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PRESS RELEASE

UN in Lebanon scales up efforts to respond to key gender issues related to the COVID-19 outbreak

Beirut, Lebanon

Friday, 29 May 2020 (United Nations) – In Lebanon, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the country at a time of instability. In this context, its secondary effects on domestic violence, the gender gap in employment and on unpaid work, risk disproportionately impacting women and girls, and rolling back hard-won gender equality gains.

Women health care workers, social workers, domestic workers and at-home caregivers are the bulk of the front-line responders to COVID-19 and, in Lebanon, women constitute 80 percent of registered nurses and the vast majority of social workers and domestic workers. With continued infection rates across health care workers and front-line staff, it is critical that all front-line workers are supported to remain safe and keep working through personal protection equipment and social assistance. Moreover, since the outbreak of the pandemic, women are reporting lay-offs, and income and wage reductions at higher numbers to men, which could result in a prolonged dip in women's engagement in the paid economy. Reporting on domestic violence also suggests a dramatic surge since the onset of COVID-19.

In order to respond to this, the United Nations in Lebanon continues to work with the Lebanese Government and partners to scale up work to address the immediate and long-term needs of women and girls. As examples of this, the UN has provided support to the Ministry of Social Affairs to maintain the delivery of emergency health and protection services through its Social Development Centres, while scaling up support to National Governmental Organizations who serve as essential first responders to incidents of gender-based violence. It has been working to provide unconditional cash to women and men laid off as a result of the COVID pandemic, and basic assistance and urgent protection services. In collaboration with the Government of Lebanon, it is working to provide advice to government partners on how social protection and economic stimulus measures can be devised to equally impact women and men – to help both meet their daily needs and remain in the economy where possible. The UN has begun issuing regular gender alerts, in collaboration with the government of Lebanon, to provide real time reporting on the gendered impact of the crisis, while supporting and leading awareness raising campaigns on issues of burden-sharing within the home, and gender-based violence.

“As a result of women's historic marginalization from the labour market in Lebanon, they are more vulnerable to economic shocks. They are significantly less likely to be in employment and when they are, they earn less and have less savings. Economic shocks are therefore more difficult to absorb and bounce back from for them, and they have fewer resources at hand to address



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violence they may experience, or inequalities they face', says Rachel Dore-Weeks, head of UN Women Lebanon.

As Lebanon continues to tackle the complex challenges posed by COVID-19 and the economic crisis, the United Nations in Lebanon will continue to support the Government of Lebanon and those residing in Lebanon to address its impact – working to ensure that its affects do not further reinforce gender discriminations, violence and inequalities.

Asma Kurdahi, head of UNFPA Lebanon said, "The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened gender inequalities in Lebanon, which has been witnessing an increase in cases of domestic violence in particular. With movement being restricted and many confined to their homes, women and girls find themselves at risk of gender-based violence and harmful practices on a daily basis. We must continue to work towards ensuring protection measures are in place to reach those most at risk."

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