

GENDER ALERT

WHEN CRISES STRIKE, GENDER INEQUALITIES ARE OFTEN EXACERBATED: THE URGENT NEEDS OF CRISIS AFFECTED WOMEN AND GIRLS IN LEBANON.

27 September 2024

UN Women Lebanon

INTRODUCTION

This Gender Alert draws attention to the disproportionate impact women and girls in Lebanon, including women-headed households and women with disabilities, are experiencing due to the sharp escalation in hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. Intense Israeli airstrikes are bringing about rising numbers of casualties, including among women and girls, and massive displacement from southern Lebanon, eastern Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburb to other areas in the country. This has significantly disrupted livelihoods and increased needs for protection, shelter, food, health, and cash assistance.

Women and girls, particularly those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, are at higher risk due to gender-based discrimination curtailing their rights in both private and public spheres as well as limited access to national evacuation plans that ensures their safety, dignity, and well-being. Societal changes resulting from conflict may further subordinate women and girls, de-prioritize their life and health, exclude them from access to life-saving services and decision-making processes, limit their mobility and expose them to threats of violence and exploitation outside and inside the home.

As the humanitarian response continues, it is paramount that the specific needs, capacities and priorities of crisis-affected women and girls, alongside those of men and boys, are identified and assistance targets the persons and groups most vulnerable and in need. Based on a combination of data from national surveys, databases, consultations with women, and UN Women field monitoring, this Gender Alert highlights the urgent need for the humanitarian community to uphold the rights of women and girls affected by the ongoing humanitarian crises, with a focus on the groups most at risk such as women-headed households, widows and women with disabilities, and to meet their needs and priorities equitably. As conflict wages embracing women's agency in humanitarian situations is paramount. Despite women's central role in responding to the humanitarian emergency, including through women-led organization, front-line social workers, and health workers, they are still largely bypassed for leadership positions in crisis response that they deserve.

¹ See Inter Agency Standing Committee Policy Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action accessible [here](#).

In line with the 2024 IASC Gender Policy,¹ to effectively address the complexities of how crises affects diverse groups of women, girls, men, and boys, humanitarian action must: (1) be grounded in a rights-based approach, (2) incorporate an intersectional understanding of diversity to ensure no one is left behind (LNOB), (3) be aware of societal power dynamics and the effects of gender inequality and other forms of intersectional discrimination, (4) acknowledge the different gender-based needs and the potential disparities in access to resources and services needed to meet those needs, and (5) facilitate the leadership role and contribution of crisis affected women and girls in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any response strategies that directly impact their lives and those of their dependents and wider communities. The Alert draws attention to specific sectors and highlights needs,² all the same emphasizing that addressing the additional vulnerabilities women and girls face because of conflict requires multisectoral commitment and interventions.

Key Data Points

- As of 26 September 2024, there have been a total of 1,565 women and girls among the casualties, including 175 who have been killed.³
- Before 19 September, more than 100,000 people were internally displaced. The number of displaced individuals in Lebanon has continued to rise, reaching 211,319 as of 26 September 2024 including 67,132 individuals in 341 shelters.⁴
- Over 100,000 women and girls are estimated to be displaced, desperately seeking protection for themselves and their families.
- Thousands of families have been displaced. UN Women estimates that nearly 12,000 of these families are headed by women.⁵
- Over 50,000 of the displaced women and girls are estimated to be in reproductive age and need access to appropriate items to support hygiene, health, dignity, and well-being.⁶
- More than 2,300 women are estimated to be currently pregnant, of whom 1,050 are newly displaced since 23 September 2024.⁷

Women and Girls in the Current Conflict in Lebanon

To embrace a holistic approach to gender and empowerment of women in humanitarian crisis, it is crucial to shed light on the broader needs of crisis-affected women and girls addressing areas such as shelter, food security, nutrition, livelihoods, health, and water, sanitation, and hygiene in addition to gender-based violence (GBV) and protection. The section below summarizes those needs based on available data to date.

² For detailed advice on mainstreaming gender in humanitarian response, please see IASC Gender in Humanitarian Action Handbook accessible at <https://www.gihahandbook.org>

³ According to WHO casualties include both injured and deaths as well as people accessing health medical services as a result of the current conflict. Data sourced from DHIS2. However, these figures may not fully reflect the reality because there may be delays in reporting.

⁴ Lebanon - [Mobility Snapshot](#) - Round 48 - 26-09-2024.

⁵ Estimate is drawn based on displacement figures and demographic structures. However, please note that this number may not reflect full reality on the ground as many women may have become heads of households as casualties of conflict may include married men, heads of households increase.

⁶ UNFPA [Flash Update #1](#): Escalation of Hostilities in Lebanon, September 2024. According to the SPHERE standards, 15 (disposable) pads are needed for each girl/woman per month. Based on this estimate, close to 850,000 pads will be needed each month to preserve their dignity and reproductive health.

⁷ [UNFPA Flash Update](#) UNFPA Response: Escalation of Hostilities in Lebanon.

FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION AND LIVELIHOOD

Impact

- For many women and girls living in conflict-affected places, hunger is a reality with roots in pre-conflict times. More women-headed households in Lebanon are not able to meet many basic needs compared to men-headed households.⁸ The 2023 Multisector Needs Assessment (MSNA) in Lebanon shows that between 1%-3% of women-headed households are in the severe hunger scale; these households are three times more likely to have a poor food consumption score compared to other types of households. As conflict unfolds women and girls may face limited access to food due to a range of factors, including unequal control over resources, limited autonomy in household decision-making, and restrictive, discriminatory norms that curtail their freedoms.
- Rising prices for staple food continue to widen the disparities in food security;⁹ acutely felt by women headed households who already have lower incomes and face uncertain livelihoods, often reliant on resources from their support network in country or abroad.¹⁰
- Agricultural land has been decimated, which impacts particularly women farmers who depend on these lands for their livelihood and economic independence.¹¹

Most immediate needs

- Target the specific nutrition needs of women, including those currently pregnant or lactating and girls, who are more likely to reduce their food intake as a coping strategy in favour of other household members.

- Prioritize women-headed households, older women, and women with disability in food delivery and create “safe spaces” at the distribution points by including women in the selection of safe distribution points and distribute food through a gender-balanced team.
- Include women and girls in any rapid participatory assessment to ensure the integration of gender perspectives in the initial nutritional status analysis to identify groups most at risk and collect data on the individual level, where feasible, to properly identify the needs of different groups.
- Monitor security and instances of abuse in the process of food distribution.

WASH

Impact

- Pregnant and lactating women have higher daily water intake requirements than others. Women need access to an extra litre of clean water per day to ensure they have sufficient drinking water. Access to clean water is critical for breastfeeding mothers. Dehydration during breastfeeding induces lack of energy and fatigue, reduces breast milk supply, and has negative consequences for infants. As well, lack of drinking water for women and girls leads to urine infection especially for pregnant women and adolescent girls.
- Menstrual hygiene is integral to women’s health, dignity, and privacy. Menstruating women and adolescent girls in Lebanon face limited access to menstrual hygiene products¹² and WASH facilities. UNFPA reports that there are 56,620 displaced women and girls in reproductive age, who need immediate access to menstrual hygiene products.

⁸ Data sourced from MSNA 2023 Gender Snapshots on Lebanese Households in Lebanon, Households of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and Households of Live-Out Migrants in Lebanon, accessible [here](#).

⁹ Famine Early Warning System Network, Lebanon Key Message [Update](#): Spike in staple food prices widening consumption gaps among the very poor, August 2024

¹⁰ MSNA 2023 Gender Snapshot: Lebanese Households in Lebanon, accessible [here](#).

¹¹ See Oxfam’s brief on International Women’s Day 8 March 2024. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/resilience-amid-ruins-struggle-and-strength-south-lebanon-women-international-womens-day>.

¹² With the economic crisis access to menstrual material has become expensive. Per MSNA 2023 Gender Snapshots, close to 11% of households struggle to secure menstrual material due to cost.

- Limited water supply and access to private WASH facilities, adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities for menstrual hygiene management affects women's and girls' dignity as well as their mental and physical health.¹³
- Due to displacement, women and girls may have to resort to harsh coping mechanisms to compensate for the lack of menstrual items. UN Women estimates that 850,000 pads will be needed each month to preserve their dignity and reproductive health.

Most immediate needs

- Ensure women in collective shelters can access safe and appropriate WASH facilities.
- Prioritize pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls with access to drinking water and involve women and girls in water management.
- Enhance the provision of hygiene kits and menstrual hygiene management kits for women.

SHELTER

Impact

- The extended families have become super-extended families, thus restricting privacy, especially for women and girls.
- Per IOM, 341 shelters are currently hosting more than 67,000 individuals. While there are no sex-disaggregated data of persons hosted in these shelters yet, it is likely that availability of non-food items and fuel for basic service provision in these shelters are wanting. Limited privacy in temporary shelters, coupled with scarce resources, including insufficient electricity, can lead to disputes and violence, including gender-based violence.
- For those households that are looking to rent, stark increases in rental fees, may limit opportunities of female-headed households for decent shelter due to both having lower income pre-conflict and loss of

livelihood at present and may expose women to exploitation by landlords.

- Persons with disabilities, specifically women with disabilities, often cannot seek collective shelters for accommodation due to the inaccessibility of these shelters.
- Refugees, including women refugees, are prohibited from using many collective shelters across the country.

Most immediate needs

- Establish safe and well-lit spaces inside collective shelters for women and girls as well as dedicated women shelters.
- Ensure that all collective shelters are accessible for women with disabilities.
- Provide in-kind and cash support to families hosting internally displaced populations and target women-headed households with cash assistance toward decent shelter.
- Support efforts towards winterisation especially through provision of fuel.
- Establish a mechanism for reporting abuse and exploitation cases against women related to shelter.

MENTAL HEALTH

Impact

- The lack of protection for women and their families is severely impacting women's psychosocial health. Unhealed war-related trauma, including the 2006 war and the Lebanese civil war, runs deep and has the potential to resurface with the current conflict.¹⁴
- Escaping conflict has re-configured dynamics within families: many are separated (few staying behind, others staying with relatives and friends). Others are sending their children to new locations for schooling but stay behind creating a sense of loss and eroded mutual support.

¹³ The SPHERE standards recommend either absorbent cotton material (4 square metres per year), or disposable pads (15 per month).

¹⁴ UN Women Gender Alert on the Conflict in South Lebanon 2023 accessible [here](#).

- Women feel the heavy responsibility of increased unpaid care impacting and report needing to conceal their emotions to avoid increasing fear within their families, amid the heightened fear and risk of life and uncertainty.

Most immediate needs

- Provide mental health and psychosocial support for women through face to face or online sessions including in shelters.
- Ensure integration of protection and wellbeing activities in emergency response planning.

PROTECTION, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Impact

- Current conflict is bound to amplify protection risks for women due to weakened protection services, including an overwhelmed judiciary system, economic crisis and accessibility of protection actors to affected women.
- Verbal and sexual harassment or violence are among the top three safety concerns for Lebanese women, according to the 2023 MSNA. There is a risk of increased sexual harassment especially in shelters where private spaces for women may have not been secured.
- There is a risk of increased domestic violence due to the increase in stress, job loss among men, including those who are head of households, and difficulty in accessing legal services.
- Migrants and refugee women and girls may become victims of human trafficking into/ across Lebanon.¹⁵
- In emergencies, sexual exploitation and abuse is not unusual where aid is delivered. Exploitation of vulnerable groups such as women headed households increases during crisis. Survival sex and forced prostitution and child marriage increases as negative coping mechanisms.

Most immediate needs

- As coordination to serve the needs of many happens, ensure compliance with the PSEA strategy for Lebanon, including awareness and effective pathways for women to report sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation.
- Scale up awareness raising on violence against women and girls and strengthen case management and referrals.
- Prioritize women who were survivors of violence from before the conflict to ensure they are properly supported.
- Continue support for protection and legal aid services should women need to use such services onsite and/or online.
- Mobilize resources for women-led organizations, who are serving as frontliners to respond to the immediate protection needs of women and girls in all their diversity.

¹⁵ Observations from KAFA's Anti-Trafficking and Exploitation Unit, as cited in UN Women. 2023. Gender Alert on Missing Women and Girls in Lebanon' Humanitarian Crisis: What We Know So Far. March.

CALL TO HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

As humanitarian response continues, the following cross-cutting actions remain crucial in designing, implementing and monitoring action geared toward leaving no women and girls behind:

- Support rapid gender analysis including sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data as key to adapting and designing response rooted in the understanding of the evolving situation and instability. Paying attention to change in gender roles/relations and gaps in the context of conflict is paramount to avoid perpetuation of pre-conflict power structures and dynamics leading to more disparities between women and men, girls, and boys.
- Increase support for women-led organizations as they work at the grassroots level and have the potential to address women's rights and concerns and encourage their active participation in decision-making in humanitarian response planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- Recognize and address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls, which are heightened during displacement. It should ensure safe and dignified access for women and girls to essential resources such as food, safe drinking water, toilets, shelter, and menstrual hygiene products. These provisions must protect their privacy, uphold their dignity, and be age appropriate. The immediate response should be designed based on a stakeholder analysis that looks at (i) the role of men/women and institutions in the current conflict; (ii) the gender balance in service delivery especially in crucial areas such as shelter, food, and protection; and (iii) the plurality of women's identities, interests and organizations and its relationship to wider ideological positions.

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.