



UN Women is supporting internally displaced communities and delivering lifesaving humanitarian assistance to women and girls across Lebanon, through our partner KAFA. Photo credit: KAFA

## GENDER ALERT

On the Frontlines: Women-Led Organizations  
Central to Lebanon's Crisis Response



November 2024







UN Women is supporting internally displaced communities and delivering lifesaving humanitarian assistance to women and girls across Lebanon, through our partner Kafa. Photo credit: Kafa

Escalating hostilities in Lebanon have taken a profound toll on people’s lives. The humanitarian crisis continues to worsen, with the intensification of Israeli airstrikes resulting in deaths and wide-scale displacement. As of 18 November 2024, 3,516 fatalities have been recorded, including 700 women and 231 children, and more than 14,929 injuries. Some 896,315 people have been displaced, of whom an estimated 457,120 (51 per cent) are women and girls.<sup>1</sup> Women and girls face significant gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities, some of which predate the conflict and others which have developed or worsened as a result. UN Women’s 27 September 2024 Gender Alert—issued before the escalation of conflict on 1 October—highlighted the urgent and intersecting needs of women and girls in Lebanon in all their diversity.

Women-led organizations (WLOs)<sup>2</sup> are on the frontlines of the crisis response and continue to deliver critical humanitarian assistance to affected populations, including women and girls in need. WLOs are deeply connected to local communities

in Lebanon and are familiar with the needs and concerns of the people they serve. Since many WLOs are also trusted and experienced humanitarian, development, and peace actors, they are well positioned to navigate the complex sociopolitical context of Lebanon, identify solutions, and respond to crises in their communities.

Despite their critical role, WLOs are often under-resourced and under-valued as strategic partners. Given their key contributions to the humanitarian response in Lebanon, their role deserves greater recognition and support, and their voices and perspectives must be amplified, both nationally and internationally.

In October 2024, UN Women conducted a rapid assessment to: (1) assess the involvement of WLOs in the humanitarian response in Lebanon; (2) identify the roles played by WLOs in crisis response and the challenges they face; and (3) advocate for the resourcing and capacity-strengthening of WLOs as early-response actors.

<sup>1</sup> OCHA 2024, [Lebanon: Flash Update#45-Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, as of 18 November 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> Local women-led organization (WLO): An organization with a humanitarian mandate and/or mission that is: (1) governed or directed by women; or 2) whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50 per cent or more occupying senior leadership positions. Definition included in: Inter-Agency Standing (IASC). 2024. [Guidance on Engagement, Participation and Decision-making by Women-led Organizations in Humanitarian Action](#).



Distribution of food and non-food items across seven Palestinian camps in Lebanon, through UN Women partner Najdeh. Photo credit: Najdeh

## METHODOLOGY

UN Women administered an online survey<sup>3</sup> from 16 to 28 October, in partnership with the Gender Working Group of the Lebanon Response Plan<sup>4</sup> and the UN Women-supported Lebanon's Feminist Civil Society Platform.<sup>5</sup> A total of 50 women-led

organizations participated in the survey, of which 47 reported being involved in the humanitarian response; those organizations are the focus of this alert.

<sup>3</sup> The list of organizations and their representatives is based on a 2024 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) mapping of WLOs in Lebanon. 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*. UNDP.

<sup>4</sup> The Gender Working Group in Lebanon is a platform that promotes gender equality and the integration of gender considerations into UN and partner actions related to humanitarian, development, and peace efforts. It brings together more than 100 international and national stakeholders and includes workstreams on various topics, including gender in humanitarian action, reforms, and policy priorities. The GWG is co-chaired by UN Women and UNDP.

<sup>5</sup> [Lebanon's Feminist Civil Society Platform](#)

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- WLOs in Lebanon are delivering essential, life-saving assistance to those impacted by the recent escalation, including protection-related services (70 per cent of those 47 WLOs involved in the humanitarian response), together with the delivery of core relief items such as blankets (45 per cent), food assistance (40 per cent), and emergency education (40 per cent).

- WLOs in Lebanon are prioritizing reaching the most impacted and vulnerable groups, including refugee women and girls (specifically targeted by 60 per cent of those WLOs), migrant women and girls (36 per cent), young women (64 per cent), older women (45 per cent), and women and girls with disabilities (40 per cent). They are also providing support to women and girls in collective shelters (reported by 85 per cent of WLOs), and in rented or hosted accommodations (62 per cent).

Despite their critical role, WLOs face significant challenges:

- **Access to funding** remains the most critical challenge for all WLOs, limiting their capacity to deliver emergency relief and life-saving assistance. Some 95 per cent of organizations involved in the humanitarian response (45 WLOs) reported being affected by a lack of funding. This is compatible with an analysis of results from the UN Lebanon

Humanitarian Fund, which showed that only one WLO received support from the fund, receiving around 8 per cent of the total funding distributed to civil society organizations. Most of the support coming to WLOs is through partnerships with international non-governmental organizations.<sup>6</sup> Dependence on such organizations often results in smaller grants and limited influence in decision-making processes. According to the responding WLOs involved in the humanitarian response, barriers to accessing funding include limited awareness of funding opportunities (56 per cent); donor reluctance to prioritize interventions focused on the needs of women and girls (53 per cent); inflexible donor policies on reallocating funds to meet emerging needs (29 per cent); and fund suspension due to current contextual difficulties (24 per cent).

- **WLOs' participation in humanitarian coordination structures** is often limited to specific sectors and working groups such as gender-based violence and protection, despite their broader expertise and work in addressing gender-related issues across various other sectors.

- **Staff safety and security issues** impact the majority of these organizations (88 per cent), significantly limiting their ability to reach affected populations safely.

**All these factors constrain WLOs' ability to reach even more affected populations.**



Of **43 WLOs** that reported on the number of people they reached with their services,



**65 per cent** served less than **1,000 people**.

and survey respondents said they *did not have funds to expand their programming*.

# FINDINGS

## NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE LEBANON CRISIS



Adolescent girls take shelter at a public school in Mount Lebanon after fleeing their homes from the south. Photo credit: UNFPA - Anastasia Hajj

Through the consultations conducted, the urgent needs identified by WLOs were (1) safe shelters, (2) basic assistance, (3) food supplies and emergency livelihood support, and (4) protection services.

**Shelter** is recognized as a top priority for crisis-affected women and girls in Lebanon. The WLOs identified the urgency to have safe and dignified environments within shelters, with increased support services provided within the shelters to enable women to effectively meet their childcare and domestic responsibilities. **Basic assistance** — such as multi-sector cash transfers, core relief items, and winterization assistance — followed by **food security** also ranked high. In the absence of these essential services, the escalation is likely to create additional vulnerabilities and exacerbate the risks of gender-based violence, particularly for women and girls.

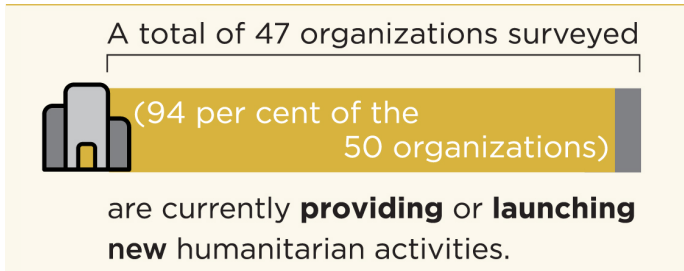
According to responding organizations, over the next six months, **safety and protection** are expected to remain the most pressing issues due to prolonged displacement and rising exposure to violence and insecurity. **Basic assistance** is projected to stay high on the priority list, while **livelihoods** are identified as essential for sustainable income and employment opportunities that foster resilience. **The data indicate a potential shift from immediate needs for shelter and food towards sustained protection and economic stability**, suggesting an opportunity to better align programmatic responses with the evolving needs of women and girls in Lebanon.

# ROLE OF WLOS IN THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE



Distribution of food and non-food items across seven Palestinian camps in Lebanon, through UN Women partner Najdeh. Photo credit: Najdeh

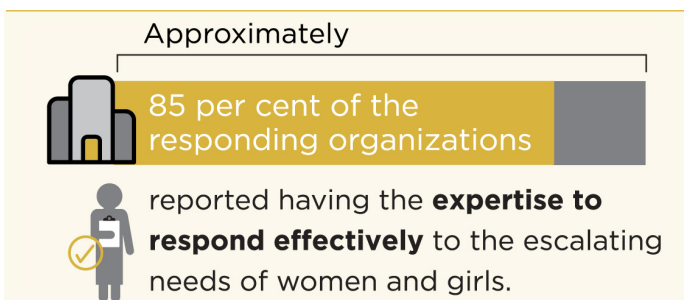
WLOs are at the forefront of delivering essential, life-saving assistance to vulnerable and marginalized groups in Lebanon.



The analysis below is based on the responses of the 47 organizations that are involved in the humanitarian response.

## Capacity and preparedness

WLOs report varying degrees of preparedness to respond effectively to the emerging humanitarian needs of vulnerable and marginalized women and girls.



They also report having flexibility in implementing humanitarian, peace, and development interventions and adapting them in response to emerging humanitarian needs.

## Geographic coverage

WLOs have established a geographically extensive response, with significant activities reported in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and the North Governorates, areas with high concentrations of displaced populations and where WLOs are already well established. The increased intensity in airstrikes in the South, Bekaa, Baalbek, El Hermel, and Nabatieh Governorates, have resulted in higher levels of conflict-triggered displacement and have limited the number of WLOs that can remain operational in these areas. Only 28 per cent of organizations (13 WLOs) are operating in Akkar, primarily due to the lower proportion of the internally displaced people in this area (7 per cent of the total displaced population).<sup>8</sup>

7 IOM Mobility Snapshot Round 59: [Lebanon - Mobility Snapshot - Round 59 - 04-11-2024](#) | [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#)

8 IOM: [Mobility Snapshot - Round 61 - 11-11-2024](#) | [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#)

## Interventions

Most WLOs that participated in the survey are working across multiple areas of need; 43 per cent of WLOs working on humanitarian assistance are providing support in two or three areas of need, while 36 per cent are addressing five to seven areas, indicating their capacity for multisectoral interventions.

Key areas include:



### Protection-related services (70 per cent)

Gender-based violence case-management services; distribution of emergency cash assistance for violence survivors and those at risk; awareness initiatives; psychosocial and mental health support; safe shelters; and capacity-building of frontline workers.



### Food assistance (40 per cent)

Distribution of hot meals; in-kind dry parcels; fresh produce; cash-for-food, and the provision of fortified foods for children and pregnant women.



### Distribution of essential non-food items (45 per cent)

Including pillows, mattresses, blankets, kitchen sets, and winterization items.

- **Emergency education (40 per cent):** Support for safe learning spaces; recreational activities for displaced children and children affected by the escalation; psychological first aid; and training of teachers to help children cope with trauma and ensure education in crisis-affected areas.

## Target groups

WLOs working on humanitarian assistance leverage their extensive geographical networks and their deep understanding of the gendered impacts of war to target the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. **They reach women and girls regardless of their location:**



whether in **collective shelters**<sup>9</sup> (reached by **85 per cent** of WLOs);



in **rented** or **hosted accommodations** (**62 per cent**),



or **among refugees** (**60 per cent**) and **migrant workers** (**36 per cent**).



WLOs also reach women and girls with **disabilities** (**40 per cent** of WLOs surveyed offer such services).

However, despite their efforts, their reach remains **limited in comparison with the overall needs**, due to limited funding and operational capacities.

## Funding sources

WLOs use adaptive strategies to mobilize resources to address emerging needs, whether through new funding or reprogramming existing funds. A total of 21 WLOs (45 per cent of organizations working on humanitarian assistance) reported accessing new or additional funding beyond their regular programming while 27 WLOs (57 per cent) reprogrammed existing funds; out of these organizations, 14 WLOs reported accessing both new funding and reprogramming existing ones. Regarding the 21 WLOs that received new funding, nine received USD 35,000 or less, while only six organizations secured over USD \$100,000. With limited funding, their reach remains constrained.

<sup>9</sup> Collective shelters are existing buildings used as temporary living accommodations for hosting displaced populations. In Lebanon, the Government of Lebanon and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education have repurposed public education institutions as collective shelters, including public schools, public technical and vocational education centres, and branches of the Lebanese University.



# CHALLENGES FACED BY WLOS IN LEBANON

Responding organizations identified several challenges that impact their ability to deliver humanitarian assistance.

## Lack of funding



As the most significant challenge cited, **95 per cent of organizations** engaged in humanitarian work reported being **significantly or moderately affected by a lack of funding**, limiting their ability to expand or initiate delivery of assistance.

Key reasons for this funding shortfall include limited awareness of funding opportunities and donors' priorities failing to include women and girls, cited by 56 and 53 per cent of organizations, respectively. Additionally, 29 per cent of organizations reported facing donor restrictions on reprogramming of funds to meet urgent needs, and 24 per cent experienced the suspension of funds due to implementation challenges.

## Security risks



The **intensifying Israeli airstrikes** across different governorates, including in the Beirut and Mount Lebanon areas, pose significant **security risks** affecting **88 per cent of organizations** performing humanitarian work and **limiting their capability to reach affected populations**.

Organizations also reported moderate to severe restrictions on their supplies (81 per cent of organizations) and challenges in humanitarian coordination (75 per cent). These coordination barriers limit their ability to effectively collaborate with other actors and address newly emerging needs.

## Humanitarian coordination

While WLOs coordinate with various local actors, with other civil society organizations being the most commonly cited (in 81 per cent of cases), followed by smaller civil society/community-based organizations (58 per cent), their participation in formal humanitarian structures varies. Of the WLOs surveyed that were engaged in humanitarian work, 56 per cent participate in the gender-based violence sub-sector group, and 49 per cent are active in the protection sector. WLOs, along with UN bodies and international non-governmental organizations, are members of the Gender Working Group, co-chaired by UNDP and UN Women, which is the overarching gender-coordination mechanism that underpins the Lebanon Response Plan. However, WLOs' participation in sectors such as food security, shelter, basic assistance, and livelihoods is still limited, indicating potential gaps in their ability to influence some of the biggest humanitarian sectors, leading to missed opportunities to enhance their overall impact and reach.

## Urgent needs

Immediate financial support is critical, as cited by 100 per cent of organizations performing humanitarian work, with 66 per cent also needing supplies and equipment. Improved coordination with other actors (cited by 47 per cent) is seen as key to enhancing efficiency and reach. While training ranks lower as an immediate priority, capacity-building in emergency response and preparedness (cited by 85 per cent), human resources (53 per cent), and communication (51 per cent) were identified as key priorities by WLOs to respond effectively to the escalating conflict. Financial resources (91 per cent), emergency response tools (64 per cent), and stronger networks (62 per cent) are top priorities for future preparedness.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

UN Women calls on national and international humanitarian actors to support strengthening WLOs' involvement as proactive and recognized actors in humanitarian response efforts in Lebanon through the following key recommendations:

### To donors:

- Bolster funding to existing pipelines such as through the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund to ensure enhanced dedicated funding for WLOs at the frontline of humanitarian response in Lebanon. It remains essential to identify innovative approaches to strengthen outreach to the WLOs and implement adaptive approaches to simplify processes and address barriers experienced by WLOs in accessing the funds. Provide targeted funding opportunities for smaller local organizations to provide emergency assistance in local communities.
- Prioritize flexible funding for WLOs, and consider the repurposing of existing funding to respond to the growing needs of women and girls and strengthen WLOs' vital role in providing critical services and support.
- Simplify and streamline funding application procedures, considering the challenges and capacity gaps that WLOs (particularly small and medium-sized organizations) face under the current escalating crisis.
- Increase awareness of funding opportunities. International partners, including donors, should improve the visibility of funding channels focused on gender-responsive humanitarian action, particularly for organizations with limited access to funding sources.
- Prioritize funding interventions that target vulnerable or marginalized sub-groups, such as older women, women with disabilities, and migrant women and girls.

### To humanitarian coordination and response actors:

- Improve access and spaces for WLOs to participate and provide leadership in humanitarian coordination structures, particularly in coordination groups where they are currently most absent (e.g., basic assistance, shelter, livelihoods, social stability) and ensure their active engagement in humanitarian needs assessments, planning efforts, and coordination mechanisms.
- In line with global good practices, establish a dedicated mechanism to ensure participation of WLOs in humanitarian decision-making across strategic and technical levels. This could be through the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, as part of the Gender Working Group, co-chaired by a WLO and comprised largely of WLOs. Such a mechanism will contribute to greater accountability on gender commitments and the amplification of women's voices in humanitarian response priority-setting.
- Support WLOs with capacity-building for emergency preparedness, response planning, and coordination.
- Provide organizations with the necessary access and knowledge of emergency response tools, technology, and digital platforms to increase their preparedness for humanitarian response. Notably, their access to the ActivityInfo platform and the Lebanon Information Hub is required for effective emergency coordination and response tracking. Technological support can also facilitate better monitoring, reporting, and communication, which are critical for effective and efficient humanitarian response.



At the Houssein Massoud public school converted to a shelter in Bchamoun, Mount Lebanon. Photo credit: UNFPA - Anastasia Hajj

## About UN Women in Lebanon

UN Women works across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus to support national efforts to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Lebanon. More specifically, UN Women, together with UN agencies, the Government and civil society organizations, works to address the needs of vulnerable and marginalized populations living in Lebanon – Lebanese, refugees, and others – to meet their pressing needs. UN Women also seeks to bolster women’s participation in decision-making at all levels, in political leadership roles and in peace and security matters, to improve livelihoods through economic empowerment, and to end violence against women.