20Issue%204.pdf>; UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, NCLW (2020). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. Issue No.5. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Arab%20States/Attachments/Publications/2021/02/Gender%20Alert%20on%20COVIDLebanon%20Issue%205%20FINAL.pdf>

9 Women Deliver. A Crisis Within a Crisis: Grassroots Feminist Organizations Press On During COVID-19 in Lebanon. <https://womendeliver.org/a-crisis-within-a-crisis-grassroots-feminist-organizations-press-on-during-covid-19-in-lebanon/>

10 IPSOS Group SA (2018).

11 El Helou, Z. & Antara, L. (2018). Political Participation of Refugees: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. Robert Bosch Stiftung. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/political-participation-of-refugees-the-case-of-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon.pdf>

women's leadership and collective action over their shared struggles; or facilitating access to income-generating opportunities. Lebanese women's organizations also have a long history of advancing women's rights in the country, and continuously adapt their work and respond to women and their communities' needs in the face of crises.

Considering the multiple protracted crises and overall response in Lebanon, women's organizations are playing a critical role in delivering responses that are inclusive, conscious of the distinct needs of women and girls, and providing life-saving services focused on these needs. Many of these organizations work to support women in their communities in building leadership, challenging harmful social norms and practices and participating in the design and implementation of humanitarian and stabilization interventions. These groups also play a key role in facilitating women's ability to enter the labour market and offering opportunities for strengthened knowledge and skills. They are instrumental in ensuring women have access to needed information about services and in raising awareness about their rights, while amplifying their voices, needs and priorities in decision-making and coordination spaces.

Their contributions and interventions, especially grassroots and community-based groups, are ever so crucial in times of emergencies as they hold an intrinsic understanding of the communities they serve, and particularly women from these communities, founded on their own lived experiences of crises. They often come from these very communities, and have access to groups and areas that can be difficult to reach by crisis response actors. Within the rapidly deteriorating situation in Lebanon, their standpoint offers them the knowledge to identify the most relevant forms of support and to design. It further allows them to deliver interventions that respond to the distinct needs and priorities of women and girls. They may be closer to the most marginalized groups, who tend to be invisibilized or left behind by crisis response interventions, including people with disabilities and older persons, and especially to women and girls from these groups. Engaging with women's organizations would therefore support the development of more contextualized and relevant responses, as well as strengthened accountability and trust with community members¹². When it comes to research and assessments, this would ensure meaningfully participatory processes whereby communal dynamics, needs and priorities can be captured, and women's distinct concerns can be centered. Women's organizations also operate at the intersection of sectors and across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, offering opportunities for consistent, yet adaptive interventions and long-term cumulative change. Overall, strengthened engagement and support for women's organizations would contribute to promoting more inclusive, transformative and sustainable interventions.

Despite women's rights organizations (WROs) and women-led organizations (WLOs)'s major role and consistent work in Lebanon, they are chronically under-resourced, similarly to gender-relevant humanitarian interventions more broadly¹³. These organizations are not always formalized or supported. Overall engagement and consultations with them by actors across the country are significantly limited. These limitations often result from patriarchal social norms restricting women's access to networks and resources and translating into their organizations' experiences as well. These are also due to structural barriers around women's representation at all levels, as well as barriers related to the very nature of humanitarian and stabilization ecosystems, partnership models and funding structures, as is further elaborated in this report. Accordingly, despite women's organizations being on the frontlines since the onset of the crises in Lebanon, and meeting the needs of affected communities, they do not always have equal access to decision-making spaces and resources.

12 UN Women (2020). How to promote gender-responsive localization in humanitarian action. Guidance Note. Geneva: UN Women. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-05/UN%20Women%20-%20How%20to%20promote%20a%20gender-responsive%20participation%20revolution%20in%20humanitarian%20settings%20-%20Guidance%20Note.pdf>; UNICEF (2020). Partnering with Women- and Girl-led Organizations. Action Learning Brief and Checklist. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/media/129046/file/UNICEF%20-%20Action%20Brief%20-%20Engaging%20Local%20WGLOs.pdf>

13 Fernandez, S. M. and Chicet, C. (2022). Funding for gender-relevant humanitarian response. Development Initiatives. https://devinit.org/documents/1152/Funding_for_gender-relevant_humanitarian_response.pdf

As a result, their voice, priorities and concerns, as well as those of the women they support and represent, are often missing from key humanitarian and stabilization coordination and decision-making spaces in Lebanon.

B. Rationale for this report: objectives and scope

As of 2024, the Lebanon Response Plan (LRP), co-led by the Government of Lebanon and the UN, will be a unified response framework for partners to help meet the needs of crisis-affected populations across Lebanon. The LRP will be a two-year humanitarian-stabilization framework (2024-2025), building on the previous Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) and Emergency Response Plan (ERP). Partners will advance four strategic objectives: 1) Enhance the protection of vulnerable people; 2) Provide immediate assistance to vulnerable people to ensure their critical needs are met; 3) Support service provision through national systems, including national rapid response capacity; 4) Reinforce Lebanon's economic, social and environmental stability.

Women from crisis-affected populations have been disproportionately affected, though a considerable gap has been identified when it comes to engagement, partnerships, support and consultations with WROs and WLOs. Building on the recognition of the unique role they have to play, since 2022/2023 the LRP had prioritized engagement with women's grassroots organizations across all its sectors¹⁴. This will ensure the delivery of a response that adequately meets the distinct experiences of women and girls. Moreover, it will strengthen their influence and participation in the design and implementation of crisis response interventions, as well as in assessments and feedback mechanisms. Key questions and knowledge gaps around engagement with such organizations within the humanitarian and stabilization ecosystem in Lebanon included: (1) What are the landscape and experiences of WROs and WLOs in humanitarian action and stabilization efforts in Lebanon and (2) What are the needs and challenges of these organizations and (3) What are the best strategies and approaches to support, consult and collaborate with diverse women's groups, and particularly grassroots and community-based ones?

This report, together with a mapping of WROs and WLOs in humanitarian action and stabilization in Lebanon (Annex I) were commissioned under the framework of the LCRP and were jointly conducted, to contribute to filling these knowledge gaps. The main objectives of the report are therefore: (1) to identify and map women's rights and women-led organizations relevant to humanitarian and stabilization efforts across all areas in Lebanon, (2) to capture the experiences, challenges and priorities of these organizations, and (3) to provide practical guidance and recommendations for national and international partners on engagement with and support to WROs and WLOs.

¹⁴ The LRP includes coordination mechanisms with actors working across 9 different sectors: Food Security and Agriculture, Basic Assistance, Education, Health, Water, Protection, Social Stability, Livelihoods, Energy, and Shelter.

II. Methodology

This report was developed together with a mapping of women's rights and women-led organizations operating within the crisis response in Lebanon (annexed to this document) following a joint methodology in two stages. It adopts a qualitative approach, and is supported by quantitative data from the mapping exercise, to characterize the landscape of WROs and WLOs working within this scope.

The **first stage** consisted of identifying and mapping national WROs and WLOs working within the framework of humanitarian and stabilization sectors. This process entailed a thorough **desk review** of existing lists, mappings, articles, donor reports and other documentation around women's groups, initiatives and organizations delivering services and interventions over the past years, and especially since the onset of the Syria crisis. This also included **coordination and consultation** with relevant partners, including **UN Women** and the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**, to get a better understanding of their engagement with women's grassroots organizations, and ensure coherence with existing work in the country. Coordination with other key actors was also conducted throughout the process of developing this work, especially in the review and validation stages.

Box 1:

Women's Rights and Women-Led Organizations in Humanitarian Action and Stabilization in Lebanon

Identification of WROs and WLOs followed pre-defined criteria to ensure relevance to the scope of the mapping and strategy development exercise. Self-identification by the organizations also informed the process, offering some flexibility around the defined criteria. Overall, three essential criteria were followed: 1) women's leadership (with a minimum representation of 50% of women in the board/management), 2) provision of services responding to humanitarian and stabilization needs or other work under humanitarian and stabilization sectors, and 3) support to women and/or girls, whether as a central mandate or as a sub-objective.

A series of **9 semi-structured interviews** were then conducted with the Lebanon Humanitarian and Development NGOs Forum (**LHDF**) as well as **INGOs and UN Agencies** working on gender across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and regularly engaging with WROs/WLOs through partnerships or other approaches. The organizations interviewed allowed for a wide variety of perspectives and practices to be captured, given their diversity in terms of type, partnership and engagement models, areas of work and WROs/WLOs partners. These interviews supported the identification and mapping process, but also informed the second stage of the methodology, by providing insights around partnership strategies, approaches and challenges.

Table 1: List of I/NGOs and UN Agencies interviewees

1	Oxfam
2	Plan International
3	International Rescue Committee (IRC)
4	United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)
5	Hivos
6	United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
7	Kvinna till Kvinna (KtK)
8	Lebanon Humanitarian Development NGOs Forum (LHDF)
9	Fair Trade Lebanon (FTL) [focus on women's cooperatives]

The **second stage** involved interviews with **64 identified WROs and WLOs** from across the country, with a commitment to reach out to smaller, grassroots organizations that often fall through the cracks of such exercises or of humanitarian and stabilization funding and partnerships more broadly. Efforts were also made to reach organizations based outside of Beirut. A total of **98 organizations or groups** were reached for interview requests, with a **response and engagement rate of 65%**. A snowball approach further supported identification and outreach efforts, whereby organizations interviewed would refer and suggest other similar groups. An in-depth analysis of the landscape of these organizations is presented in section III-A below. Interviews with WROs and WLOs provided both operational information that can be found in the mapping, as well as insights around their engagement with communities, preferred partnerships and collaborations, and challenges and support needs. An additional **review of the literature** around partnerships, engagement, funding and support for WROs and WLOs in humanitarian and stabilization interventions was conducted to identify similarities with global trends and inform strategic recommendations.

A series of 4 validation sessions were also conducted with WROs and WLOs who participated in the exercise, as well as with Gender Working Group (GWG) members, and SGBV Task Force members. The aim was to ensure the findings and recommendations are useful and relevant to these diverse stakeholders, and that they represent the concerns and priorities of WROs and WLOs.

Finally, a round of review by key stakeholders, including UN Women, UNHCR, UNFPA and UNDP was conducted. An internal peer review committee was also formed to provide feedback and ensure the robustness of the findings and recommendations of this report.

Limitations: While this mapping exercise and report attempted to be as comprehensive as possible, and offer extensive information on a large number of WROs/WLOs in the country, it doesn't claim to have described all women's rights and women-led organizations working on humanitarian action and stabilization in Lebanon; neither does it represent all challenges, barriers or priorities. Targeted efforts were nonetheless made to reach grassroots, under-represented and less visible organizations, including by adopting a snowballing approach as well as engaging with INGOs that support such groups.

III. Findings

A. Landscape of WROs/WLOs working in Crisis Response in Lebanon

When thinking of national WROs and WLOs working within the framework of crisis response in Lebanon, one might tend to identify four or five medium or large well-established organizations, that are the most visible, active in coordination spaces, and most often working in partnership with international partners. However, there exists a large number of organizations, groups and initiatives led by women, that operate across different areas in the country, providing a wide array of services and responding to the distinct needs of different communities and social groups. These organizations are very diverse, be it in terms of size, geographical areas, formalization and registration status or type of work. They make up a large share of frontline responders in crisis and implement evidence-based and impactful interventions. However, for many of these organizations, especially small, grassroots and community-based groups, access to humanitarian and stabilization funding and coordination structures remains limited.

The mapping exercise conducted between October 2022 and January 2023 allowed for the identification of and outreach to 64 WROs and WLOs engaging with crisis response across all regions in Lebanon. Some of the organizations interviewed reported engaging with coordination structures and/or operating as implementing partners with a larger organization involved in the LCRP. However, only 8% of organizations featured in the mapping were appealing partners under the LCRP in 2022, and 9% in 2023.

i. Self-defined organization types

The profile or type of these organizations, by self-definition, varies between women's rights organizations, feminist or intersectional feminist organizations, organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs), local civil society organizations (CSOs), legal actors, service providers (providing GBV, health, education, mental health and SRHR services, amongst others). Initiatives and less formalized groups were also included in the mapping, such as women's groups, feminist groups, as well as a few community-based, youth-led and faith-based women's groups. Women's cooperatives too were included in the scope of the mapping. A quarter of WROs and WLOs interviewed – all either small or micro in size, most often having less than 10 members or volunteers – reported being in the process of seeking registration in Lebanon, or interested in doing so, but not always having the capacity or needed requirements to do so¹⁵.

Below is a detailed typology of organizations interviewed and included in the mapping:

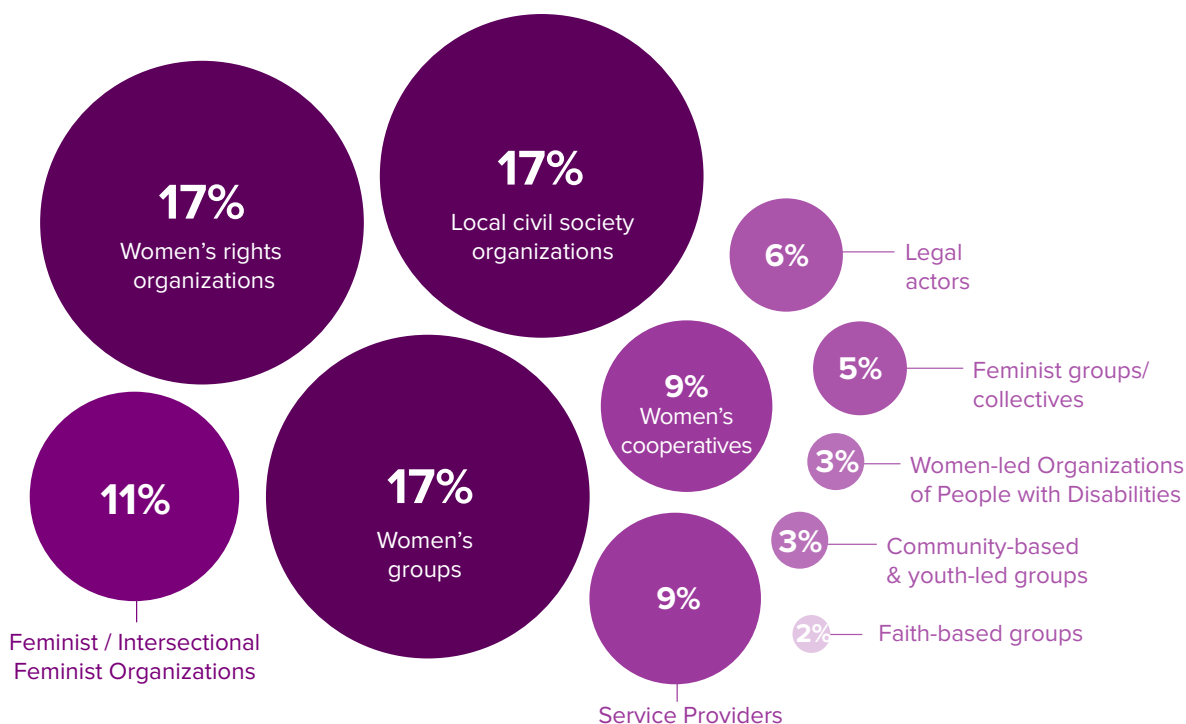
- **Women's rights organizations (17%)** are those local civil society organizations that focus, as their main mandate, on supporting women and their empowerment, facilitating women's access to resources and opportunities and achieving gender equality and gender justice. Some of the women's rights organizations in this exercise specialize in a specific issue, such as SRHR, women's economic empowerment or political participation for example. Others adopt a more general approach and work on women's issues more broadly.
- **Feminist or intersectional feminist organizations (11%)** similarly focus on achieving gender equality and justice and supporting women's rights. These organizations' interventions are founded on an analysis of inequalities and social change that examines and challenges power

¹⁵ For instance, challenges were reported around accessing the needed information and legal support to navigate the complex requirements for registering non-Lebanese organizations. Others referred to financial challenges related to securing a lawyer and the needed documentation for the process.

dynamics and overlapping systems of oppression. These organizations generally tend to adopt structures and practices that reflect feminist values, and focus on achieving transformative and sustainable change.

- **Women-led Organizations of People with Disabilities (3%)** are organizations led by women with disabilities, with a core mandate focused on supporting PWD's empowerment, rights and equitable and inclusive access to opportunities and resources.
- **Local civil society organizations (CSOs) (17%)** are non-governmental organizations that may address various issues and operate across sectors. Only women-led CSOs engaged in humanitarian action and stabilization efforts were included in this exercise, with the great majority working on women's issues, amongst others.
- **Legal actors (6%)** are organizations that are mainly led by lawyers. They provide as their core mandate legal support and services. While some of the women-led legal actors provide general legal services, the majority focus on particularly vulnerable groups – such as LGBTQI+ individuals, refugees or migrant domestic workers – and/or on specific issues, such as personal status law, domestic violence or legal status.
- **Services providers (9%)** specifically self-defined as such their main mandate lies in the delivery of emergency relief and/or the provision of essential services, particularly GBV, SRHR and mental health services.
- **Women's groups (17%)** are often less formalized community-based initiatives and are in great majority newly emerging. These are small groups of women (3 to 10 members) who have come together over shared struggles and similar experiences. Their aim is to advance gender equality, whether by focusing on a specific issue or addressing women's rights more broadly. These are very commonly working on a volunteer basis, and sometimes through small grants disbursed by feminist and women's funds or local NGOs.
- **Feminist groups and collectives (5%)** adopt a similar focus to feminist organizations, as well as feminist values, structures and approaches, with the distinction that they are less formalized and very often small or newly emerging.
- **Community-based and youth-led groups (3%)** are another type of informal and often emerging groups that may address women's issues, amongst other issues. These are commonly led by young people, and for organizations in this mapping, young women specifically.
- **Faith-based women's groups (2%),** whether formal or informal, are groups of women that have come together over their shared faith to support vulnerable community members in accessing needed resources and support. Few faith-based women's organizations were identified in this exercise. Those most commonly engage in charity and some ad hoc community activities or small-scale distributions.
- **Women's cooperatives (9%)** are independent formalized groups, primarily working in agriculture and food processing. They are owned and run by several women cooperative members. The cooperatives identified in this work mainly operate with the objectives of their own economic empowerment as well as strengthened roles and participation in their communities. Some also contribute to supporting farmers in their areas.

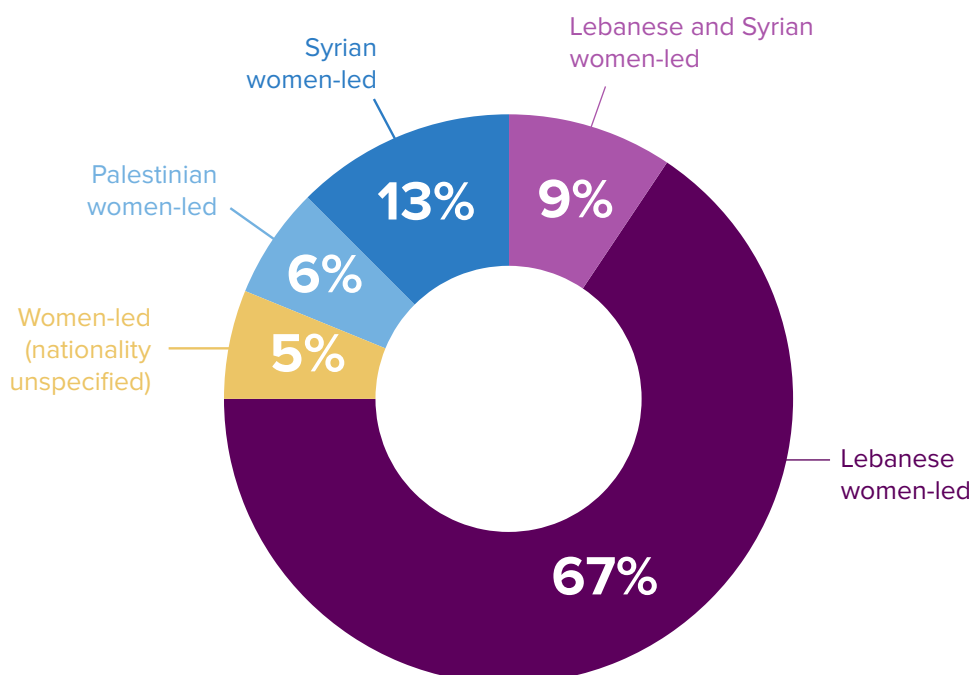
Chart 1 WROs/WLOs Typology



ii. Leadership

All 64 organizations and groups interviewed have a minimum of 50% women as board members and senior management. The great majority are mostly (over 75%) or entirely (100%) women-led. Explicit efforts were made to reach refugee women-led organizations and groups, who face distinct challenges and restrictions when it comes to freedoms of assembly, registration and access to funding and decision-making spaces. Refugee-led organizations make up a little under a third of the total sample. As per Chart 2, 67% (n=43) of WROs and WLOs interviewed are Lebanese women-led, 13% (n=8) are led by Syrian women, and another 9% (n=6) are jointly led by Syrian and Lebanese women. 6% (n=4) of organizations reached are led by Palestinian women. 5% (n=3) of organizations reached are led by women of unspecified nationality.

Chart 2 WRO/WLO Leadership



iii. Size

WROs and WLOs included in the mapping are categorized by size, following a pre-defined categorization scale based on the number of staff and members and average yearly budget, as detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2

WRO/WLO size	Number of staff and members	Yearly budget
Micro	Less than 5	Under 100,000 USD
Small	Between 5 and 10	100,000 to 200,000 USD
Medium	Between 10 and 25	200,000 to 500,000 USD
Large	Between 25 and 50	500,000 to 1,000,000 USD
Very Large	More than 50	Over 1,000,000 USD

The majority of WROs and WLOs included in this exercise are micro to medium organizations, who tend to be less visible and under-resourced, despite their active role in crisis prevention and response and impact on gender justice. As per chart 3, 42% (n=27) of organizations are micro in size; these organizations are often emerging initiatives, women’s groups and cooperatives, and grassroots organizations working in their own geographical and surrounding areas and supporting women from their own communities. Small and medium organizations make up 16% (n=10) and 20% (n=13) of the sample respectively, and the remaining 22% (n=14) can be characterized as large or very large. It is important to note, as per the table below, that the majority of larger and more established organizations tend to be led by Lebanese and Palestinian women. This can partially be explained by their longer history of operating in the country. Syrian women-led groups and organizations as well as those led jointly by Syrian and Lebanese women, tend to be micro or small in size. This serves as yet another indication of restrictions in civic space and in access to resources and support. Lebanese women-led WROs and WLOs are distributed across all categories, with the majority being micro, small or medium.

Chart 3 WROs & WLOs Size

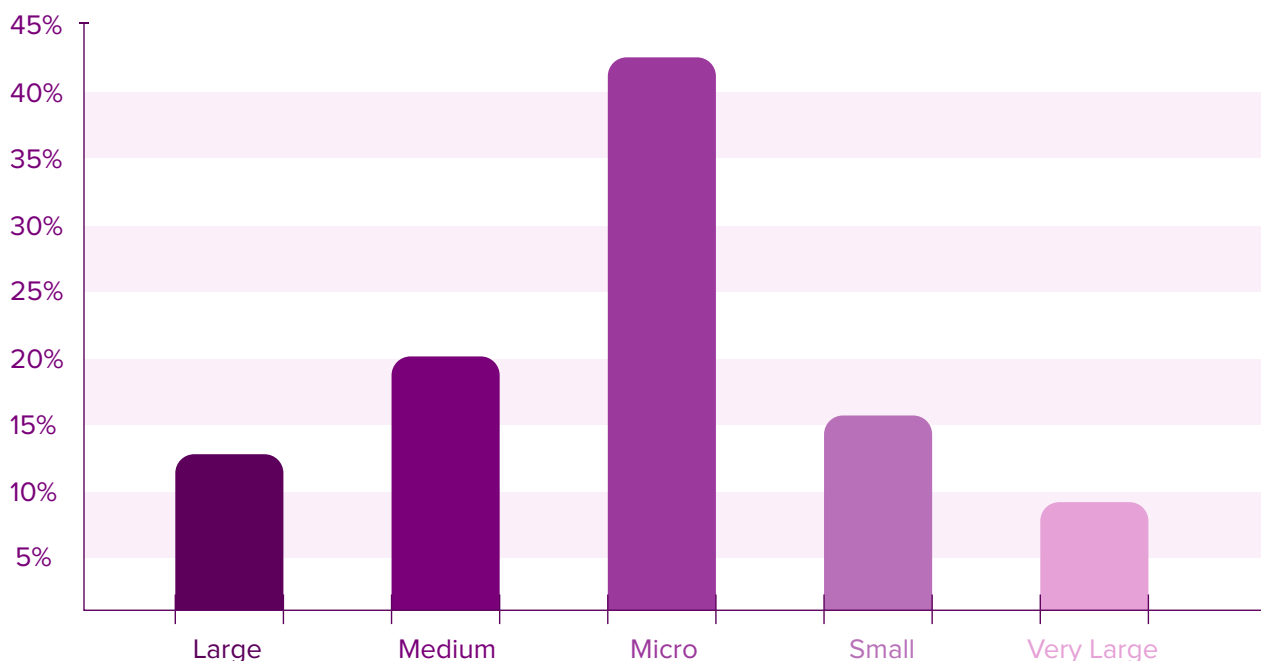


Table 3

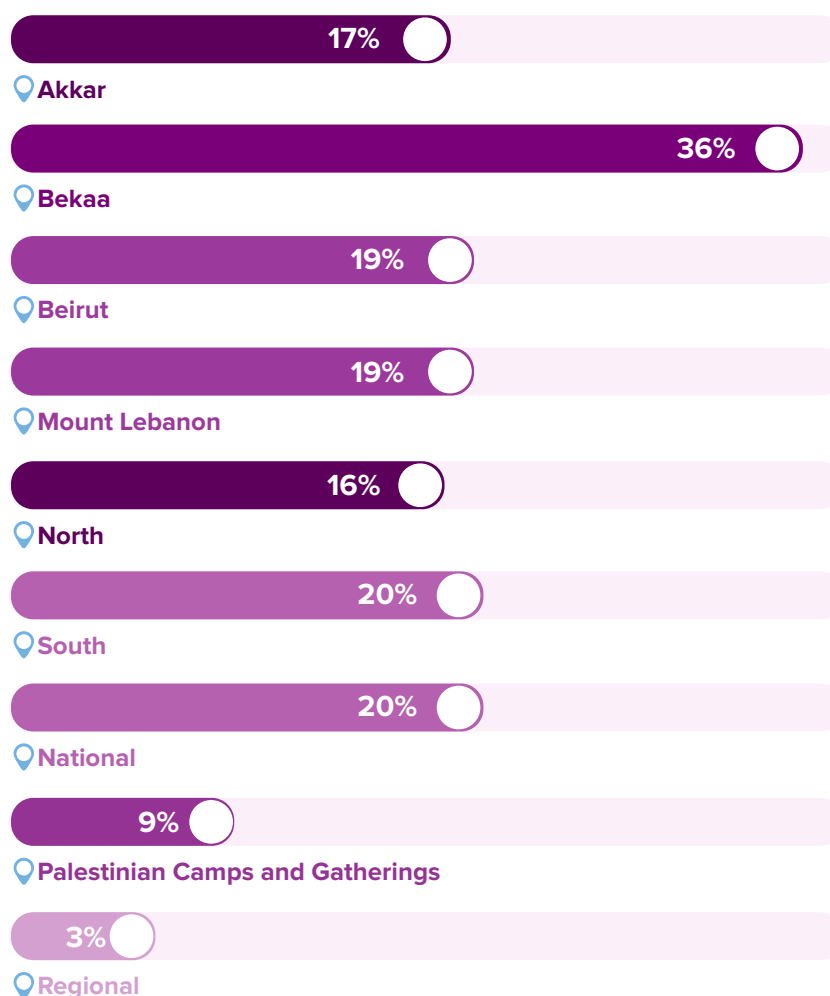
Organizations' size by leadership	Number	Percentage
Lebanese women-led	43	67%
Micro	14	22%
Small	8	13%
Medium	10	16%
Large	6	9%
Very Large	5	8%
Syrian women-led	8	13%
Micro	6	9%
Small	1	2%
Medium	1	2%
Lebanese and displaced Syrian women-led	6	9%
Micro	6	9%
Palestinian women-led	4	6%
Micro	1	2%
Large	2	3%
Very Large	1	2%
Women-led (nationality unspecified)	3	5%
Small	1	2%
Medium	2	3%

iv. Geographical distribution

WROs and WLOs interviewed are distributed across the country, and implementing interventions in their own areas and beyond. 36% (n=23) of organizations interviewed are based in Beirut, while the remaining 64% (n=41) are distributed between Akkar (6%), the Bekaa (2%), Mount Lebanon (8%), North Lebanon (8%), South Lebanon (11%) and Palestinian camps and gatherings (3%).

Many others may also operate outside of their base location, and in more than one area. Chart 4 presents an overview of the areas covered by WROs and WLOs interviewed. The great majority of interventions by these organizations are located in the Bekaa Valley, one of the largest geographical areas in the country, but also an area with growing needs and gaps in services. Larger organizations also tend to operate national-level interventions, reflecting larger capacity and reach. Importantly, all areas include operations and presence of WROs and WLOs of various sizes and areas of focus.

Chart 4 Areas of Operation



v. Type of work and relevance for sectors

WROs and WLOs interviewed vary in terms of the type of work they implement, the issues they prioritize, and the approaches they use. Many WROs and WLOs often have specific areas of expertise. However, they also tend to work at the intersection of various sectors. Their interventions cannot be solely categorized as crisis response interventions or as rights-focused, advocacy or development work. In fact, they play an essential role in identifying and responding to the diverse and changing needs of women and other members of their communities, and adapt their interventions to these needs. For example, one micro, Lebanese-led organization interviewed started as a group of women coming together around inheritance and land rights, wanting to advocate for legal reform and changes in communal practices. However, in light of the economic crisis and growing need for income-generating opportunities and financial independence for women in their areas, the organization added a livelihoods-focus to its work. Thus, it started offering women vocational training, material and technical support and income-generating opportunities. All the while, the organization sustains its more strategic work around social norms and legal reform for women’s inheritance and land rights. **In that sense, WROs and WLOs are uniquely positioned to respond to both immediate, practical needs, while maintaining a more strategic outlook and in parallel addressing medium to longer-term needs and priorities.**

Approaches

Chart 5 highlights various types of approaches used, with most organizations reporting awareness-raising as a common type of activity in their work, whether around women’s rights, gender equality and social norms more broadly, or around specific issues, such as SRHR, GBV, child protection or

economic empowerment. Another common approach is training and capacity-building. This includes training community members around issues relevant to different organizations' mandates and sectors, including training of trainers, life skills trainings, facilitation trainings, and sessions around gender equality and human rights, amongst others. For some organizations, this approach is adopted to ensure knowledge can be further disseminated at community level through participants themselves. This approach also includes training other organizations and partners by way of sharing knowledge and expertise. The latter included organizations of all sizes, sometimes training other partners or organizations of similar size, and sometimes offering their expertise and knowledge to bigger or smaller organizations.

Chart 5 Type of work: Approches



“This initiative has been a life goal for me. I faced a lot of oppression, and so did the other members, which is why we wanted to offer women something they really need, and to focus on awareness. They may not have access to this information or even know what rights are! We might be one of the first initiatives of its kind in [our area] and I am so proud of this. We are slowly growing and succeeding.”

Syrian women-led initiative

Additionally, service-provision, primarily centered around GBV, SRHR, health, education and psychosocial support services, as well as advocacy, were frequently mentioned as approaches used. Finally, a few organizations mentioned the need to create safe spaces for women and girls to receive services, but also to develop their own initiatives for social change and even for leisure activities. For many others who did not operate safe spaces as of yet, this was a key ambition and goal in the near future, given their potential for transformative change.

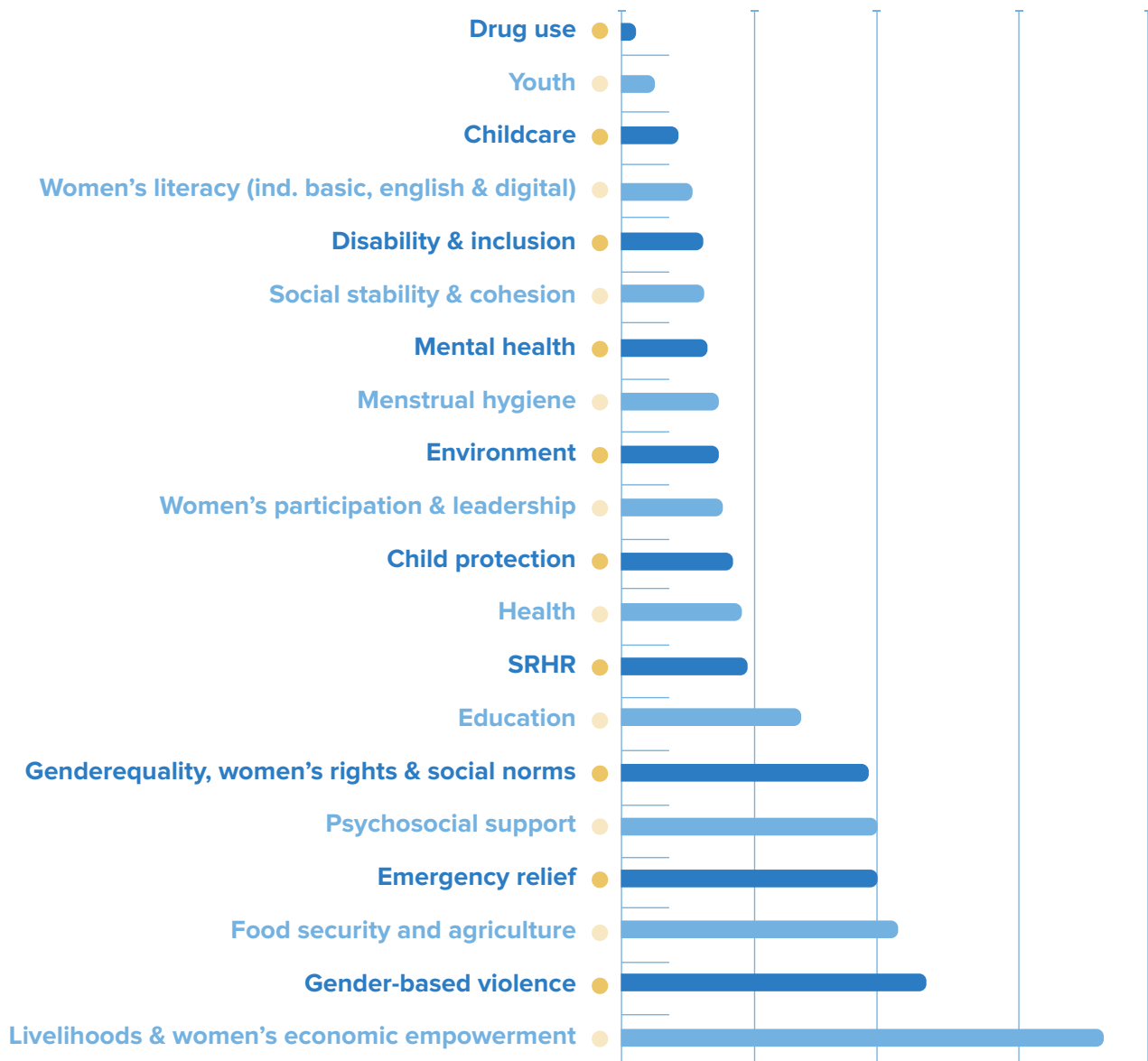
“Our work has been successful. People see us as a safe place to come to. This is what I am most proud of. Some women now come to the safe space even without needing a service or participating in an activity. They feel truly comfortable and safe here.”

Lebanese women-led GBV service provider and women’s rights organization

Issues prioritized

When it comes to prioritized issues and relevance to sectors, chart 6 provides a general overview of the issues addressed. However, some of the issues that seem to be the least tackled were highlighted as critical by interviewees in view of growing needs, including mental health, childcare support, disability inclusion and services and supporting youth. Gaps in funding, capacity as well as prioritization by the sectors were some of the reasons behind the limited interventions around these issues.

Chart 6 Type of work: Issues



Notably, the main sectors under which WROs and WLOs operate relate to **Livelihoods** – with a specific focus on women’s economic empowerment, vocational training and income generation. For some organizations, economic empowerment is also used as a tool or an entry point to gain greater community acceptance and to be able to reach women and raise awareness about their rights. Additionally, by supporting women’s access to employment and income, livelihoods interventions also contribute

towards medium and longer-term recovery and stabilization. Further to this, **Protection** – particularly GBV prevention and response, including community-based prevention, psychosocial support and the provision of GBV structured support services for survivors were listed as key areas of intervention.

“We were able to prove ourselves in the area where we work. It is a very marginalized and conservative area where women have no rights and face a lot of violence; where girls cannot go to school because it is too far... We faced some resistance from the men there in the beginning but with time, we were able to prove ourselves and provide support to the women in this area, and even the men now agree that our work is useful, especially since there is an income-generation aspect to it as well.”

Syrian women’s rights initiative

On the one hand, prioritizing women’s economic rights and participation as well as their safety from violence robustly illustrates the relevance and importance of WROs’ and WLOs’ interventions. This is especially emphasized in light of the exponential rise of GBV in emergencies, displacements and pandemics, as well as increased poverty and loss of income generating opportunities as a result of the economic crisis. It also demonstrates WROs and WLOs’ in-depth understanding of the needs of women in their communities. However, even within these sectors, limited resources and capacity, and growing needs, remain important challenges to ensuring a comprehensive response. Unlocking the transformative potential of WROs and WLOs operating under these sectors would require more consistent engagement and increased support. Moreover, it would require greater opportunities and spaces for exchange and discussions and joint creation of suitable models of engagement and collaboration.

“There is a big scarcity of services around mental health, and especially specialized services for substance use. No matter how much we expand, we are always at full capacity and we cannot cater to all the people who need and seek our support.”

Lebanese women-led civil society actor and service provider

On the other hand, WROs and WLOs show a solid understanding of women’s cross-sectoral needs. However, some issues seem less represented or addressed across their work, as is detailed in the paragraphs below. This can partially be attributed to discontinued and scattered engagement with these WROs and WLOs across sectors and a shortage of spaces and opportunities for joint reflection and design of collaborative methods and approaches.

Some WROs’ and WLOs’ interventions are relevant to other sectors, including Health, Education and Basic Assistance. When it comes to **Health**, the main focus of WROs and WLOs is around mental health, sexual and reproductive health, but also primary healthcare and access to essential medications. The sexual and reproductive health services provided include ante-natal and post-natal care, STDs treatment and specialized services for people who use drugs as well as for people living with HIV. Organizations concerned with **Education** can be divided into two main categories: (1) those supporting women’s education, including basic literacy, digital literacy and English literacy, as well as education around specific issues of interest and (2) those supporting children’s education, for some, specifically using gender-responsive curricula. A similar portion of WROs and WLOs deliver interventions relevant to the **Basic Assistance** sector. These include distributions of core relief items, and menstrual hygiene products¹⁶, amongst other items.

“We are proud that we were able to train and group of women who are now able to sell their products and generate income. We are now focused on health in response to the growing needs in our area.”

Lebanese women-led civil society organization

¹⁶ Menstrual hygiene is a cross-sectoral issue, also relevant to Health, WaSH and Protection. However, it is mentioned here under Basic Assistance to specifically refer to the distribution of basic menstrual hygiene products.

Some WROs' interventions were related to **Food Security and Agriculture**, but also to Livelihoods. These were women's cooperatives' work in great majority. However, very few interventions could be classified under the remaining 3 sectors, mainly **Social Stability, WaSH and Shelter**. In that sense, the sectors where there is fewest engagement of WROs and WLOs indicate gaps when it comes to women-led responses. This could translate into limitations when it comes to gender mainstreaming and responsiveness in their interventions, unless such considerations are recognized. For instance, better engagement of WROs and WLOs under the Social Stability sector could lead to enhanced understanding and prioritization of women's perceptions of safety, and implications of insecurity and tensions on their daily lives, movements, and freedoms¹⁷. **Ensuring greater engagement with WROs and WLOs across all sectors would thus contribute to response efforts that are more inclusive, responsive and accountable, while also resulting in more robust and gender-responsive interventions that respond to the distinct needs of women and girls.**

B. Challenges, support needs and recommendations for engagement and support

WROs and WLOs interviewed reported facing various challenges, whether at the level of partnerships, funding, operations or systems. Many of these are unique to their work as women's organizations. In fact, even though some may be shared by other types of organizations, WROs and WLOs' work and the systems within which they operate, distinctively position them at a disadvantage within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, as an extension of restrictions imposed on women more broadly¹⁸, as well as due to the systemic and structural nature of the issues WROs and WLOs address. Evidently, challenges and support needs vary between larger, more established organizations and smaller groups, with the latter having greater concerns related to operations, sustainability and access to opportunities and spaces.

Drawing on discussions and reflections from interviewees and global and national guidance, this section provides contextualized **recommendations for greater and more impactful forms of engagement with WROs and WLOs in humanitarian action and stabilization**. These recommendations not only respond to the challenges raised but also reflect the preferences and recommendations brought forth by the interviewees themselves. For many micro and small WROs and WLOs, the process of reflecting on support needs and partnerships might have been a fairly new exercise in the interview. In that sense, reflections and collective discussions would be needed to further articulate priorities and preferences. It remains essential to recognize these organizations' multifaceted role across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and guarantee long-term and continuous support so they can sustain their work and continue adapting to rapidly changing realities. While recommendations are targeted at specific stakeholders, some may be relevant to more than one actor. It is therefore suggested to explore this section in its entirety.

i. Technical and capacity-building gaps and challenges

Capacity building opportunities

The great majority of WROs and WLOs focused on capacity-building and training as main support needs. They distinctly conveyed **preferences for tailored training and mentoring**, for better and more focused learning and to ensure content can be directly relevant to the nature of their work.

¹⁷ According to findings documented in the LCRP 2023, "men commonly respond to perceived or real inter-communal tensions by restricting women's movement and access to public space. [...] As a result of such tensions, women are less likely to work and to participate in the workforce and in public life, fostering dependency on men and/or the humanitarian system." Government of Lebanon and the United Nations. (2023).

¹⁸ Various factors such as gendered discrimination, gender stereotypes, harmful social norms and unequal access to resources and opportunities constrain women's participation and leadership in various spheres, including in the humanitarian-development-peace. These broader systemic and structural issues can also affect the ability of WROs and WLOs to operate effectively and sustainably. Therefore, the challenges faced by WROs and WLOs are linked to the larger social restrictions placed on women.

Most smaller organizations located outside of Beirut highlighted the **need for training opportunities in their own geographical areas** as this was identified as a shortage.

While many do attend trainings and meetings in the capital, this takes a toll not only on their finances, considering the increased cost of transportation and communication, but also on their already stretched time, as they often carry many tasks and have to commute long distances or spend the night close to the training locations. For some coming from more conservative areas or communities, leaving their towns as women by themselves is particularly difficult. Sometimes it is rejected due to patriarchal social norms and expectations constraining their mobility, as well as due to childcare responsibilities. Weather, road conditions and road lighting were also often overlooked barriers, in addition to having to miss some training hours to ensure safety on the way back to their homes.

Digital and language skills

Many smaller organizations, especially those in rural areas and those led by Syrian women, highlighted the need for support around digital skills and technology to facilitate their work; their access to information around funding; and their access to networking, capacity-building, partnerships and coordination. Digital skills are also essential to navigate funding portals, which are often complex to access and almost always in English. The English language in itself was emphasized as a much-needed skill.

“I once attended an information session for a call for proposals. I requested Arabic translation and they offered it. However, the link they shared for the proposal application was in English. They said they would consider translating it in future opportunities, but I couldn’t send in a proposal. I sent them our budget in Arabic. Whenever I need to read or submit documents in English, I resort to Google Translate – which is imperfect and inaccurate – or to individual friends or acquaintances who are willing to support – which is not sustainable or always available”

Interview with a Syrian women’s initiative

Technical language and jargon were also mentioned as inaccessible, thus creating barriers to funding and partnership opportunities, and hindering report on their work in a way that gets the needed attention and does it justice.

“The way projects are selected for funding is [unfair] and rarely tailored or aware of the reality of our work. If an organization has a staff on board who writes well and knows the system, they would get the project, even if they don’t have the relevant experience. We write good projects, but our work is on the field, not in offices; and the people who write proposals also work on other things. Sometimes, we get phone calls or feedback saying that our proposal is great, but we need to write it better, or reformulate it using [technical language]. This is a waste of our time”

Interview with a Lebanese women-led OPD

Thematic issues: knowledge, tools and approaches

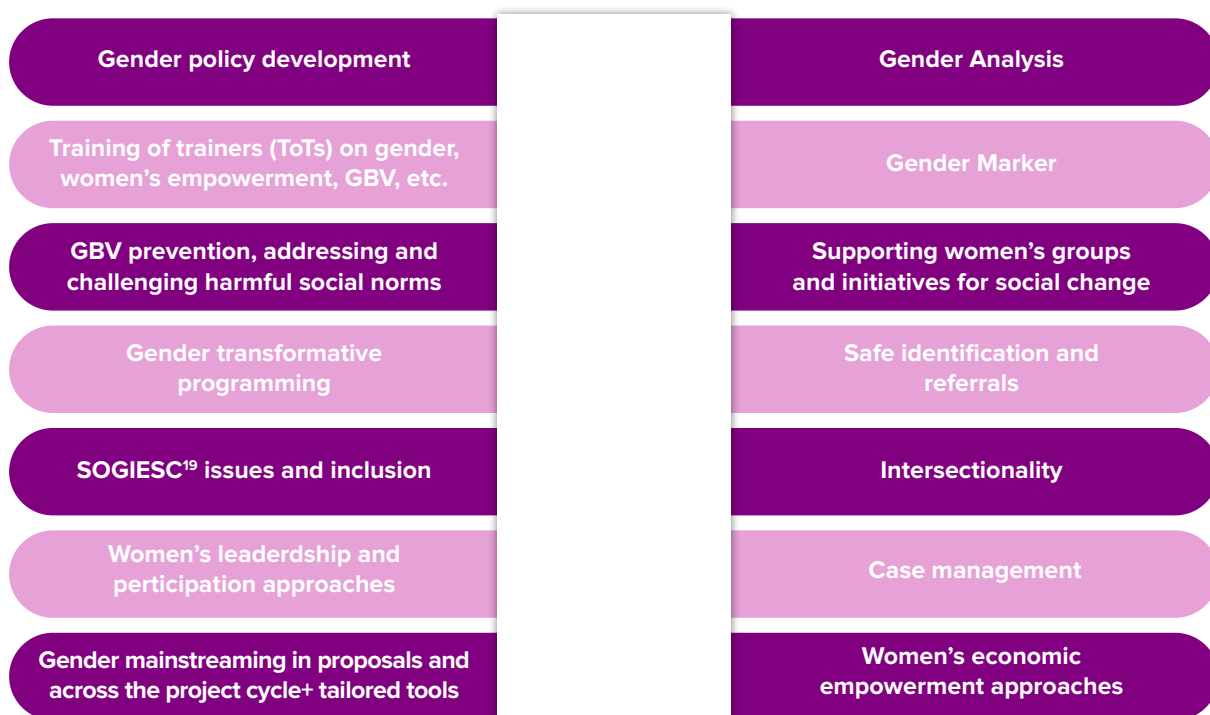
WROs and WLOs identified specific knowledge areas around which they would be interested to have discussions or receive training and support. These include global standards and principles of humanitarian action, protection mainstreaming and safe programming and disability inclusion. Additionally, many WROs and WLOs were interested in receiving support around dealing with the type of resistance they face as a result of their work with women and their issues. One organization highlighted the importance of discussing and understanding how best to practice feminist solidarity and leadership.

When it comes to gender mainstreaming, WROs and WLOs prefer training around issues that are tailored to their specific areas of work. They stressed that **capacity-building should be practical, useful and provide tools that can be directly integrated:**

- Some smaller organizations favoured Training of Trainers (ToT) opportunities, with close follow-up and support, to ensure they can build their own internal capacity and use it to support their communities.
- Medium organizations particularly focused on support in developing formal internal gender policies to guide their overall contributions and work towards gender equality.

Notably, **most WROs and WLOs had expertise in their specific areas of work, forming a rich, yet untapped, pool of knowledge that could be built on and exchanged through various models of mutual support across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.**

Chart 7: List of gender-focused support needs



Organizational development and growth

While larger organizations tend to have trained teams of experts on board, ready to develop proposals, manage projects and implement activities, most smaller organizations still face challenges in meeting partner and donor requirements. In fact, smaller organisations may lack administrative procedures required by donors and large organisations to contract them. Their work on the ground is highly relevant and impactful, but it often fails to be on the radar of larger international partners. Accordingly, many small to medium organizations requested support around **organizational development and project management**, as per the below list. Developing these skills would enable their work and ability to better grow and structure their organizations and develop clear strategies and solid governance structures. It would also help such organization to better engage with coordination structures. Notably, some smaller organizations also requested support around formalization and registration.

¹⁹ SOGIESC refers to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics

Chart 8: List of organizational support needs



What to do to address technical needs and capacity-building gaps and challenges

For operational partners:

- Identify and develop capacity-building activities in collaboration with WROs/WLOs to ensure **relevance** to their work, mandates and areas of interest;
- Offer **one-on-one opportunities for learning** for smaller organizations, such as mentorship or coaching, through which in-depth learning, discussions and support can be delivered;
- Second staff members or consultants to WROs/WLOs to provide **close support** for organizational development and growth;
- **Guide** WROs and WLOs in meeting global funding and partnerships requirements;
- Provide capacity-building and support aimed at **organizational growth**, including strengthening governance structures and developing organizational (HR, Finance, PSA, procurement, etc.) policies, particularly for micro to medium organizations.
- **Support collaborations** amongst WROs and WLOs.

For sector coordinators and GWG:

- Adapt sector-specific tools and approaches to ensure they are **gender-sensitive, relevant and accessible** for WROs and WLOs, including Arabic translations and wide dissemination;
- Invite WROs and WLOs to participate in **existing networking and learning spaces** within humanitarian and stabilization structures;
- Offer capacity-building on the global principles of humanitarian action, key terminology, and coordination mechanisms, especially for **organizations that may not be familiar with existing systems**;
- Build on the expertise of organizations of people with disabilities, including those led by women, to make humanitarian and stabilization spaces more accessible for people with disabilities, and to disseminate best practices and knowledge around **disability inclusion** across sectors.

For donors:

- Resource spaces for **convening, networking and learning** amongst WROs and WLOs;
- Invest in capacity-building around **gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive humanitarian action and stabilization** across sectors;
- Support **existing networks** and collaborations of WROs and WLOs.

ii. Systemic and operational challenges

Economic crisis and volatility of the context

Similarly to other organizations in the country, WROs and WLOs – especially micro to medium ones – are facing increased challenges. This is due to the economic crisis and banking restrictions to access funds or disburse salaries. However, **given that they are already severely under-resourced, this is creating significant strain on WROs' and WLOs' work and their ability to sustain their operations.** Rapid and drastic fluctuations in the exchange rate are impacting smaller organizations' ability to properly budget for their work. Many reported that navigating banking restrictions is incredibly time and energy-consuming for already over-stretched staff. Opening new bank accounts has become extremely difficult, further limiting access to partnerships and funding opportunities for emerging and newly registered organizations. Also, basic core costs, such as electricity, transportation and communications are continuously on the rise, with considerable impact on organizations' budgets and operations. Some WROs and WLOs highlighted rigid partnerships and funding practices, which sometimes restrict their ability to address crisis-related operational challenges such as electricity or internet cuts, fuel shortages or other related changes impacting their work. For staff, transportation and communication allowances are quickly losing value. Service delivery and activity implementation are also compromised as many community members, particularly women, are facing challenges in reaching and participating in activities. Finally, the volatility of the context in Lebanon was raised as a significant operational challenge; a key example relates to strikes by public institutions and the judicial system, which impact the work of legal and GBV actors providing much-needed support to survivors of GBV. Volatility also often results in sudden changes in activities, plans and budgets, as well as in new risks that need to be accounted for.

Retaining and supporting staff and volunteers

Due to the economic crisis and the overall nature of the crisis response, **securing and retaining quality staff is a complicated task for many WROs and WLOs**. On the one hand, salaries offered by these national actors are often significantly lower than those offered by international partners. This fosters detrimental competition amongst national and international actors, and threatens national actors' ability to retain their staff. Additionally, difficulties in sustaining staff salaries in-between grants lead to very high turnover rates, particularly considering the proliferation of short-term as opposed to sustainable and continuous funding. The latter has had high implications on staff capacity, as WROs and WLOs train and invest in staff that they eventually lose, having to repeat that process often, whenever new staff are onboarded.

On the other hand, some WROs and WLOs providing specialized services highlighted the **brain drain resulting from the crisis** as a key challenge, limiting the availability of trained individuals able to deliver such services.

“A key challenge is the brain drain. Every time we lose someone [because of migration], it is extremely difficult to replace them. There are very little mental health practitioners, and even less that are specialized. There is a serious shortage in psychiatrists who specialize and have needed knowledge around substance use. The ones that remain in the country are all super overloaded”.

Interview with a Lebanese women-led organization

For micro and small organizations, these challenges translate into having very limited human resources handling their entire operations, resulting in **overworked and over-stretched staff and members**. This not only puts strain on their energy and well-being, but also means that many of the engagement, coordination or partnership opportunities are missed due to limited time and capacity. Much of the work required by international partners for engagement and collaborations also fails to recognize the realities of these organizations, further restricting access of smaller WROs and WLOs to coordination spaces and opportunities.

“A main challenge is also time, also because our staff are overstretched and doing multiple things. Because of that, we can't always benefit from many opportunities available to us and that we might need”.

Interview with a Lebanese women-led organization

Finally, many WROs and WLOs largely rely on volunteers to implement their work. As a result of the crisis, they are seeing this type of engagement diminish, due to volunteers having less and less resources to commute to activities and communicate with the organizations – especially youth.

“For us as an organization that works a lot with volunteers, we are facing new challenges as a result of the crises. For example, the increasing costs of transportation have affected our work because our volunteers are no longer able to be as involved as they used to be before. People have more financial challenges now.”

Interview with a Lebanese women-led organization

Resistance and backlash

WROs' and WLOs' work often challenges imbalanced power dynamics, harmful social norms and patriarchal structures, which leads to both resistance and backlash. Recent months witnessed increased anecdotal reports of such backlash by WROs and WLOs in coordination structures across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, such as the GWG. Organizations interviewed in this exercise also highlighted this reality.

This has taken the form of **resistance from religious, political or community figures against work directly targeting women, including interventions around women’s issues and rights and those preventing and responding to violence against women**. One organization providing sexual and reproductive health services in its own centres reported evictions or threats of evictions due to stigma and discrimination from neighbours against the individuals receiving these services – such as people living with HIV, people who use drugs, or other individuals in need of such services. Stigma was also reported around mental health services. For smaller and non-Lebanese WROs and WLOs who might not have the same networks and connections that larger, more established and Lebanese-led organizations do, navigating this resistance and backlash can be more challenging. It can weaken their interventions and have considerable impact on their work. Additionally, women’s cooperatives reported decreased acceptance of their work, particularly amongst husbands of women cooperative members, due to their reduced income in light of the crises. Access to markets for women’s cooperatives was also raised as a challenge distinctly affecting them –which can be partially attributed to an extension of overall limitations on women’s access to resources, social networks and access to public spaces.

“Women who are members of the cooperative themselves have less drive to work with the cooperative due to the economic crisis and fluctuations in exchange rates, because the value of the amount they receive is now very small. Their husbands also don’t want them to work anymore if the salary remains too low.”

Interview with a women’s cooperative

Finally, women-led Organisations of People with Disabilities stressed a distinct concern around the **limited inclusive and accessible spaces within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus for people with disabilities**. In fact, these organizations highlighted the fact that coordination and networking spaces as well as capacity-building and engagement opportunities are rarely planned and organized with the inclusion of people with disabilities as a consideration. This reinforces the systemic exclusion of people with disabilities from these spaces. It further limits their ability to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes and influence the design and implementation of interventions across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

What to do to address systemic and operational challenges: Crisis-responsive support

For operational partners:

- Support and resource WROs and WLOs, especially grassroots groups, in **identifying and mitigating risks**;
- Invest in research and dialogue around **addressing resistance and backlash** against WROs/WLOs;
- Exchange networks and connections that can support **operations** of smaller WROs and WLOs;
- Provide financial and technical resources to **ensure staff care and well-being** initiatives, including mental health support, self-care activities and work-life balance;
- Support and facilitate **volunteering** with WRO and WLO partners, including covering transportation and communications costs, offering stipends, and providing learning opportunities.
- Support interventions across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus that meet **women’s essential needs**²⁰ and promote **long-term gender-transformative change**.

²⁰ This includes menstrual hygiene, safe spaces, safe shelters for survivors of violence, etc.

For sector coordinators and GWG:

- Coordinate dialogue around **resistance and backlash** against WROs/WLOs, and **facilitate operations** of smaller WROs and WLOs;
- Invest in **staff care and well-being initiatives at sector level**, including mental health support, self-care activities.

For donors:

- Offer flexible **crisis-related funding and contingency budgets** to support organizational adaptability to crisis-related changes and operational challenges²¹;
- Resource **staff care and well-being activities**, and WROs/WLOs' **volunteering programs**;
- Fund initiatives that address **backlash and resistance** faced by WROs/WLOs;
- Fund interventions that focus on both **women's practical needs** AND their **strategic needs**, for sustainable change across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus;
- Invest in interventions that aim to support **women-led collective action** and women's groups.

iii. Funding challenges

Challenges related to funding were raised by most WROs and WLOs, whether at the level of the existing funding landscape, the type of grants available, current funding agendas, or access to calls for proposals themselves. Micro to medium organizations evidently face bigger and more consistent challenges, impacting the continuity and sustainability of their work and structures. On the other hand, larger organizations are still concerned with limitations in funding opportunities available as well as the varied and continuously changing donor requirements around policies and compliance.

First, WROs and WLOs widely discussed the fact that **long-term sustainable and flexible funding remains the key to unlocking the full potential of women's rights and women-led organizations, sustaining their operations and continuity, and ensuring greater long-term impact**. Challenges around sustainability in-between grants and, as a result, around long-term system-level change were highlighted. Women and girls' safe spaces approach was raised by many organizations as an important approach for their work, but incredibly challenging to sustain. The shortage of safe shelters for survivors of violence can also be partially explained by the limitations in resources to sustain them. The lack of institutional or core funding often means that **smaller WROs and WLOs have little to no resources to dedicate to organizational growth and policy development**, essential to access partnerships and funding.

Second, micro to medium organizations raised **concerns around access to information on funding calls**; partly due to a gap in orientation and knowledge sharing for emerging initiatives and groups, the inaccessibility of certain coordination spaces, and overall language and digital barriers. As a result, most of the resources available are reportedly monopolized by a few larger organizations, often creating competition amongst WROs and WLOs.

Finally, WROs and WLOs highlighted varying requirements amongst donors as sometimes confusing or requiring additional efforts and resources to ensure compliance and eligibility. Some of these requirements, and especially when they so often differ from one grant to another, can create a barrier for smaller or less formalized groups to access resources.

²¹ This could include fuel, electricity, transportation and communication costs; exchange rate fluctuation gaps; changing priorities and needs requiring rapid change in activities or interventions, amongst others.

What to do to address funding challenges

For sector coordinators and GWG:

- Engage in **joint advocacy** for increased partnerships, resources and diversified funding models for WROs and WLOs across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

For donors:

- Regularly disseminate **information around funding priorities, modalities and opportunities**;
- **Simplify funding application processes and requirements**, particularly when targeting smaller and emerging organization and ensure funding information, portals and forms are **available in Arabic and easily accessible**;
- Coordinate and **streamline funding requirements** amongst donors, to reduce burdens and increase clarity.
- Invest in interventions that prioritize **alternative funding models** (see Box 2 below) for small, emerging, informal and grassroots WROs and WLOs;
- Devise funding modalities that are **fairer, more transparent and more equitable** including earmarking resources and overhead costs for WRO and WLO partners and ensuring risk sharing and mutual accountability amongst grantees;
- **Extend funding opportunities** to underserved and more difficult-to-reach areas, which can be jointly identified with WROs/WLOs, to respond comprehensively to needs across the country.

Box 2:

Alternative funding modalities for small, grassroots and informal groups

1. **Fiscal sponsorship:** a registered and well-established organization acts as a fiscal sponsor for a smaller, unregistered/informal community-led group or one without an organizational bank account. They would then disburse the funds and share accountability with the WRO/WLO.
2. **Consortia:** smaller and less-formalized WROs and WLOs would be eligible to apply for funding in partnership or consortia with established organizations meeting the needed requirements – focusing on equal partnerships and power-sharing is key;
3. **Sub-granting:** requirements can be loosened and made more flexible, whether in terms of formalization, years of experience or reporting requirements;
4. **Group cash transfers**²²: unregistered/informal and emerging groups that have come together to respond to emerging needs in their communities can have access to funds based on simple proposals and with minimum reporting requirements.

iv. Partnerships and coordination challenges

Overall, most WROs and WLOs reported having formal and informal collaborations with other local actors, including other similar women's groups. When it comes to formal partnerships, some explained being part of big consortia. A large number reported having formal project-based partnerships with INGOs or UN agencies. A small group highlighted long-term and strategic partnership models. Notably, some of the organizations categorized as micro, mainly emerging initiatives, mentioned having very few to no formal partnerships. Women's cooperatives' partners were mainly other cooperatives as well as specialized agriculture or livelihoods partners supporting cooperatives through in-kind, technical and financial support as their main mandate.

22 CaLP (2021). Group Cash Transfers: Guidance and Tools. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/ninja-forms/2/Group-Cash-Transfers-Guidance-and-tools.pdf>

Many organizations highlighted **positive and successful partnership models and experiences, usually involving shared values and visions, equitable divisions of resources, equal decision-making power and mutual sharing of expertise and capacities**. Nevertheless, common partnership challenges and concerns were also raised, particularly for partnerships between international and local actors – in this case, local WROs and WLOs specifically. First, many raised concerns around a lack of recognition and awareness of the capacity of smaller WROs and WLOs, resulting in requests and working modalities that put significant strain on the organizations. Second, **extractive partnerships and consultations were highly critiqued by WROs and WLOs**, whereby their knowledge, expertise and resources are sought out, without support, commitments or compensation for the time and effort put into this type of engagement. On another level, **WROs and WLOs condemned partnerships that lacked mutual trust and joint or equal decision-making processes**, as these often erase their voice and contributions and limit ownership of the interventions. Also, many organizations were critical of the way overheads and operational costs are unfairly distributed, through which international partners operate with sizeable budgets as opposed to local actors.

Overall, WROs and WLOs seek equal, and sustainable partnerships, founded in common values and trust, through which all parties can contribute their distinct expertise. The latter would be founded on mutual awareness of each other's capacities and sharing burdens and requirements proportionally to those capacities. Finally, micro to medium organizations reported a key challenge around accessing coordination and meetings such as agenda-setting and decision-making spaces. Language barriers and distant geographical locations were all listed as important obstacles, as already mentioned.

What to do to build more equitable partnerships and coordination structures

a. Tailored engagement

For operational partners

- Engage in **consistent and systematic outreach** for consultations, meetings, capacity-building and other such opportunities, particularly to smaller organizations;
- Adopt **participatory processes** in identifying objectives and designing interventions, to preserve the identities and priorities, particularly for micro to medium WROs and WLOs;
- Offer support and resources for micro and small WROs/WLOs' **formalization and registration**, if desired and following careful and joint assessment;
- **Dedicate resources** to micro and small grassroots WROs and WLOs as they might not be able to compete with larger ones;
- **Avoid extractive processes** that are too demanding of WROs/WLOs' time and energy, and remain cognizant of their capacities. *For example:*
 - Shoulder the burden of requests and operational tasks and offer support where needed;
 - Ensure fair compensation through funding, training and technical support²³, for WROs/WLOs involvement in:
 - ▶ Consultations
 - ▶ Assessments, research and analyses
 - ▶ Evaluations

²³ This could include offering stipends; covering transportation and communications costs; and making concrete commitments to support and resource WROs' and WLOs' coalitions or initiatives etc.

- ▶ Information sharing
 - ▶ Service delivery
 - ▶ Monitoring and AAP initiatives
 - ▶ Safe programming
 - ▶ Identification and outreach to vulnerable individuals...
- Sustain and build **strategic partnerships** with larger organizations especially those providing essential and specialized services responding to the needs of women and girls;
 - **Support larger WROs/WLOs in building partnerships with smaller and emerging groups** to transfer resources, knowledge and expertise, and contribute long-standing experience on key issues and approaches. This can also include fiscal sponsorship, mentorship, and hosting them at their premises;
 - **Engage women's cooperatives** in humanitarian action and stabilization, especially for women's economic empowerment and women's leadership. This requires efforts to familiarize them with the humanitarian and stabilization ecosystem.

For sector coordinators and GWG:

- Use the **mapping exercise** (annex I) **as a starting point for engagement** with WROs and WLOs in humanitarian action and disseminate across sectors;
- Reach out to and engage these organizations for collaborations across **all sectors**, especially those where WROs and WLOs are least represented;
- **Strengthen links** between women's cooperatives and women's economic empowerment actors and women's leadership and participation actors;

For donors:

- Adopt participatory and consultative processes to **identify priorities and develop funding agendas**, particularly with micro to medium WROs and WLOs;
- Invest in micro to medium WROs' and WLOs' growth and sustainability, through **flexible institutional and core funding**, and **long-term and/or continuous project-focused funding**, avoiding gaps in coverage of activities and staffing;
- Offer targeted funding opportunities to foster **solidarity and collaborations** as opposed to competition, particularly between larger and smaller organizations (e.g. learning opportunities, consortia or other models);
- Invest in women's cooperatives' diverse actions around **women's economic empowerment, leadership and participation**.

b. Access to partnerships and coordination

For operational partners:

- Regularly disseminate information **around partnership modalities and opportunities**;
- **Simplify partnership application processes and requirements**, particularly when targeting smaller and emerging organizations, and offer alternative modalities (e.g., through video submissions, phone calls or dedicated meetings);

- Ensure partnership information, forms, and portals are **available in Arabic and easily accessible**;
- Coordinate and **streamline partnership requirements** amongst operational partners, to reduce burdens and increase clarity.

For sector coordinators and GWG:

- Invite emerging and less formalized organizations to be **full and active members** in coordination spaces, regardless of registration or size;
- Ensure coordination meetings and training opportunities are **spread across geographical areas** and that communications are **available in Arabic**²⁴;
- Organize **dedicated consultations** with smaller WROs/WLOs to agree on preferred engagement modalities with sectors;
- Amplify the voices and priorities of WROs and WLOs in key **decisions, plans and strategies**;
- **Simplify information and processes** for coordination and appeals, and encourage **greater information sharing** with actors across the country, even those that are not currently partners in the existing system;

c. Equal partnerships

For operational partners:

- Invest in **strategic, long-term partnerships** (both formal and informal) founded in transparency, mutual accountability, common values and shared objectives;
- Recognize partners' capacities and workload, and **distribute burdens accordingly** (e.g., reporting requirements, external visits, requests etc.);
- Recognize partners' expertise, knowledge and skills, and encourage **mutual learning**;
- Ensure smaller and grassroots WROs and WLOs are **represented in high-level meetings** and events, whether at national, regional or international levels;
- **Share resources equitably**, including overhead costs and salary scales;
- Invest in **alternative funding modalities** (see Box 2 below) for small, grassroots and informal WROs and WLOs;
- **Decentralize partnerships**, and extend to rural and difficult-to-reach areas to respond comprehensively to needs across the country.

d. Learning and Accountability

For operational partners:

- Learn from and engage with **non-humanitarian or stabilization actors** supporting and working with WROs and WLOs, including those supporting feminist movement-building (see Box 3 below).

For sector coordinators and GWG:

- Ensure **consistent and systematic tracking, documenting and monitoring** of (1) direct partnerships, (2) funding, and (3) capacity-building to WROs and WLOs across sectors;

²⁴ This includes meetings, emails, minutes, read-outs and other material.

- Regularly analyse this data and use it to **inform strategic plans**, priority issues and funding agendas;
- Facilitate regular **dialogue and learning** between WROs/WLOs and other partners across sectors to innovate and jointly develop priorities, approaches and best practices for gender-responsive, impactful and efficient humanitarian action and stabilization (peer-to-peer learning)²⁵;
- Facilitate **networking opportunities** at local and national levels and with government and municipalities, as well as partnerships with the private sector and academia as relevant.

Box 3:

Opportunities for learning from non-humanitarian or stabilization actors:

Organizations such as Kvinna till Kvinna and Hivos, interviewed for this paper, have a long history of resourcing and supporting feminist and women’s rights organizations in Lebanon and the region²⁶, through long-term partnerships that include technical support, mutual learning and accountability, and financial resources for projects and operations. Another noteworthy example from Lebanon is that of RootsLab²⁷, a feminist pilot program piloted by Oxfam, Global Fund for Women, FRIDA feminist fund, and the Young Foundation, which aimed at supporting emerging social change initiatives through a tailored process of technical and financial support. Learnings and reflections from this experience can offer important insights for similar forms of equitable and transformative forms of engagement with grassroots and emerging WROs and WLOs in humanitarian action and stabilization. Finally, Oxfam in Lebanon, also interviewed, adopts different models to support refugee and migrant women’s groups to engage in collective action and implement their own initiatives and community-level responses. These types of actors can provide insights into alternative funding models for emerging and less formalized groups; practices and approaches around equalizing power in partnerships; and supporting WROs and WLOs to respond to women’s practical and strategic needs across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

C. Why supporting and partnering with women’s organisations will improve programming quality, impact and accountability

For humanitarian action and stabilization efforts to be truly responsive to communities’ needs, especially the most vulnerable groups, WROs and WLOs are critical actors to engage with across sectors.

“We developed our own products, and we made all of this ourselves. We have many women of different ages, including older women, and we are all active, so I am proud of all the women who are members of our cooperative. We are all active in our communities and able to generate some income for us, and for our families.”

Lebanese women’s cooperative

“Every woman amongst us is independent, financially and socially. We gained a lot of knowledge. We always grow and we are always in good spirits. We were really able to prove ourselves as women”

Lebanese women’s cooperative

²⁵ This could include overarching and sector-specific priorities and entry points, and would draw on WROs’ and WLOs’ in-depth knowledge and understanding of women’s issues and priorities in their communities. Such a process would require facilitated discussions and synthesis of priorities into practical tools and guidance.

²⁶ Gaspais, S. and Eghnatios, R. (2021). Supporting Feminist Organising: Experiences and Learnings from Middle East and North Africa. Kvinna Till Kvinna. <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/publications/foundation-supporting-feminist-organising-experiences-and-learnings-from-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>

²⁷ Eghnatios, R. and El Asmar, F. (2020). Making the case for a transformed development ecosystem: a feminist reflection on the experience of RootsLab in Lebanon. Gender & Development, 28:1, 69-83, DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2020.1717181



WROs' and WLOs' lived experiences and close knowledge of vulnerable communities and areas, in addition to their intrinsic understanding of women's needs and priorities, create an untapped potential for sustainable and transformative change through equitable and effective crisis response:

WROs and WLOs provide a **deep understanding of vulnerable groups' needs and concerns** and the contexts and dynamics they have to navigate. They would especially have greater access and understanding of the experiences of **women from these groups who might be particularly difficult to reach**;

Through coordination and partnerships with crisis response actors, WROs and WLOs can design, implement and facilitate **accessible and relevant interventions** for vulnerable groups that often fall through the cracks of existing interventions;

WROs and WLOs play a strategic role in **strengthening accountability** of crisis response interventions by contributing to **building trust while centring women's experiences**, voices and priorities and ensuring **timely and contextualized responses**;

Through their adaptable and multi-faceted role across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, WROs and WLOs can significantly contribute to the **stabilization and localization of crisis prevention and response efforts**;

Engagement with WROs and WLOs contributes to greater and more **meaningful participation of women and girls** across the project cycle, guaranteeing greater opportunities for gender-responsive and transformative change;

Consultations and coordination with WROs and WLOs around cross-sectoral needs assessments, research, gender analyses and other such processes are critical **to ensure that gendered dynamics are captured and that women's needs and concerns, as they relate to various, sectors are highlighted** – thereby informing **gender-responsive interventions**, cognizant of women and girls distinct needs and experiences;

WROs and WLOs consistently deliver interventions, services and support responding to women and their communities' needs and concerns as they emerge, making them **strategic actors for long-term change across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus**;

WROs and WLOs invest in interventions that address both women's immediate practical needs, but also hold a strategic outlook and objectives. Their work is founded in the understanding that change around gender equality can never be linear, and is instead a long-term process. Engaging them would therefore provide **unique insights into the needed actions and approaches for gender-mainstreaming across sectors, with an outlook for sustainable and transformative change**.

“We are very proud that we are able to raise the voices of women and youth and we see huge impact from the services we offer, especially in their ability to participate in decision-making.”

Lebanese women-led service provider

“Our work doesn’t stop, it is not time-bound, it is sustainable and continuous even in difficult situations.”

Lebanese women-led local civil society organization

“We have the confidence and trust of communities; everyone knows us in the camps and they trust us. We provide safe spaces for women. We earned this trust over the years.”

Palestinian women’s rights organization

“We are proud that we are able to see concrete impact from our interventions across all programs. We see women who have become leaders in their communities, able to conduct their own initiatives on women’s rights. They are becoming our partners in advocacy at the local level on women’s rights.”

Palestinian Feminist Organization

IV. References

Baroud, Z., Majed, Z., Abdel Samad, Z., Helou, Z. & Aadas, R. (2004). Internal Governance for NGOs in Lebanon: Reference Book. IEC Unit, Ministry of Social Affairs, Lebanon.

CaLP (2021). Group Cash Transfers: Guidance and Tools. <https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/ninja-forms/2/Group-Cash-Transfers-Guidance-and-tools.pdf>

Eghnatios, R. and El Asmar, F. (2020). Making the case for a transformed development ecosystem: a feminist reflection on the experience of RootsLab in Lebanon. *Gender & Development*, 28:1, 69-83, DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2020.1717181

El Asmar, F., Shawaf, N. & Mikdashi, D. (2019). 'No One Asked': Amplifying the voices of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon on their power to decide. Oxfam: <https://bit.ly/33DzySm>, doi: 10.21201/2019.5310, ISBN: 978-1-78748-531-0

El Helou, Z. & Antara, L. (2018). Political Participation of Refugees: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. Robert Bosch Stiftung. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/political-participation-of-refugees-the-case-of-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon.pdf>

Fernández, S. M. and Chicet, C. (2022). Funding for gender-relevant humanitarian response. Development Initiatives. https://devinit.org/documents/1152/Funding_for_gender-relevant_humanitarian_response.pdf

Gaspais, S. and Eghnatios, R. (2021). Supporting Feminist Organising: Experiences and Learnings from Middle East and North Africa. Kvinna Till Kvinna. <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/publications/foundation-supporting-feminist-organising-experiences-and-learnings-from-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>

Government of Lebanon and the United Nations. (2023). Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-lcrp-2023>

Human Rights Council. (2022). Visit to Lebanon: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter. United Nations General Assembly. <https://lebanon.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/FINAL%20SR%20Report%20on%20his%20Visit%20to%20Lebanon-ENG-Published%20May2022.pdf>

Human Rights Watch. (2023). World Report 2023: Lebanon events of 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/lebanon>

IOM (2020). Well-Being and Security of Migrant Workers in Lebanon Deteriorate Since Beirut Blast. <https://www.iom.int/news/well-being-and-security-migrant-workers-lebanon-deteriorate-beirut-blast#:~:text=Lebanon%2C%20a%20country%20of%20nearly,the%20world's%20most%20impoverished%20countries.&text=At%20the%20time%2C%20IOM%20estimated,their%20jobs%2C%20homes%20or%20livelihoods>

IPSOS Group SA (2018), Unpacking gendered realities in displacement: the status of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. UN Women. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unpacking-gendered-realities-displacement-status-syrian-refugee-women-lebanon>

- Kvinna till Kvinna. (2020). Women at great risk in Lebanon's deepening crisis. <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/2020/08/17/women-at-great-risk-in-lebanons-deepening-crisis/#:~:text=With%20many%20houses%20left%20without,from%20the%20most%20vulnerable%20communities>
- Lafrenière, J., Sweetman, C. & Thylin, T. (2019) Introduction: gender, humanitarian action and crisis response, *Gender & Development*, 27:2, 187-201, DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2019.1634332
- Low, I. (2022). Key takeaways from the latest humanitarian funding data. *The New Humanitarian*. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/maps-and-graphics/2022/07/13/Key-takeaways-from-the-latest-humanitarian-funding-data#:~:text=Funding%20targeting%20gender%2Drelated%20humanitarian,humanitarian%20aid%2C%20the%20report%20found>
- OCHA. (2021). Global Humanitarian Review. <https://2021.gho.unocha.org/global-trends/gender-and-gender-based-violence-humanitarian-action/#:~:text=Humanitarian%20contexts%20affect%20women%20more,with%2035%20per%20cent%20worldwide;>
- OCHA. (2022). Global Humanitarian Review. <https://2022.gho.unocha.org/trends/humanitarian-crises-continue-exacerbate-gender-inequalities/>
- OCHA. Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls. <https://www.unocha.org/fr/themes/gender-equality-and-empowerment-women-and-girls#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%20have%20historically,%2C%20and%20gender%2Dbased%20violence>
- The World Bank. The World Bank in Lebanon: Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>
- UN Women (2020). How to promote gender-responsive localization in humanitarian action. Guidance Note. Geneva: UN Women. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-05/UN%20Women%20-%20How%20to%20promote%20a%20gender-responsive%20participation%20revolution%20in%20humanitarian%20settings%20-%20Guidance%20Note.pdf>
- UN Women, OCHA, IMPACT. (2022). Gender and Social Inclusion Data from Lebanon's MSNA 2021. https://lebanon.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/MSNA%20-%20disaggregated%20data%20report%20-%20gender%2C%20age%2C%20disability%20_%20FINAL%202021.pdf
- UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, NCLW (2020). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. Issue No.4. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Arab%20States/Attachments/Publications/2020/07/GA%20Lebanon%20No4/Gender%20Alert%20on%20COVIDLebanon%20Issue%204.pdf>
- UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, NCLW (2020). Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon. Issue No.5. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Arab%20States/Attachments/Publications/2021/02/Gender%20Alert%20on%20COVIDLebanon%20Issue%205%20FINAL.pdf>
- UN Women. (2021). Gender Analysis – VASyr. https://ialebanon.unhcr.org/vasyr/files/vasyr_chapters/2021/VASyR%202021%20-%20Gender.pdf
- UN Women. Facts and figures: Humanitarian action. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/facts-and-figures>

UNHCR. UNHCR Lebanon at a glance. <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/at-a-glance#:~:text=More%20than%20one%20million%20Syrian,operation%2C%20with%20five%20offices%20countrywide>

UNICEF (2020). Partnering with Women- and Girl-led Organizations. Action Learning Brief and Checklist. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/media/129046/file/UNICEF%20-%20Action%20Brief%20-%20Engaging%20Local%20WGLOs.pdf>

UNICEF Lebanon. The New Lebanon – How the country is turning to a series of negative coping strategies to survive. <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/stories/new-lebanon-how-country-turning-series-negative-coping-strategies-survive>

UNICEF. Gender-based violence in emergencies. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies>

UNRWA. Where we work. <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>

Women Deliver. A Crisis Within a Crisis: Grassroots Feminist Organizations Press On During COVID-19 in Lebanon. <https://womensdeliver.org/a-crisis-within-a-crisis-grassroots-feminist-organizations-press-on-during-covid-19-in-lebanon/>

Annex I: LCRP Mapping of Women's Rights and Women-Led Organizations in Humanitarian Action and Stabilization in Lebanon

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/104751>



UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.