LEBANON Response Plan

In-Focus

Women's Livelihoods in the context of a multifaceted crisis

In partnership with Canada

Lebanon is grappling with a multifaceted crisis marked by a displacement situation due to the Syria crisis, economic downturns, the devastating Beirut Port Explosions and the escalation of conflict in the South of Lebanon, resulting in the internal displacement of around a hundred thousand people. Livelihoods represented one of the most affected areas by these multiple crises, being as well a primary need for all population groups.[1] Women were among the ones hit the hardest at socio-economic level. The pre-existing vulnerability of women in the country has been amplified, leading to heightened marginalization, discrimination, and a surge in unemployment rates among them. Despite their significant contributions across various sectors, women continue to face obstacles in economic participation, including unpaid work and restricted access to financial resources.[i] Furthermore, the crisis has pushed many of them into unemployment, while others find themselves economically sidelined or exploited in the informal sector.

This In-Focus briefing aims to collate recent information and data on women's employment and economic inclusion. Its goal is to provide recommendations that can shape future responses, specifically identifying and addressing the challenges faced by women in these exceptional times while mitigating their impact on women's daily life.

Economic Participation of Women

Lebanon's standing on the 2023 Gender Gap Index underscores significant gender disparities, ranking 132nd out of 146 countries. Its placement at 127th in the women's economic participation and opportunity dimension is particularly concerning, revealing pronounced gaps.[ii]

Sixty-three per cent of the service industry labour force (banking, education, health, tourism, and social work) is women compared to only 33 per cent men.[iii] In the public sector, women represent approximately 70 per cent of teachers, emphasizing their significant presence in this domain. In the Health sector, women account for 80 per cent of registered nurses in Lebanon.[iv] However, their participation in entrepreneurship remains notably low at 16 per cent. Women are primarily employed rather than engaged in self-employment, often holding lower-paying roles, and their individual choices are influenced by traditional gender stereotypes and societal expectations for the role.[v,vi] Only 27 per cent of women, compared to 73 per cent of men, were in managerial positions in 2022.[vii] Notably, there is a significant contrast between rural and urban settings in Lebanon. The majority of women work in formal sectors in urban areas, while approximately 31 per cent of the informal workforce is made up of women who lack fundamental protection such as healthcare and social security.[viii] In agriculture, women constitute 43 per cent of the labour force, engaging in various tasks.[ix] In the agriculture sector, 85 per cent of the labour force is informally employed, with women being overrepresented in this group, which increases risks of exploitation.[x] Despite their significant presence in the labour force, women face challenges in resource and income control, and generally receive lower compensation compared to men.[xi]

Palestinian refugees make contributions to Lebanon's diverse employment landscape. However, they are restricted from participating in 39 professions.[xii] A significant gender disparity exists with 55 per cent employment rate among Palestinian men as opposed to only 12 per cent for Palestinian women.[xiii]

Fifty-four per cent of displaced Syrians remain unemployed, and women's labour force participation rates were as low as 19 per cent in 2023.[xiv] Agriculture and other services sectors emerge as the primary sectors[2] for the displaced Syrians' employment (31% and 18% respectively), yet even those employed struggle to cover essential needs from their earnings.[3]

Migrant women often engage in domestic work. The "Kafala" system[4] further increases their risk of exploitation, by placing them under the full control of sponsors.[xv] In fact, women make up an estimated 76 per cent of all migrant workers and 99 per cent of migrant domestic workers who come to Lebanon for employment.[xvi]

[1] 2023 LCSI (Livelihood Coping Strategies Index) and classified income sources: 44% of households had a livelihood living standard gap, indicating unmet needs. For Livelihood Living Standard Gaps, 59% of households were in need. The primary livelihood needs were Access to basic needs due to unstable or absent income sources, as 41% of households reported having only one seasonal/unstable, or no income sources. Moreover, 24% of HHs reported at least one crisis or emergency livelihood coping strategy in the 7 days prior to data collection.

[2] Including hotels, restaurants, transportation, and personal services

[3] Households only manage to meet 28% of the monthly food and non-food Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket value from employment. In 2022, the majority of Female-Headed Households continued to rely on monetary aid or humanitarian agencies as their primary sources of income (46%) compared to male-headed households (29%). The household gender gap in average monthly per capita income dropped in 2023, with Female-Headed Households (FHH) earning 34.5% less than MHH on average per capita. (VaSyr 2023 preliminary findings)

[4] Kafala system renders domestic workers dependent on their employers and does not grant them the most basic rights. For the domestic worker to work in Lebanon, they must be legally tied to a Lebanese employer who becomes their sponsor.

Key Challenges

• **Enabling Environment – Public and Policy levels:** Obstacles hinder women's full integration into the labour force, requiring proactive measures by the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Economy and Trade, and the Ministry of Finance. Effective strategies encompass policies, legislation, and programmatic interventions, prioritizing initiatives like legal reforms, enhanced employability, job creation, countering negative perceptions of working women, and preventing discrimination.[xvii] Further to this, the limited capacities to enforce decent work principles, often leads to exploitation and protection risks that hit the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, including women. The context of the concurrent crises represents a key challenge which has a considerably higher impact on women compared to other groups as they are more likely to face underemployment, decreases in salaries, and drop out of the labour force than men.

• **Enabling Environment – Private Sector:** The availability of flexible working arrangements within the private sector as well as affordable child-care services in addition to other supporting mechanisms would encourage women and facilitate their entry and their stay into the job market. Challenges include short maternity leave (10 weeks as per the Lebanese Labour Law[xviii] which is not necessarily enforced or adhered to by the private sector). Women can also face occupational segregation where they are bound by stereotypically female-dominated fields which can manifest in unequal treatment, as well as bias in hiring and promotion.

• **Social Norms:** Social norms perpetuate gender disparities in economic activities as they are influenced by collective expectations prioritizing traditional roles, creating barriers to women's access to diverse economic opportunities. Strategies for challenging and changing these norms are essential for fostering a more inclusive economic landscape.

• **Profile of Women in Livelihoods Initiatives:** Women in Lebanon, exhibit all types of characteristics influenced by factors such as the urban and rural residency, citizenship status (such as migrants and refugees), diverse educational backgrounds, and a variety of employment statuses. These characteristics contribute to the complexity of their experiences and their connection to gender-differentiated development outcomes. The unique profiles of women significantly impact their potential roles; while some may thrive as entrepreneurs, others face limitations due to factors like lack of skill sets in alignment with market needs. Women encounter diverse challenges shaped by factors such as socio-economic background, education, skills, location, and cultural context. Those lead to variations in income, resource access, and actual employment opportunities among women, as well as shaping entrepreneurial aspirations, ranging from small businesses to participation in value chains or cooperatives. A nuanced understanding of these challenges allows project designers to tailor interventions for specific groups.

• **Gender-Stereotyped Approach:** Deeply ingrained stereotypes confine women to traditional roles, primarily centered on staying at home. These perceptions portray women as vulnerable and limited to domestic responsibilities, discouraging their participation in economic opportunities. Initiatives like sewing, hairdressing, agro-processing, and online trading were and are implemented to provide women with economic engagement while working from home. This suggests that these approaches not only fail to consider factors such as potential profitability, quality standards and market demand and saturations, but also conform to conventional gender norms and roles without significantly altering the environment surrounding economic empowerment, such as introducing women to non-stereotypical economic opportunities.

Gender Disparities in Economic Opportunities

- **Pervasive Impact of Legal Disparities:** Gender disparities in legal frameworks include for example excluding migrant workers from the Labour Law and subjecting them to the Kafala system. Or preventing women workers in informal sectors from accessing any social security service such as the National Social Security Fund (NSSF)[xix] or from extending social security coverage to the spouse[5];[xx]. These disparities have a pervasive impact on women and girls.

- **Informal Employment:** A significant portion of women's employment is in the informal economy which often lacks job security, benefits, and social protection. This economic participation stems from the women's economic and financial needs and the scarcity of opportunities in the formal economy especially when they lack the required skills and expertise. Furthermore, informal jobs might offer part-time work which would allow women to meet their domestic obligations.

- **Challenges in Social Protection:** There is a lack of targeted social assistance programmes for specific groups of vulnerable women, including female headed households (FHH), single women with dependents, older women, and women with disabilities as well as pregnant women in social assistance programs such as the NPTP, IMPACT and NSSP.[xxi] This gap pushes women more into informal employment to be able to meet their needs.

- **Skills Gap:** There remains a gap between the potential capacity of women and what women in Lebanon have achieved so far, due to disparities in access to education and training, hindering women from effectively participating or competing in the labour market.

- **Persistent Labour Force Participation Disparities:** Women have a lower labour force participation rate of 22 per cent compared to men, with the remaining 78 per cent outside the labour force, i.e., not pursuing employment (Lebanon follow-up Labour Force Survey January 2022)[xxii]

[5] *Except if he is at least 60 years old, or if he suffers from a mental or physical disability.*

- **Entrepreneurial Challenges:** Women encounter greater obstacles and disadvantages when initiating entrepreneurial ventures. These include the gender roles and expectations, absence of support systems and networks, barriers in accessing finance, and complex bureaucracy that can be challenging for women, particularly those with low educational backgrounds.
- **Informal and Vulnerable Employment:** Women are disproportionately represented in informal and vulnerable employments characterized by a lack of contracts and social protection, non-existing job security, and precarious conditions.
- **Workplace Violence and Harassment:** Sexual harassment at work is a widespread problem in Lebanon which is due to cultural and social norms. According to research by the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality in 2018, only 15 per cent of businesses in Lebanon have policies that protect against sexual harassment in the workplace.
- **Leadership Disparities:** Attaining the highest leadership positions remains a challenge for women.
- **Gender Pay Gap:** Women have lower wages compared to their male counterparts, even within the same professional fields and level of expertise.
- **Increased risk of exploitation:** Approximately 31 per cent of the informal workforce is made up of women who lack fundamental protection such as healthcare and social security. In agriculture, 85 per cent of the labour force is informally employed with women, who constitute 43 per cent of the labour force, being overrepresented in this group, which increases risks of exploitation.
- **Unpaid Labour and Domestic Work:** Unpaid labour and domestic work, essential for economic function, often go uncounted and unrecognized, with women shouldering a disproportionate burden especially in female-headed households.

Ongoing Lebanon Response Plan

The range of livelihood interventions in Lebanon, particularly those aimed at women beneficiaries, spans various sectors. Efforts are made to address barriers to women's participation, such as providing safe transportation and childcare services. The Livelihoods sector in Lebanon is composed of 82 partner organizations under the Lebanon Response Plan (LRP), involving both local and international governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Food Security and Agriculture sector also offers livelihood activities through cash-for-work in agriculture as well as support to small-scale farmers and women-led cooperatives.

Capacity building and guidance: Vulnerable men and women are equipped with strengthened and relevant technical skills to meet the job market's demands. This is done through practical, hands-on, and theoretical trainings that align with market needs, such as market- and work-based learning and cash-for-work programs. They also receive career guidance, participate in awareness-raising sessions, and are provided with job matching services. Concurrently, training and employment initiatives aim to enhance women's technical skills and facilitate job placement, focusing on building resilience through training and on breaking occupational stereotypes wherever possible. Entrepreneurship initiatives support women-led enterprises and include building capacities in business and financial management. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) initiatives encourage ventures in science and technology, while others promote e-commerce and fair trade.

In 2023, the Livelihoods sector supported 30,814 women (48% of total beneficiaries) through various capacity-building initiatives and career guidance services.[xxiii] The Food Security and Agriculture sector supported 4,577 individuals to be employed in temporary casual labour and received training on skills and competencies in the agriculture sector, with 57 per cent women beneficiaries. The support provided employment opportunities in exchange for cash, while also creating agricultural assets benefiting small-scale farmers and farming communities.[xxiv]

Support to businesses: Other initiatives support with financing, training, and incubation to enhance productivity, reflecting a comprehensive approach. Partners are guided in developing gender-transformative programs for women, which promote their engagement in the green economy for economic empowerment. In the realm of financing, which is crucial to address challenges in accessing finance from the traditional banking sector, various organizations, especially Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) play a leading role in providing affordable financial services and small grants to businesses including women-led Medium, Small, and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) and startups, strengthening businesses in Lebanon's challenging environment. To strengthen MSMEs and create decent jobs, interventions by LRP partners emphasize enhancing productivity, competitiveness, and local economic resilience. In 2023, 8,442 of 18,018 businesses supported under the Livelihoods sector were owned by women[xxv], the majority of which receiving access to financial services. The Food Security and Agriculture sector supported more than 6,000 women small-scale farmers by providing technical trainings and distribution of agricultural inputs to improve crop and livestock farming practices. The sector also provided emergency short-term support through cash or vouchers modalities to purchase agricultural inputs.

Market Alignment: The Livelihoods sector facilitates communication and coordination among partners to align projects with market needs. The sector advocates prioritizing programs for new entrants to the labour market, notably youth and women, including female heads of households. The goal is to increase income generation, thereby lifting individuals and their families out of poverty. Simultaneously, cash-for-work programs provide temporary employment for vulnerable women, contributing to local economic benefits. Additionally, cooperatives empower rural women through capacity building, cash and in-kind grants, and cash-for-work initiatives.

Good Practice - Demand-Driven rather than a Supply-Driven Approach for Enhanced Livelihoods Initiatives: Emphasis on Post-Training Employment Transition

Focusing on providing skills that match the market demand, this approach emphasizes an opportunistic attitude to emerging sectors. Cooperation with training providers emphasizes the value of strong relationships while preserving training quality, reaching beyond the private sector to organizations in different geographic regions. An integral element involves assessing the transition to employment post-training, achieved through additional support to facilitate access to employment through organizations or specialized hiring offices for successful job placement outcomes (e.g., 10% upon successful job placement within MOUs). Additionally, participants are equipped with tools and skills to bolster their job search, encompassing job hunting skills and guidance for entrepreneurship, focusing keenly on market-driven considerations.

Furthermore, providing a holistic service from capacity-building (training) to internships within businesses with the potential for employment enhances the effectiveness of livelihoods initiatives. This approach ensures that participants not only acquire skills but also gain practical experience and exposure to real work environments, increasing their employability and facilitating a smoother transition into the workforce.

Opportunities and Recommendations

For the Government of Lebanon

• **Strenghten a conducive environment for women's employment and entrepreneurship:** Enact legislation that guarantees the full economic participation of women while at the same time enforcing legislations that protects them from harassment and exploitative practices at the workplace. This includes a revision of the Social Security law and its articles related to women's coverage. Among these also, ensuring that new provisions extend the duration of maternity leave, enforcing the application of the labour law in terms of respecting the maternity leave period, and introducing paid paternity leave, ensuring that men and women can equally access social security benefits, etc. Concurrently, strengthen policies to reduce the gender wage gaps especially in the informal market where women are disproportionately represented.

• **Strengthen the implementation of the Sexual Harassment Law No. 205:** Ensure monitoring of businesses and enterprises to guarantee that employers implement the law. Strengthen the implementation of the feedback mechanisms.

• **Invest in child and older people care services:** The expansion of childcare and older people care services can help to increase women's employment choices as it overcomes one of the main constraints on women's paid work. Creating jobs for women in the care sector has the dual impact of employing women and freeing up other women for paid work, education, or other activities. This could be achieved through support to local Social Development Centres (SDCs) in the areas.

For Donors

• **Establish specialised funds:** This will allow more gender responsive and transformative programming for women's employment and economic empowerment. For example, funds for providing safe transportation, child-care, household support, access to finance, etc.

• **Facilitate long-term funding:** This type of support is needed especially for activities that hold the potential of sustainability, specifically in increasing employability and support to businesses.

• **Support the Government in developing the overall business environment:** such as affordable and reliable electricity, affordable and reliable telecommunications (internet, phone calls), and faster access of businesses to justice. Improving the business environment will lead to increased investments resulting in the creation of long-term job opportunities.

For LRP Operational Partners[6]

• **Foster Women's Inclusion in Non-Traditional Sectors:** Addressing entrenched gender norms and developing interventions aimed at incorporating women into job sectors where they are currently underrepresented is crucial. This may include sectors such as construction and infrastructure development, tourism, and industrial fields like paint production, welding, plumbing, and transport, while giving full consideration to protection concerns and potential health risks. Raising awareness about diverse, non-stereotyped opportunities for women, including rural tourism, is essential for empowering individuals to explore alternative sectors. The growth of information technology—encompassing digital marketing, STEM, and artificial intelligence—emerges as a significant trend. Furthermore, the pharmaceutical sector is experiencing notable expansion in Mount Lebanon and Beirut.

[6] *Gender Mainstreaming in Livelihoods - Lebanon, Partners are advised to consult and integrate the "Gender Mainstreaming and Women Inclusion in Livelihoods Activities Guidance Note and the Gender and GBV Risk mitigation Tipsheet into assessments, analysis, planning and M&E.*

• **Seize Economic Opportunities Amid Crisis:** The economic crisis in Lebanon has created openings for local products, extending beyond the realm of food processing to encompass the manufacturing of new products. The exploration of renewable energy, with an emphasis on non-traditional and environmentally supportive roles, offers potential employment avenues. It is important to conduct targeted market and country assessments through networking with public and private academia and specialized institutions, emphasizing the identification of successful cases. Important programming areas to consider include innovation, seal of quality, traceability of products, competitive prices, and eco-friendly agroecological products.

• **Promote Social Enterprises:** Acknowledging the transformative potential for positive societal change, programming should place a strategic focus on promoting social enterprises. These initiatives, which harmonize social and economic objectives, are pivotal in cultivating sustainable businesses that not only contribute to economic growth but also address pressing community needs.

• **Monitoring and Evaluation:** LRP partners are encouraged to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in promoting women's economic empowerment and share the results of these evaluations, especially the lessons learned and the recommendations, with the sector partners to contribute to guiding the partners towards best practices. It is crucial to focus not only on the short-term effectiveness of interventions aimed at enhancing women's economic status but also on their long-term impacts. For example, conducting tracer studies a year or two after completing education and training projects is essential for assessing the sustained effects of the training on employment and income. It is essential that donors allocate funding for these studies, ensuring they are conducted after a specified period post-intervention.

• **Financial literacy and financial management:** The delivery of financial literacy and financial management ©trainings, including household budgeting, debt management, and savings management, has a positive effect on the ability of women to better manage scarce resources at both household and business levels.

• **Agents of Change:** Work with men and women in communities, with leaders and business owners and managers, in the private and public sector to ensure a comprehensive approach, acknowledging that the barriers are not limited to women's skills and capacity but are also linked to the enabling environment they are a part of.

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[ii] *World Economic Forum. Gender Gap Index Report 2023. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf*
[iii] *https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/women-economic-participation-lebanon-mapping-analysis-laws-english.pdf*
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[v] *UNDP. (2020). Gendered Value Chains Study: Barriers and Opportunities*
[vi] *ESCWA. (2022). Women's economic participation in Lebanon: A mapping analysis of laws and regulations. https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/women-economic-participation-lebanon-mapping-analysis-laws-english_0.pdf*
[vii] *ILO & CAS (2022)*
[viii] *ILO. (2022). New ILO project works towards formalizing Lebanon's economy through tripartite social dialogue. https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-centre/news/WCMS_850402/lang--en/index.htm*
[ix] *FAO (2021). Country gender assessment of the agriculture and rural sector – Lebanon. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb3025en*
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[xiii] *UNDP Household survey in Palestinian Gatherings*
[xiv] *VASyR 2023 preliminary findings*
[xv] *UN. (2021). Lebanon crises increase suffering of migrant domestic workers. https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1108332*
[xvi] *Source: Migrant Workers's Rights and Women's Rights - https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/06/women-migrant-domestic-workers-in-lebanon-a-gender-perspective)*
[xvii] *ILO. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_438671.pdf*
[xviii] *http://77.42.251.205/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=261523&lawId=179571*
[xix] *https://www.efi-ife.org/en/pdf-detail/94860-policy-brief-gender-analysis-of-the-lebanese-legal-system*
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[xxi] *https://lebanon.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/SP%20Baseline%20Report%20_1.pdf*
[xxii] *https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beir ut/documents/publication/wcms_848353.pdf).*
[xxiii] *Livelihoods sector 2023 End of Year dashboard, https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/106724*
[xxiv] *Food Security and Agriculture sector 2023 End of Year dashboard, https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/106959*
[xxv] *Ibid*