

PROGRAMME BRIEF

UN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME IN LEBANON

BUILDING RESILIENCE AND PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY FOR LEBANESE NATIONALS AND REFUGEES RESIDING IN LEBANON

Photo: UN Women/ Joe Saade

The Issue

Women's economic empowerment is critical to achieving gender equality, inclusive economic growth, development, and poverty reduction in Lebanon. Improving the economic status of women leads to better outcomes at the individual, family and community level, and has ripple effects across society.

The escalating economic, political and health crisis in Lebanon poses a historic threat to the country and its population as a whole. It has significantly challenged the livelihoods of women living within Lebanon, both their engagement in the labour market and the coping mechanisms they are able to employ to meet their basic needs. This in turn negatively affects their ability to negotiate equal treatment, rights and protection from violence within their everyday lives.

This multifaceted crisis is taking place within a context of pre-existing and deep structural gender inequalities. Lebanon has one of the highest overall gender gaps in the world (ranking 145 out of 153 countries in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap report 2020)¹, and amongst the lowest global rates of women's labor market participation, hovering at 29% for women and 76% for men. ESCWA estimates in 2020 that more than 55% of the country's population was trapped in poverty and struggling for bare necessities, i.e., almost double the previous year's rate (28%). Extreme poverty has registered a threefold increase from 8% in 2019 to 23% in 2020.² GDP is expected to fall by at least 13.8% in 2020, and UN Women had estimated in June 2020 that

women's employment in Lebanon was set to fall by 14-19%³ as a result of current economic contraction rates. These numbers have deepened as a result of the August Beirut port explosion.

The lockdown measures and school closures that have been put in place as a result of COVID-19 have amplified women's unequal burden of unpaid care work while pushing them out of employment, with women at the forefront of home-schooling and domestic work. Moreover, with the formal labor force transitioning to remote work, the digital gender gap in Lebanon impacts women's ability to engage in changing economies.

All of this comes on top of an almost decade-long protracted Syrian refugee crisis, which has had a profound economic impact in Lebanon, particularly overstressing governmental services and the country's infrastructure, and increasing job competition in marginalized communities. Syrian refugees' access to both the labor market and livelihoods has been devastatingly low, while poverty is increasing drastically.⁴ Recent estimates suggest that 89% of Syrian refugee households are living below the poverty line and unable to meet their survival needs for food, health and shelter; this is even higher amongst female headed households.

1 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report, 2020.

2 Lebanon Labour Force and Households' Living Conditions Survey 2018-2019.

3 UN Women, Gender-Responsive Recovery in Lebanon: Recommendations for Fiscal, Social and Labour Policy Reform, July 2020.

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



Photo: UN Women/ Joe Saade

Our Strategy for Change

UN Women's economic empowerment portfolio was initiated in response to the impact of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon. It works across the humanitarian-development nexus to build the economic resilience of Lebanese and refugee women, employing a holistic approach which combines skills development, income generation programmes, and protection services, alongside work on legal and policy reform to create a stronger enabling environment for women.

- At the **macro level**, UN Women works with partners to support the government and private sector in the formulation of gender sensitive policies and legislation that seeks to enhance women's economic participation and strengthen their protection against all forms of violence and exploitation.
- At the **meso level**, UN Women supports government, public institutions to deliver gender-responsive programmes and public services that facilitate women's economic empowerment, in particular through Social Development Centres (SDCs). UN Women also works to build coalitions across civil society calling for gender-equitable recovery and supports the facilitation of civil society watch dog bodies on issues of gender and the economy.
- At the **individual level**, UN Women creates economic opportunities and pathways to decent employment for women, to enable them to meet their immediate needs as they relate to nutrition, shelter, health and education and to support asset replenishment. This is paired with protection services, including legal aid and self-defense.

Much of this work is implemented through UN joint programmes, in order to support and leverage the cumulative impact and work of the UN for gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Achievements and Approach

UN Women has reached over 10,000 women since the establishment of its presence in Lebanon (2017), significantly increasing their employability, purchasing power, and confidence.

To address immediate needs of those impacted by Lebanon's compounded crises, UN Women combines accredited vocational training and a package of soft skills, including life skills and managerial skills, with an employment opportunity to support women's employability.

Employment opportunities include job placements, cash-for-work, and entrepreneurship support as pathways to sustainable and decent employment for women at risk (Lebanese and refugees). In 2020, MOUs were signed with 32 private sector companies, securing 6-month paid job placements with a commitment to examine the longer-term retention opportunities for the women placed. Priority is placed on supporting opportunities for women's employment in Lebanon's productive sectors, the ICT industry and in food processing. UN Women also supports female owned businesses, cooperative and enterprises, and works to connect them to the local and international market using tools such as gender responsive budgeting and procurement.

As part of a holistic approach to supporting women's economic empowerment, employment opportunities are complemented with the provision of protection referrals and psychosocial-support services, awareness raising on gender-based violence, first aid and self-defense classes, and affordable childcare services.

In 2020, with the volatility of the global context as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women shifted its programming modality to account for restrictions in movement and gathering. This included scaling up remote case management to respond to the increased cases of domestic violence within the confinement duration. UN Women also adapted its programmes to be more supportive to local community economic needs. This included support to community kitchens in Tripoli and Akkar, providing paid on-the-job training to women to cook and distribute meals to local families on a daily basis. In addition, women have been engaged in the production of PPE products and hygiene materials which are distributed free of charge.

UN Women undertakes much of its service delivery in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MOSA), by supporting expanded social service delivery through 11 of its Social Development Centres (SDCs).

At the macro level, UN Women supports coordinated multi-partner policy advocacy to address gender discrimination in Lebanon's legislative framework, and to expand support to female owned businesses. This includes technical assistance for the reform of the labour law and the passage of legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace to create employment opportunities for women and advocacy. UN Women is also working with UN partners in supporting the Government of Lebanon to develop an inclusive and integrated social protection system, particularly to provide working poor women access to the labour market.

Supporting the private sector through the Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs), UN Women is partnering with 21 companies to address gender gaps within their enterprises by adopting gender sensitive policies and practices that ensure equal opportunities for women.

To support Lebanon's recovery, UN Women, in partnership with UN agencies and government bodies, produces regular analysis of the gendered impact of the economic and political crisis.

Stories for Change

"I want to teach blind and visually impaired people how to take photos. I plan to study filmmaking, as I want to share my story with the world, so that people will look at me and realize that nothing is impossible!"—Ihsan Hatab, a UN Women beneficiary who is visually impaired, participated in photography training at the Social Development Center in Tariq Jdide and received a start-up business kit to support her livelihood.

"This experience is completely life-changing. I saw a huge improvement in my life and my overall wellbeing."—Rim Khalaf, who participated in a training and internship, facilitated by UN Women Lebanon and ACTED, in the context of a project supported by the United Nations Human Security Trust Fund (UNHSTF). She is now working as a health worker in Social Services Medical Center (SSMC), an elderly healthcare center, in Tripoli.

"I never thought this could happen to me. If I hadn't taken these classes, I would have never been able to defend myself."—Fatima*, a mother of four, on participating in self-defense training supported by UN Women, which gave her the confidence to stop an assault by a close relative.

"I have worked with several NGOs for the last 12 years. These courses do a lot for the wellbeing of trainees. Their relationship to their body, entourage, and male partners is transformed. This course gives them confidence in themselves and allows them to take another look at their lives."—Instructor Yasmine Abu Jawad on how these self-defense classes also address the psychological aspects of security.

Partnerships for Change

NGO: ABAAD, ACTED, CARE International, CODI, DOT, Global Compact Network Lebanon, Islah wa Taahil, KAFA, LPADE, Live Love Lebanon, May Chidiac Foundation, RDFL, Rouwad al Tanmiya, Safadi Foundation

Government: Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labour

UN: FAO, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Habitat, UNIDO, RCO, WFP and the World Bank

Private Sector: Collaboration with more than 86 private sector enterprises to facilitate the placement programme and to promote gender equality through the WEPs.



Photo: UN Women/ Joe Saade