

# UN WOMEN

## 2020 BEIRUT PORT EXPLOSION

### RESPONSE PLAN

August 13, 2020

A woman in front of a destroyed house, Karantina, Beirut, August 9, 2020. Photo: UN Women/Dar Al Mussawir

#### Situation Overview

On Wednesday 4th August 2020, at around 6pm (Beirut time), two explosions occurred at the Port of Beirut causing widespread casualties and material damage. As of 12th of August, 220 have people lost their lives, over 100 remain missing, and more than 5000 people are injured. Emerging data suggests that men are overrepresented amongst the dead (a UN Women estimate suggests that approximately 63% of the deceased are male<sup>1</sup>), likely due to the fact that they served as the majority of port workers and day labourers/migrant workers around the port area. Based on the estimates from the government, more than 300,000 people have lost their homes – with 50,000 housing units affected.

Local NGOs and CSOs, including various local women-focused NGOs have mobilized, supporting search, rescue and clean-up efforts, and the provision of emergency support – medical, food, cash, shelter and mental health support.

The blast has caused damages as far as 20 km from the port, destroying and damaging businesses, houses, hospitals, and schools. The most affected areas are Gemmayzeh, Karantina, Mar Mikhael, Jetaoui, Marfaa Karm El Zeitouni, Downtown and Bourj Hammoud. Out of these Karantina, Bourj Hammoud, Marfaa and Karm El Zeitouni are the most in need. A large number of people have lost their homes and livelihoods, adding to the compounded crises that Lebanon has been experiencing since October 2019, namely, the financial and economic crisis followed by the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020. Moreover, WHO has stated that 50% of Beirut's hospitals are out of service while the country witnesses historically high COVID-19 cases. Shortages in foreign currency, glass and other needed materials will hinder reconstruction, and the destruction of the port will challenge medical and food imports.

Food prices have been rising steadily due to Lebanon's economic crisis, which – with COVID-19, collides and deepens the impact of the explosion. Food prices are likely to continue to raise amidst the ongoing economic and political crisis, supply chain disruptions and the loss of up to 85% of the country's cereal reserves.<sup>2</sup> The food security of the poorest households and of those who had just enough to provide for their families will be increasingly threatened; multiple assessments in recent years have shown food security higher amongst female headed households and such gender inequality around food insecurity will need to be monitored closely.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UN Women analysis based on a list shared by the Ministry of Health on 7 August which included 152 names. <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/ExtImages/images1/Final%20Deaths%2007082020.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> [HRW 06/08/2020,WFP 06/08/2020](https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/08/06/HRW-06/08/2020,WFP-06/08/2020)

<sup>3</sup> Vasyr 2019, 2018

Beyond the human tragedy, the economic impact of the explosion is expected to be large. It is expected to consist of (1) significant physical damage to the Port, as well as residential and commercial areas; (2) loss of economic activity due to the damages; (3) trade disruptions resulting in an increase in transactions costs of external trade and (4) loss of fiscal revenues. The Port of Beirut, significantly affected by the explosion, accounts for about 68 percent of the country's trade in goods (imports plus exports).<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the explosion has generated a new wave of protests across the country and on Sunday, August 9th, the Cabinet resigned – remaining on as a caretaker government.

To support Lebanon to recover from these multiple shocks, a nexus approach is critical – one that brings together humanitarian, development and peace and security work – targeting both short term relief and longer-term recovery.

### **Rationale: Why prioritise gender issues in the Beirut response?**

**In Lebanon, women are more likely to be food insecure, more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be in public school (rather than private school), more likely to be a survivor of gender-based violence, more likely to not have legal residence (if you are a refugee), and more likely to not have access to adequate shelter (if you are the head of a household). Taken in its totality, this makes women less resilient to shocks – they are less likely to have savings, a bank account, extensive social network beyond their family and access to urgent social protection – all things critical in enabling individuals and families to respond to disasters such as the Beirut blast.**

An initial assessment undertaken by ACTED states that women, the elderly and people with specific needs (chronically ill, persons with disability, elderly headed households) are identified as the most in need of protection assistance across impacted locations.

In the immediate term, women face heightened risks in accessing humanitarian assistance. Displacement, overcrowded temporary shelters, lack of privacy, lack of lighting, limited and unsegregated wash facilities, and other factors will contribute to violence against women and hinder women's access to necessary services. Moreover, in a country where in 2019 23% of women stated that they had either experienced 'sextortion' (coerced sex in exchange for public services) or knew someone who had, the threats of exploitation and abuse are severe, especially in light of increasing economic vulnerabilities.<sup>5</sup> This will be particularly true for female headed households and domestic workers, and will be exacerbated by law enforcement mechanisms being overwhelmed by the disaster.

Furthermore, while the Beirut explosion is taking place against a backdrop of deep economic crisis, described by experts as the worst in Lebanon's recent history, is it also happening within a context of extreme 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), and amongst the lowest global rates of women's labor market participation, hovering at 29% for women<sup>6</sup> and 76% for men.<sup>7</sup> Already before the explosion, the economic contraction on women's overall employment in Lebanon was estimated by UN Women to result in a 14-19% reduction in women's employment.<sup>8</sup> In the current situation this number will most likely go up.

4 World Bank Preliminary Assessment. August 10.

5 <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/sextortion-middle-east-and-north-africa>

6 ILO and Central Administration of Statistics, Labor Force and Household Living Conditions Survey (LFHLCs), 2018-2019, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_732567.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_732567.pdf).

7 World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, 2020, [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf).

8 UN Women, Gender-Responsive Recovery in Lebanon: Recommendations for Fiscal, Social and Labour Policy Reform, July 2020. [https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/macro%20economic%20policy%20recommendations%20\\_final%20english%20design.pdf?la=en&vs=5558](https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/macro%20economic%20policy%20recommendations%20_final%20english%20design.pdf?la=en&vs=5558)



As the economy suffers across the country as a result of the explosion, the increase in food insecurity and decrease in employment opportunities will affect women the disproportionately, given that women are the most food insecure in Lebanon (among both refugees and those with Lebanese nationality) and the already starkly low numbers of women in Lebanon's economy. Greater economic vulnerability in turn risks precipitating increases in violence against women within the household, as seen during the COVID-19 lockdown, where one assessment found that up to 54% of respondents have observed an increase of harassment, violence or abuse against other women and girls in their household or their communities.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, progress made against gender equality gains are likely to be threatened and undermined by the economic crisis, and while the political crisis equally poses a number of challenges, it also represents an opportunity for feminist and women's rights actors to be leveraged.

It is important to note that although women are highly vulnerable to disasters, they are not a homogeneous group. Intersectional factors such as age, marital status, sexual orientation and disability often exacerbate these vulnerabilities. Previous evidence from disasters and crises demonstrate that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer persons (LGBTIQ+) face increased vulnerability, particular risks and discrimination during times of crisis and in crisis aftermaths. In addition, migrant domestic workers, people living without identification documents as well as refugees are particularly vulnerable. These inequalities have and will continue to shape how women have experienced the explosion and its impacts but will also affect their capacity to access and benefit from the humanitarian response. This includes access to shelter, water, food, nutrition, health, as well as information and restored livelihoods.

Humanitarian responses often miss opportunities to transform gender relations through the leadership and empowerment of women and girls in their role as decision makers, first responders and economic actors — forgetting the fact that these are key to effective crisis response and to building community's resilience for future shocks.

9 UN Women, NCLW, WHO, UNFPA, Gender Alert. COVID-19. June 2020. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/lebanon%20gender%20alert%20issue3/update%20652020/gender%20alert%20on%20covid19-lebanon%20issue%203english.pdf?la=en&vs=3305>.



A woman standing in her destroyed house, Gemmayze, Beirut, August 5, 2020. Photo: UN Women/Dar Al Mussawir

It is therefore crucial to make sure that the response to the explosion as well as longer term recovery work takes into consideration to the needs of women and girls and ensures that women are included and benefit from in the response both as decision-makers, active participants in the design and implementation, as well as recipients.

**Key immediate gender issues that need to be addressed:**



**Participation, Analysis and Access**

- Promote the use and collection of sex and age disaggregated data (SADD) throughout the humanitarian response and the use of data to inform programming.
- Ensure that women's knowledge, expertise and skills are acknowledged and integrated into the humanitarian response particularly at the district level.
- Ensure that the risk of exclusion from relief due to lack of formal documentation is addressed, including for the children of undocumented women and men.
- Promote the participation of women and other vulnerable groups in designing, planning and executing relief distributions to ensure they are safe, dignified and accessible in terms of locations, timing of distributions (taking into account women's care duties and men's engagement in employment when timing distributions) with sex-segregated and shaded queuing. Ensure plans reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Promote accessible distribution points for vulnerable groups, especially housebound and older people, persons with disabilities and pregnant women and regulate and schedule distribution to avoid large groups gathering to avoid further COVID-19 community transmission .



**Shelter**

- Ensure temporary shelters are safe and those running them are fully cognizant of the specific needs of women and girls, especially single women/girls of female-headed households etc.
- Advocate for temporary shelters or resettlement temporary sites to provide minimum standards for safe and dignified spaces for women, girls, female-headed households, people with physical disabilities and unaccompanied children, taking into account potential protection risks.



**Gender-Based Violence and the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse**

- Ensuring that women's safe spaces, including Social Development Centers, are able to open/remain open and provide services in affected areas, ensuring risks of COVID-19 transmission are mitigated both for safety of staff and community at large and to ensure access and safety for women, girls and boys. Creating a strategy including training of staff to carry out GBV case management and other life-saving services remotely.
- Monitoring and mitigating the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by ensuring community feedback mechanisms are in place, SEA prevention and mitigation strategies are integrated into all clusters, agencies and response strategies, staff are trained on PSEA and affected populations are informed of their rights and methods to report cases.
- Monitoring, preventing, and responding to protection risks including GBV including intimate partner violence, human and sex trafficking, ensuring that referral systems are in place and active to facilitate GBV survivors' access to psychosocial support, safety and security, justice and legal aid and socio-economic support. Non-specialised staff

should be sensitized to existing and expected protection risks and be familiar with existing multi-sectoral support mechanisms, referrals to GBV case management, psychosocial first aid and survivor-centred approach.

- Put measures in place to prevent and mitigate harassment, abuse or other forms of GBV towards female frontline workers and ensuring provision of women-friendly personal protective equipment (PPE) both for health staff and other frontline workers as needed. Promote measures to address the care burden of women health workers.



### Health and WASH

- Ensure that SRHR and prevention and response to GBV services are deemed as essential services and ensuring continued access to menstrual hygiene management, sexual and reproductive health services, including for pregnant and lactating women and family planning.
- Promote access to mobility, hearing and visual aids for older people and persons with disability.
- Advocate for nutritious food, particularly for pregnant and lactating women.
- Promote the respective needs of women, and girls and people with physical disabilities in terms of appropriately designed WASH facilities with privacy (sex-segregation) and safety measures and location and sufficient hygiene products available.



### Livelihoods and Cash

- Continue recovery and resilience activities, to ensure rapid asset replenishment, such as cash for work and livelihood opportunities for women.

To ensure gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women and girls in the Beirut explosion response, UN Women has deployed a short-term Gender Advisor to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to support the integration of gender equality across all sectors. As needed and as the emergency response matures, the UN Gender Working Group and gender sectoral focal points will be utilized to provide technical support for on-going humanitarian interventions.

## UN Women's Response Strategy: Strategic Priorities

UN Women will build and expand on its existing programming in Lebanon to support the broader response to the Beirut blast, doing so in a way that works across the development-humanitarian and peace and security nexus.

In doing this, UN Women will leverage its triple mandate – normative, coordination and operative – to ensure that gender mainstreaming and targeted action for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) is incorporated in preparedness, response, and recovery and contribute to humanitarian effectiveness through integrating human-rights and gender-transformative approaches across the work of all clusters. Targeted programming from priority areas listed above where UN Women has a comparative advantage will be undertaken and will continue, specifically in the areas of economic recovery, women's leadership and women, peace and security.

The strategy responds to urgent humanitarian needs and longer-term recovery imperatives in the aftermath of the explosion in Beirut.

### A. Immediate Response

1. **Support gender mainstreaming throughout the broader humanitarian response to the explosion.**

UN Women has seconded a gender advisor to OCHA to support the integration of gender analysis and needs into the work of the overall Humanitarian Country Team in Lebanon. UN Women has also activated the gender theme group for the disaster response and is providing dedicated technical expertise to the newly established disaster response clusters (WASH, Food Security, Protection, Health, Shelter, Logistics).

**2. Support post disaster needs assessments, conduct gender analysis and integrate gender equality the empowerment of women and girls into recovery planning**

UN Women is leveraging its existing partnerships and working with OCHA, the World Bank, the Lebanese Red Cross and others to ensure that all post disaster needs assessment underway collect sex-disaggregated data and integrating gender analysis.

Furthermore, UN Women is working with its existing gender equality partners, Care International and Abaad, to undertake a rapid gender needs assessment to further inform and feed into all undergoing assessments. This also includes the collection of evidence-based and real-time information on the separate and differing needs and vulnerabilities of women and men, girls and boys, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ and other vulnerable and marginalized groups

As the response moves forward, where additional gender analysis is needed on specific groups, areas and issue, UN Women will partner with relevant actors for its production.

**3. Support women's rights and LGBTIQ actor's advocacy initiatives aimed at responding to and influencing the response to the explosion in Beirut and its impact on the ongoing economic and political crisis**

UN Women is supporting women's rights actors and organisations across Lebanon to develop a women's 'charter of demands', outlining what women's rights actors expect from the response. From this localized women's disaster platforms will be formed to engage with local authorities on the response. In addition, UN Women is providing technical support to civil society and women's organizations to ensure they have access to relevant funding opportunities and that women are able to equally participate as contributors and recipients of the response and early recovering efforts. Furthermore, UN Women will document stories highlighting the role of women and women's organisations in the relief efforts.

**4. Support efforts to prevent to sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)**

Based on the priorities outlined in the Humanitarian Country Team PSEA strategy, UN Women will continue its partnership with UN partners (namely the Resident Coordinator's Office and UNICEF), national authorities and women's rights actors, to generate buy-in and leverage funding for the establishment a national hotline and the needed institutional mechanisms for reporting of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in the delivery of government services and government related humanitarian and develop assistance. These efforts will continue and be expedited and will be complemented with continued rapid training of governmental and humanitarian partners on SEA issues – including technical assistance on the establishment of agency/partner specific complaints mechanisms, and awareness-raising with aid recipients.

**5. Implementation of short-term interventions**

As a rapid response, UN Women in collaboration with its existing partner NGOs is working to provide the following services to women and girls including elderly, adolescent girls, women with disabilities and other vulnerable and marginalized groups. Some are being provided through women's safe spaces and Social Development Centres while others are being provided remotely:

- Food, hygiene and dignity kits
- Psychological First Aid and psychosocial support and trauma assistance
- Case management services
- GBV referrals
- Cash (for those enrolled in UN Women’s cash for work programming) and cash for work opportunities to help women economically impacted by the blast; these opportunities will focus on supporting the Beirut clean and repairs efforts

UN Women will also support local women’s groups to serve as community mobilizers to help identify vulnerable households – e.g. FHHs – making sure they are able to access assistance.

## **B. Longer-term Recovery Response**

To ensure a gender-responsive and inclusive response to the explosion and its impact on the deepening economic and political crisis, UN Women is doing the following:

### **1. Support to women affected by the blast to access livelihoods and receive quality protection services**

Cash for Work interventions targeting those affected by the blast will support the production of social goods, support to community kitchens, and care aids, and to engage in supporting reconstruction and repairs.

As the economy recovers, cash for work programmes will be shifted to job placement and matching interventions, to promote the sustainability of the employment interventions offered. Cash for work will be supplemented by a technical training programme to help women acquire new technical and management skills to increase their employability and entrepreneurship opportunities. Considering the need to strengthen the health sector, UN Women will be supporting the training of women in nursing and the care economy (elderly/childcare).

UN Women will complement its economic empowerment work with the delivery of protection services including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services, GBV case management, legal aid and referrals and comprehensive legal assistance, including legal representation, first aid and self-defense training.

Support for child-care and transportation will continue to be provided with all cash for work/job placement opportunities.

### **2. Blast recovery and reconstruction frameworks and policies respond to gender equality needs, and the private sector is mobilized – including through procurement supply chain engagement – to support female led SME’s and women’s engagement**

UN Women will continue to engage, advise and influence recovery and reconstruction focused macro-economic policy discussions, specifically for the integration of issues social protection and economic stimulus, and will ensure timely data and gender analysis on reconstruction plans and packages.

Female-led SME’s will be supported to network, access financing and to leverage support for the import of raw materials. They will also be engaged to better integrate into national procurement supply chains and supported to advocate for integration into the recovery and reconstruction procurement chain.



To support the retention of women workers within the private sector, companies will be engaged through the Women's Empowerment Principles to enact family-friendly and gender equitable policies.<sup>10</sup>

**3. Women leaders and civil society organizations are supported to prevent and respond to conflict, and dialogue tracks are deepened to promote social cohesion**

Under the broader framework of the implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, UN Women will continue to support inclusive pathways for dialogue and trust building in Lebanon, supporting women's engagement in peace and security deliberations and helping to build relationships and confidence across divides. This work will include the development of short-term policy options for addressing the current crises and discussing substantive elements of a future vision for the country. Dialogue will continue to be UN Women's primary tool for this work, and common community initiatives will be supported, led by peacebuilding focused women's organisations in the country.

**4. Women's rights and feminist actors in Lebanon are supported to ensure that Lebanon's recovery and transition is peaceful, inclusive and just**

As the political landscape continues to shift, UN Women will continue to support and advocate for more women in politics, and for greater transparency and inclusion in Lebanon's governance system. In addition, UN Women will continue to support established and emerging national women's rights organizations for movement building, action, advocacy and communication amplify women's voices around gender-responsive legal reform, policy-making and women's political representation. UN Women is also supporting women's rights actors to coordinate around common visions for a revised electoral law, as well as increasing women's participation in the social dialogue on the socio-economic impact of COVID 19 and the Beirut blast.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.weps.org/>



A young woman in the middle of debris, Gemmayze, Beirut. Photo: UN Women/Dar Al Mussawir

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