



IN BRIEF



# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN LEBANON

## BUILDING RESILIENCE FOR LEBANESE NATIONALS AND REFUGEES RESIDING IN LEBANON

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### The Issue

*Ensuring that even the most vulnerable women and girls have income security, access to decent work, and economic authority to influence access to assets and resources.*

Women's economic empowerment is critical for achieving gender equality, and inclusive growth, development and poverty reduction. Improving the economic status of women can lead to better outcomes at the individual, family and community level, and has ripple effects across society. Research shows that women's economic empowerment affects not only the economic health of countries through increased productivity, but also overall health and well-being outcomes for the next generation. UN Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) work contributes to the achievement of SDG 5: achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, and SDG 8: promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

In Lebanon, existing structural challenges prevent equal opportunity in the economic spheres. Despite legally being able to register companies, seek employment and run businesses, women still face challenges that relate to issues of financial exclusion and access to credit, a mismatch between skills and labour market opportunities, and social stigma and stereotypes. In 2017, the Gender Gap Index indicated that Lebanon ranks 133rd out of 144 in Economic Participation and Opportunity. While the gender gap in education has been mostly eliminated, this has only had a small positive impact on women's participation in the economic life, with women's labour force participation standing at 26%, compared to 76% of men.

Furthermore, the conflict in Syria, and the influx of refugees, has impacted Lebanon's economic growth, as well as exacerbated pre-existing development constraints which are felt by the entire community, including host community members and Syrian refugees. As vulnerability increases, along with the number of female-headed households in Lebanon, economic empowerment is essential for Syrian women and girls both in displacement and in event of return to Syria.

### UN Women's approach

UN Women's WEE work was initiated in response to the impact of the Syria crisis, seeking to bridge the humanitarian-development nexus to build the resilience of refugees and host community nationals through comprehensive models that focus on economic empowerment. It is inclusive of diverse women living across Lebanon, engaging Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian women in urban and rural settings to address vulnerability while building choice and empowerment, and bringing diverse communities together. In doing this, UN Women is working for the empowerment of women in collaboration with local and national partners, including government, civil society, and private sector. The programme seeks to ensure that:

- Women's sustainable livelihoods are enhanced through gender-responsive services
- Gender equality advocates influence policies and poverty eradication strategies to promote women's economic empowerment and, protection,
- National plans, and budgets are adopted and implemented to strengthen women's economic empowerment

## WEE Programme Highlights

Initiated in 2015, the WEE Programme has implemented three main interlinked components that seek to build women's engagement in the economy: i) the creation of job opportunities through skills training, job placement and entrepreneurship support; ii) services to prevent and protect women from Gender Based Violence; iii) engagement with the private sector and the government to create an enabling policy and operating environment for women's economic empowerment.

Former and on-going projects utilize skills development, through training, job placement, cash-for-work, and entrepreneurship training linked to small grants, as a key entry point to economic empowerment, in addition to providing protection services, including first aid and self-defense classes. External and internal evaluations on UN Women's programmes in Lebanon show that this holistic approach positively impacts women and improves well-being. In 2018, UN Women, with Global Compact in Lebanon launched the Women's Empowerment Principles, the WEP's, to which more than 20 companies in Lebanon have signed to date and are being supported by UN Women and partners to create gender equal employment environments. Moreover, UN Women, with partners such as UNDP and others, supported the Government of Lebanon in developing its national action plan on women's economic empowerment (linked to the World Bank Mashreq facility).

### In 2018, this generated:

- **2,429 female new active job seekers** as a result of engagement in upskilling and employability, **including 730 women** who benefited from longer term job placement and small business support in the private sector, **resulting in increased monthly income**
- 5 women-led cooperatives established and strengthened focusing on the agricultural sector; 2 women's production units within private sector established;
- 450 small business women (skilled in handcrafts) linked to five international designers for longer term mentorship partnerships on product upgrading and marketing.
- 13 MOSA Social Development Centres supported to roll out service (employment and GBV related) to women in need.

## Fund for Gender Equality

UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) is a global initiative that provides high impact grants channeled directly to civil society work in order to propel women's political and economic empowerment across the Sustainable Development Goals. The Fund's modality has been operating in complex settings, addressing different levels of vulnerabilities and marginalization, investing in their innovation capabilities as a catalyst for change. The framework for successful economic empowerment interventions is based on leveraging the following model:

- i) Productive Resources - interventions improve access and control over inputs needed for sustainable income
- ii) Institutional Relations - interventions that strengthen relations and commitments between individuals and the formal/informal institutions
- iii) Interpersonal Relations - interventions that increase and expand life skills
- iv) Personal Resources - interventions that improve and expand relationships between individuals and communities, and help shift norms and expectations.

In Lebanon, the UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality is supporting vulnerable women transition from small-scale, home-based production to profit, while supporting greater control over earnings. This work targets rural women, in addition to migrant and refugee women - Syrian, Iraqi, and Egyptian and Sudanese. To date, the Fund has reached a total of 36,000 people in Lebanon, creating over 320 new market opportunities for women, 9 permanent marketing outlets, including establishing and supporting 18 women-led cooperatives and social enterprises, in partnership with 19 municipalities. The Fund facilitated vocational trainings and education for over 2,200 women, local authorities and community members, addressing social norms and reaching groups who had been left behind.