

Gender-Based Violence Information Management System

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

2021

Background

The multiple crises affecting Lebanon throughout 2021 have worsened the overall protection situation for Syrian refugees and refugees of other nationalities and deepened the vulnerability of the Lebanese host community. The deterioration in the economic condition combined with the social instability and the increase in COVID cases urged vulnerable communities to increasingly rely on the humanitarian services as a coping mechanism to respond to their rising and emerging needs.

This gender-based violence information management system (GBVIMS) report¹ aims to analyze the increase in reports of GBV in Lebanon as a result of the compounded crisis. Increasing poverty levels, growing family tensions, barriers in access to services and flaw in law enforcement are all considered risk factors and drivers to GBV in the community. The analysis has been triangulated with other sources, protection monitoring reports, studies, surveys, and assessments conducted in Lebanon such as VaSyR 2021 preliminary findings, Law 205 on sexual harassment and RIMS reports on women and girls’ barriers to access humanitarian services.

Profile of survivors seeking assistance

Data from 2021 show that adults accounted for **89 percent** and children accounted for **11 percent of the GBV cases reported through the GBVIMS**. The percentage of adults and children seeking services remains the same, similar to 2020. However, partners reported an increase in the number of child survivors especially in certain regions (South Lebanon recorded the highest proportion of children seeking services, at **25 percent** in 2021). The increased number of children seeking services is probably linked to the increasing risks faced by children in the current crisis but also to the increase in services available targeting children in the region. In 2021, forced marriage, psychological or emotional abuse and sexual assault were the most commonly reported types of GBV incidents against children, accounting for 36 percent, 31 percent and 18 percent of incidents, respectively.

According to the preliminary findings of the 2021 “Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon” (VASyR),² 20 percent of Syrian refugee girls and women ages 15–19 were married in 2021. The same assessment revealed that 46 percent of girls ages 15–24 do not attend school because they are married. After marrying, and due to the traditional gender and social norms imposed by the community,

¹ The data quoted above are derived from only reported cases and do not represent the total incidences or prevalence of GBV in Lebanon. These statistical trends are generated exclusively by GBV service providers who use the GBVIMS for data collection in implementing GBV response activities across Lebanon, with the informed consent of survivors. Thirteen organizations contributed to the trends. These data should not be used for direct follow-up with survivors or additional case follow-up. This information is confidential and must not be shared outside your organization/agency. Should you like to use this data or access more information on the GBVIMS, please contact the Inter-Agency GBVIMS Coordinator, Lamis Delbani (aldelbani@unfpa.org).

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme (2021). “Preliminary Results of the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees.” Accessed at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88960>

many girls are deprived of opportunities and services that are not directly linked to their spousal role, including education.

Syrian refugees continue to constitute the majority of the population seeking GBV services, accounting for **67 percent** of all the individuals who sought out support in the first half of 2021. According to the preliminary findings of the 2021 "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon" (VASyR), the economic crisis and COVID-19 pushed almost the entire Syrian refugee population in the country to below the survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB), with about nine out of every 10 households surveyed living in extreme poverty. Thirty one percent of the survivors seeking services were Lebanese. Lebanese nationals have also been newly confronted with the effects of the rapidly escalating socio economic crises, notably the government's decreasing capacity to provide basic public services such electricity; water, health and sanitation services; waste management; and health care. Data triangulated with the SGBV sector achievements for 2021 show that there is a **25 percent** increase in the total number of beneficiaries from different nationalities accessing GBV services at the safe spaces compared to 2020, showing the impact of the multi – layered crisis on marginalized groups including Syrian and Lebanese population.

Most of the survivors who accessed GBV services in 2021 were female, but male survivors were also affected with **4 percent of men and boys reporting GBV incidents**, (a 2 percent increase compared to 2020). Data from the GBVIMS in 2021 indicates that **8 percent** of the children subjected to GBV were males. Despite the limited services designed for male engagement in GBV programming, there is an increase in the reporting of male children seeking services in 2021. In addition to children, GBV case managers reported an increase in male survivors needing case management services especially in the second half of 2021.

Data from the GBVIMS in 2021 indicates that 2 percent of the survivors seeking GBV services are people with disability. Data triangulated with the SGBV taskforce indicator analysis for 2021 shows that the percentage of people with disabilities is even lower than what was reported on the GBVIMS, accounting for **0.2 percent³** of all the individuals who sought out support from the GBV services through accessing safe spaces. People with disabilities continue to face challenges in accessing services due to several limitations, including limited capacities and skills of service providers to engage people with disabilities in the activities, community stigmatization and marginalization and the issue of safe spaces that may not be properly equipped and rehabilitated to host people with disabilities. As a step to engage marginalized groups in the GBV programming, the SGBV sector is prioritizing the inclusion of people with disabilities in the current and future programs, while ensuring the engagement of organizations specialized in working with people with disabilities in coordination platforms.

Most commonly reported types of GBV incidents

Women and girls continue to be exposed to many risks and GBV types in the community including sexual violence, which is further supported by data reported through the GBVIMS. In 2021, physical assault and psychological or emotional abuse were the most commonly reported types of GBV incidents in 2021, accounting for 38 percent and 32 percent of incidents, respectively. However, incidents of sexual violence,

³ Lebanon SGBV Taskforce, SGBV Sector Indicators Analysis (2021).

combining the incidents of rape and sexual assault accounted for 17 percent of the total cases reported, which is the third highest percentage after the physical assault and psychological or emotional abuse.

On 31 December 2020, and after continuous advocacy on different levels, the new law on sexual harassment was approved. In 2021, the percentage of GBV incidents happening in public spaces such as workplace, street, transport, garden and open field constituted 16 percent of the incident locations, which is the second highest percentage after the client's home and marking a 4 percent increase compared to 2020, after the approval of the law. Also, the percentage of rape and sexual assault incidents perpetrated in public spaces such as the street and workplace increased compared to 2020. Field reports justify this increase with the impacts of the compounded socio-economic crisis, where women and girls are obliged to work and generate income, and they are often exposed to GBV risks, including sexual violence at the workplace.

Compared to 2020, field reports indicated that there is an increase in the percentage of sexual abuse incidents, reported in 2021. Anecdotal evidence from the field may link this increased reporting to the advanced awareness raising and information dissemination initiatives after the approval of the law, and the slight but increasing knowledge about the sexual harassment law that was announced widely in the country. Other reports show that the legal disciplinary measures taken after reporting the sexual harassment previous incidents, aren't as expected by the survivors and the community due to the cultural pressure and the acceptance of this type of violence in certain communities.

Sexual exploitation

Incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse may often go unreported, especially among women and girls, including female refugees and migrant workers, due to the stigma they carry, lack of information on reporting mechanisms and limited legal support. For refugees, such incidents may also go unreported if the survivor lacks legal residency and is afraid of being arrested or deported if she/he approaches the police. Increased levels of debt and difficulties in paying rent or purchasing essential items may increase the risk of sexual exploitation⁴ and other forms of violence among the most vulnerable populations, especially refugees and marginalized members of the host community.

In 2021, the percentage of possible sexual exploitation accounting to 1 percent is similar to the percentage reported in 2020. However, the percentage of children possibly involved in sexual exploitation increased in 2022. Anecdotal evidence from GBV partners shows that due to the economic crisis and the lira's depreciation against the US dollar, families and employers are recruiting Syrian girls instead of migrants for domestic work and paying them low salaries. As more Syrian children are engaging in domestic work, their risk of sexual exploitation or abuse increases, and this is in line with the field reports of increasing exploitative domestic servitude incidents against working girls.

Issues in access to services and referrals

According to the data reported through the GBVIMS in 2021, almost half of the GBV reported incidents (**43 percent**) were reported after one month of the incident. The delayed reporting is often linked to the

⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, World Food Programme (2021). "Preliminary Results of the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees." Accessed at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88960>.

delayed disclosures from GBV survivors who might need more time to accept and process the abuse they were subjected to before reporting to specialized service providers. Other reports justify this percentage with the heavy caseload GBV service providers are currently facing.

Security protection services and **legal assistance services** constitute the highest percentage of most declined referrals by GBV survivors, accounting to 44 percent and 38 percent respectively. Data triangulated with Referrals Information Management System report (RIMS) on women and girls' barriers to access humanitarian services,⁵ traditional **gender norms and cultural barriers** and **access to information and services** were identified as the two main barriers identified by female key informants. According to interviewed women, gendered cultural norms often prevent women and girls from accessing educational, professional, or psychosocial support services including access to legal and justice services. Furthermore, many intersectional dimensions further hamper vulnerable women and girls in need of humanitarian assistance from accessing assistance or services, notably due to their legal or immigration status, their nationality or the absence of a nationality, and/or sexual orientation as well.

Adding to this, data triangulated with a study by UN Women and partner organisations on **Access to Justice for Sexual and Gender Based Violence case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon**⁶, It was commonly reported by both interviewed men and women that they tend to resolve the GBV reports/ incidents internally in case the GBV is perpetrated within the household, before bringing the case to court. This is reflective of social pressures, fears associated with a lack of documentation, financial constraints to engaging in the legal system, and the fact that informal justice processes take less time to reach an outcome, even if the outcome is not in the favor of women and/ or the survivor's needs. The same study reveals that LGBTIQ+ Syrian refugee women, despite of the significant GBV risks they are facing in the community, confront significant barriers to accessing the formal justice system due to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, in addition to the fear of being criminalized because of their sexual and gender identity due to the existing laws and the Lebanese penal code.

Recommendations

The Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence Task Force offers the following recommendations for safeguarding at-risk populations and responding to survivors' needs based on the data reported through the GBVIMS during the year of 2021:

- Ensure proper implementation of the sexual harassment law through active coordination between GBV actors and legal actors throughout the case management process.
- Strengthen the dissemination of information related to the sexual harassment law and ensure awareness raising sessions in PSS activities.
- Strengthen and increase the gender-sensitive discussions and provide systematic and ongoing training for legal professionals and other justice actors on women's rights, refugee rights, existing GBV laws, Lebanon's international obligations under human rights frameworks, referral mechanisms, gendered experiences of justice, and the needs of survivors.

⁵ Danish Refugee Council. Referrals Information Management System. "WOMEN'S BARRIERS TO ACCESS HUMANITARIAN SERVICES."

⁶ UN Women, "Justice for me is living free and as a human being" - An Analytical Study of Access to Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. Accessed at: [UN Women Lebanon and partners - SGBV A2J - 2022.pdf](#)

- Establish a monitoring mechanism throughout the case management process for organizations to document the procedures, outcomes, and experiences of women in informal justice systems, in addition to women's human rights violations.
- Strengthen timely and safe referrals across sectors, and to the GBV sector, through capacity building on GBV core concepts, including disclosures and safe and ethical referrals.
- Raise awareness to service providers and across different sectors on the importance and criticality of immediate reporting to GBV case management services.
- Scale up the mainstreaming of GBV and SEA awareness and risk mitigation in targeted sectors and programs, including advanced awareness raising on the enforcement sexual harassment law to institutional actors and police officers.
- Collaborate and promote joint initiatives among GBV actors, child protection actors and the Ministry of Social Affairs in working groups and coordination platforms to mitigate the risk of GBV, especially sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Strengthen the collaboration between GBV sector and Ministry of Social Affairs, to introduce the GBV services and improve Lebanese women and girls' access to GBV services.
- Adapt the complaints and feedback mechanisms to barriers women face, to be able to capture challenges that women and girls face in accessing services, in a more systematic manner.
- Raise awareness about GBV to service providers, especially those in direct contact with women and girls such as forensic doctors, nurses, CMR service providers, to strengthen access to sexual and reproductive health services and sanitary need for women and adolescent girls.
- Increase the availability of CMR services across health centers, to cover the demanding and increasing needs of survivors, especially in border areas and areas that suffer from deficiency in humanitarian services.
- Raise awareness on the needs and particular services that LGBTIQ people require, and ensure that frontliners, those in direct contact with survivors and case workers have the necessary information to engage with LGBTIQ survivors in crisis, through training and capacity building.
- Strengthen community based approaches such as outreach and scale up the work with community volunteers and committees to ensure improved access to services and information for women and girls.