



Syrian Women Refugees in Lebanon: Houses without Walls

Project

**Promoting and Supporting Women Victims of Gender-based
Violence in Refugee Camps outside Syria**

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Introduction

As the conflict in Syria ended its seventh year, the humanitarian situation for the Syrian people in Syria and in countries of refuge remains critical, tragic and volatile. More than five million Syrian men and women refugees are still dispersed worldwide, and the Syrian refugee crisis continues to be at the forefront of refugee crises across the world.

The fragile cease-fire and the transition in the dynamics of the conflict have restored relative calm in some regions. However, obstacles remain significant, both at the national level and for the millions of refugees, men and women, especially those living in Lebanon. Lebanon has been ranked as one of the highest receiving countries for refugees, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹

Considering this reality, there are several options and proposals to determine the fate of refugees. The current solution offered by international agencies is settling them in Lebanon, whereas many refugees assert that voluntary return is their preferred solution, and that security and safety in Syria are key factors influencing their future decision to return. However, Lebanese official and non-official positions stress the necessity of refugees' return to Syria. In fact, some limited returns have already begun.² Until this situation is resolved, Lebanese efforts to deal with the refugee crisis continue, including the "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2010" which was launched in January 2017. According to this plan, there are more than one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon registered with the UNHCR, whereas the Lebanese authorities estimate the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon at 1.5 million. The numbers of refugees remain unclear as the Lebanese authorities have not yet published official statistics indicating the number of Syrian refugees who have not acquired legal status. The plan estimates that 60% of those who are over the age of 15 lack basic legal residence in Lebanese territories, compared to 47% in January 2016.³

Refugees live in very poor conditions due to limited income opportunities. They are among the poorest and most vulnerable, relying mainly on humanitarian assistance.

Many of the reports summarize the refugee situation by saying that "Syrian refugees in Lebanon are weaker than ever", as more than half of them currently live in extreme poverty, and more than three quarters live below the poverty line. These figures are based on the vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, conducted annually by UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the World Food Program (WFP).⁴

¹<https://www.unhcr.org/ar/4be7cc27207.html>

²<https://www.unhcr.org/ar/4be7cc278c2.html>

³<https://www.unhcr.org/lb/10426-للاستجابة-للازمة-10426.html>

⁴<http://data.unhcr.org/surianrefugees/download.php?id=14762> you can download this report through this link

The 2017 evaluation reveals that 58% of Syrian households live in extreme poverty (on less than \$2.87 per person per day) and are therefore unable to meet their basic needs to live in dignity, with an increase of 5% in comparison with 2016.

Syrian refugees do not have enough funds to secure the basics. Per capita spending is currently \$98 per month, of which \$44 is spent on food. The percentage of households living below the poverty line (less than \$3.84 per person per day) continued to rise, amounting to 76% of refugee families in 2017.⁵

In addition to the poor economic situation, the legal status of refugees is an obstacle due to the continuous restriction imposed by the decision of the General Directorate of Public Security of 2015. The decision prevented many Syrians from entering Lebanese territory and others from collecting or renewing regular residency.⁶ In February 2018, the State Shura Council overturned the decision and confirmed that the General Directorate of Public Security was not competent to amend the conditions of entry and residence of Syrians in Lebanon. The Council stated that the law limited this authority to the Council of Ministers. However, the procedures are still very complicated.⁷ Most of the refugees were unable to meet the residency requirements. The General Security Decision led to the arrest of large numbers of refugees and restricting their movement, creating difficulty in finding work, sending their children to school and health centers for medical care. Most seriously, these restrictions have prevented the formalization of marriages and births. Thus, we have dozens of Syrians born in Lebanon who are at risk of statelessness. The absence of a legal status leaves Syrian refugees vulnerable to a range of violations, including exploitation at the work place, harassment and sexual assault, inability to resort to security authorities seeking protection for fear of being arrested if their stay has expired.⁸

Meanwhile, issues relevant to refugee women and girls have emerged strongly. In 2017, UNHCR warned of the high risks faced by women in the area of sexual and gender-based violence.⁹ UNHCR's planning figures and indicators for 2018 show that 100% of survivors of sexual violence and gender-based violence will receive appropriate support from UNHCR as confirmed by their planning figures for 2018.¹⁰

The stories of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon reflect obvious manifestations of women during conflict. Endless stories that are full of tragedy and injustice. It is true that these stories

⁵<https://www.unhcr.org/ar/news/press/2017/12/5a33c8970.html>

⁶<http://www.general-security.gov.lb/ar/posts/33>, <http://www.labor.gov.lb/AllLegalText.aspx?lang=ar&type=11>

This decision is as a result of the lawsuit filed by one of the Syrian refugees against the public security concerning the amendment of the conditions of entry and residence of Syrians.

⁷This decision comes in light of an appeal by a Syrian refugee to the Legal Agenda and Ruwad Associations to challenge the public security directives concerning the amendment of the conditions of entry and residence of Syrians. For more information, see: <http://www.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=4286>

⁸ Lebanon: new refugee policy; a step forward, Human Rights Watch, 2017 for more information:

<https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2017/02/14/3000040>

⁹<https://www.unhcr.org/ar/5b7a96264.html>

¹⁰<https://www.unhcr.org/ar/4be7cc278c2.html>

differ in detail, but they are one in their complex manifestations and dimensions; framed by fear, anxiety and violence – both inside and outside the family.

Since the beginning of the Syrian refugee influx into Lebanon, three major challenges faced by Syrian refugee women and girls in Lebanon have emerged:

1. Sexual exploitation and harassment.
2. High rates of domestic violence.
3. Early and forced marriages and diminishing resources.¹¹

Over the years, many reports have been prepared on gender-based violence and violence against Syrian refugee women and girls in Lebanon. However, most of these studies dealt with violence in its general context, whereas this report addresses violence within the context of the family. It is true that violence targets women in all areas but the most severe threat and targeting is carried out at the family level, where traditional values, a patriarchal system, and community-based norms are reinforced by religious beliefs.

The report is part of the Urnammu Organization for Justice and Human Rights (OHRNO) project: *Strengthening and Supporting Women Victims of Gender-based Violence in Refugee camps outside Syria*. It aims to demonstrate the link between refugeehood and family violence against refugee women. The report attempts to characterize and analyze different practices, as well as identify levels of discrimination and its direct and indirect forms, and to facilitate an understanding of how different factors and relationships interact and affect women and girls.

The methodology and methods of qualitative research used in the development of the report include:

1. Statements collected, by a group of female Syrian activists in Lebanon, from Syrian women refugees in Lebanon. The women activists were trained in the context of the project on monitoring techniques.
2. Three focused working groups organized including a number of Syrian refugees in the Beqaa region.
3. Meetings with several workers specialized in providing psychological, social and legal support services for Syrian refugee women in Lebanon.

The methodology above required that certain determinants be taken into consideration when reading the conclusion. The methodology is highly dependent on the researcher and their ability to assess variables on the ground. That way conclusions are not generalized. The goal is not to generalize, but rather to reveal the forms that govern relations within the Syrian family in Lebanon due to the state of refugeehood.

¹¹International Rescue Committee (IRC), *Do We Hear? Working on our commitments towards women and girls affected by the Syrian conflict*, 2014.

The report examines the main manifestations of domestic violence against Syrian women refugees in Lebanon and analyzes the factors that aggravate these phenomena. Finally, the report makes some recommendations to various stakeholders working on issues relevant to Syrian women refugees in Lebanon.

Executive Summary

The report on domestic violence against Syrian women refugees in Lebanon is part of the Urnammu Organization for Justice and Human Rights project: “**Strengthening and supporting women victims of gender-based violence in refugee camps outside Syria.**” The report reviews various forms of domestic violence, including psychological and moral violence, physical violence, economic violence, sexual violence and verbal violence. The report reviews these forms based on quotations and information derived from direct interviews conducted by the research team with Syrian refugees from different cultural, social and age backgrounds, from various Syrian governorates who are distributed with their families in various camps in Lebanon.

The report analyzes the factors affecting the forms of this violence, on more than one level, which are committed within the Syrian refugee family spectrum in Lebanon:

1. Individual factors are linked to women themselves in their relationship to violence, and their limited ability to confront and resist. This comes due to several reasons, both historical and contemporary, that were formed in Syria, and were reacted negatively to in Lebanon.
2. Community factors represented by a system of family and social values are the root of domestic violence. They are characterized by poor solidarity with and support for women refugees to respond to violence, as well as to the fact that women are often blamed for the violence against them.
3. Significant legal factors prevent women from protection privileges from domestic violence and deprive them access to justice. Lebanese legislation and laws still do not provide protection frameworks and mechanisms and include many aspects of discrimination against women. Despite Lebanon adopting a law to protect women and other family members from domestic violence in 2014, which includes all women on Lebanese territory regardless of their nationality, Syrian women refugees have not benefited from it. The primary reason is the fear of women refugees who do not have legal residency in Lebanon (i.e. the majority) from detention if they complain to the Internal Security Forces. Consequently, women refugees’ victims of domestic violence are unable to obtain the protection afforded by law.¹² It is not only the Lebanese law but also the Syrian legislation which includes many manifestations of discrimination and

¹²Legislation on domestic violence in Lebanon, 293: are women protected? Policy brief, Issam Faris Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, 2017
http://website.aub.edu.lb/ifi/publications/Documents/policy_memos/2016-2017/20170716_domestic_violence_arabic.pdf

violence against women and girls, especially in the absence of legislation that protects against domestic violence in Syria.

The report concludes with several recommendations addressed to those working in this field, and to those who are supposed to protect Syrian women refugees in Lebanon from various forms of domestic violence: the Lebanese State, the Syrian State, international organizations and Lebanese civil society.

The most important conclusion is the need to develop standards of obligations by the Lebanese and Syrian states to eliminate gender-based violence directed against all women and girls, especially Syrian refugees. Above all, the problem of domestic violence against women refugees must be addressed in a comprehensive method because it is a widespread phenomenon, and is not limited to individual cases.

1. Background of the Report

Violence in conflict-affected areas is committed everywhere; at home, in places of detention, in refugee camps, battlefields, and elsewhere. Violence can occur at any time and by several perpetrators. Regardless of the nature or duration of the conflict, or the parties involved, there is an increased and deliberate targeting of women in various forms of violence, ranging from murder, torture, mutilation, sexual violence, forced marriage, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, and sterilization.¹³

Violence is the same, whether it is committed against men, women or children. Nonetheless, gender-based violence against women and girls is most distinct during wars. The difference between violence against women and violence against any other human being is that women experience violence through their bodies (harassment, trafficking and rape),¹⁴ and through accumulated and long trajectories of discrimination and inequality.

It is also true that conflicts threaten everyone with devastating consequences, but their impact on women and girls is distinct and different. Women are unable to protect and support themselves, and are also excluded from political processes which are vital for peace and security.¹⁵

For these reasons, the International Track on Women's Peace and Security Issues has confirmed that violence suffered by refugee or displaced women is a stark manifestation of the discrimination and abuse of women in peacetime and inequality of power relations between men and women in most societies.

¹³ A guide on Security Council Resolution 1325, the complementary resolutions and the role of parliamentarians in their implementation. Ayska, Mervat Rishmawi 2016

¹⁴Policy of structuring violence and re-replicating stereotyped gender roles among Syrian refugee women in Lebanon, Maya Helou | 2014-12-08

¹⁵Women and peace and security: keeping the Promise. How to revive the agenda 15 years after resolution 1325. Oxfam International, September 2015.

The term “peace” for many women is not only about security and justice. It means that violence will not continue by other means. This is confirmed by the International Track on Women’s Peace and Security Issues. This Track has gone through a long and difficult course:

- Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its Additional Protocols of 1977.¹⁶
- Convention on the Status of Refugees.¹⁷
- The international human rights law system; including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other human rights conventions.
- The Beijing Platform for Action emphasized the importance of women’s participation in conflict resolution, decision-making, protection of women living in conflict and armed conflict and other types of conflict.¹⁸
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 and subsequent resolutions formed the so-called “Peace and Security Agenda for Women.”¹⁹
- The Rome Statute, which emphasizes the need for women in conflict areas to enjoy equal rights to men, such as the right to legal personality and equality before the law, whether they are combatants or civilians, as well as protection from rape, forced prostitution or any other form of degrading violence.²⁰
- Finally, General Comment No. 30 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women urged states to protect the human rights of women and to promote effective gender equality before, during and after conflict, and to ensure the full integration of women’s diverse experiences in all peacemaking processes, peace building and reconstruction.²¹

2. Lebanon and the International Context

Apart from political approaches, what concerns us is the legal context governing Lebanon’s international obligations to protect, respect and promote human rights. Since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis, the focus has been on Lebanese law and its application to refugees, alongside international law relating to refugees – which the Lebanese state has disregarded, leaving its obligations for UNHCR to fulfill.

It is true that Lebanon has not yet acceded to the 1951 Convention or to the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, yet this does not exempt the Lebanese state from fulfilling its obligations towards refugees.

¹⁶<https://www.icrc.org/ara/war-and-law/protected-persons/women/overview-women-protected.htm>

¹⁷<https://www.ohchr.org/AR/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/StatusOfRefugees.aspx>

¹⁸ Key International Policies and Legal Mechanisms: Women’s rights in the context of Peace and Security, Ansil Drian & Sanam Naraji

¹⁹Resolution 1325 is the first official and legal document of the Security Council, in which the parties to the conflict are called upon to respect the rights of women and to support their participation in all stages and contexts of conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peace-building and peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction. It is based on four axes: participation, relief and recovery, prevention and finally protection.

²⁰<https://www.crin.org/en/library/publications/international-criminal-court-icc-arabic>

²¹https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/30&Lang=en

Refugees are entitled to all the rights provided for in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, such as:

- The right to life.
- The right to not to be subjected to torture or ill-treatment
- The right to freedom of movement.
- The right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.
- The right to equality before the law.
- The right to a nationality.²²

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also provides protection to refugees and asylum seekers in many aspects of their lives, such as:

- Access to fair and preferential working conditions.
- The right to social security.
- The right to an adequate standard of living.
- Access to education.²³

In the same context, the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers are protected by other international treaties, including:

- The Convention Against Torture.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which is unique in ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers enjoy a wide range of rights under Article 5.²⁴

These aforementioned conventions constitute a regulatory framework for the rights of refugees in Lebanon, as Lebanon has acceded to all of them. However, there remains other basic human rights conventions which Lebanon has not yet ratified or acceded to.²⁵

²²The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted and offered for signature, ratification and accession by United Nations General Assembly resolution 2200 A of 16 December 1966 and entered into force on 23 March 1976.

²³The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was adopted and presented for signature, ratification and accession by United Nations General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 and entered into force on 3 January 1976.

²⁴<https://www.ohchr.org/AR/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx>

²⁵Lebanon has not acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, international convention on Protection from Enforced disappearance

In 1996, the Lebanese State acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) but did not accede to its Optional Protocol. Lebanon has expressed reservations on the following articles:

- Article 9 on nationality.
- Four sub-articles of Article 16 on personal status.
- Article 29 on arbitration between states.

CEDAW obliges Lebanon to abolish all forms of discrimination against any woman present in Lebanese territory, including women refugees. Furthermore, in accordance with the Committee's General Comments 28, 30 and 32, there is a responsibility on all States party to the Convention to exercise due diligence in the protection of refugee women, asylum seekers or women in conflict situations from all forms of discrimination and violence.²⁶

Regarding the National Plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Lebanese National Council for Lebanese Women, in partnership with several United Nations (UN) agencies, is currently working on the National Plan for Security Council Resolution 1325, using a participatory approach, along with various government frameworks and several international and local organizations.²⁷

In the context of the review of the fourth and fifth periodic report of the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against women,²⁸ several treaty bodies have made recommendations for the protection of refugees in Lebanon. Many of these observations are explicitly related to the status of women refugees, women asylum seekers and stateless women.²⁹

- a. To ensure that the policy paper on the displacement of Syrians to Lebanon, adopted by the Council of Ministers on 23 October 2014, complies with the principle of non-refoulement, including for women and girls in need of international protection, by ensuring access to their territory and establishing gender-based violence as a reason for asylum in line with Articles 2 and 3 of the Convention.
- b. A review of the 1962 law regulating entry into and exit from Lebanon, distinguishing between the needs of asylum seekers and women refugees on the one hand, and the needs of migrant women on the other.
- c. Seek technical support for the establishment of a system to collect data on incidents of gender-based violence against women, incidents of sexual violence, incidents of child marriage and/or forced marriage of women and girls. Also, provide victims with medical, psychological and social assistance, and ensure access to juridical law in line with Article 2 of the Convention and General Comment No. 33 (2015) of the

²⁶<https://www.ohchr.org/AR/HRBodies/cedaw/Pages/Recommendations.aspx>

²⁷<http://nclw.org.lb/2018/07/30/4-الهيئة-الوطنية-لشؤون-المرأة-اللبنان>

²⁸The hearing of the Lebanese National Tribe was held on 3 November 2015 and the concluding observations were adopted on 24 November 2015. For more information see the following link

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fLBN%2fCO%2f4-5&Lang=ar

²⁹https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx?CountryCode=LBN&Lang=AR

Committee on the question of women's access to law.

- d. Mobilizing and activating the support of international community to share the economic burden and meet the needs of refugees, including opportunities for resettlement and humanitarian acceptance and continued cooperation with UNHCR.
- e. Adopt a national plan of action to implement UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security and ensure the participation of women in all stages of peace operations in line with General Comment No. 30 (2013), in which the Committee addressed the role of women in conflict prevention and conflict situations after the end of the conflict, and seek the support of the international community to assist the State party in fulfilling its obligations.

3. Domestic Violence against Syrian Women Refugees in Lebanon

People affected by conflicts and war experience various forms of gender-based violence. Domestic violence is one of the most prominent forms. The threat faced by women during periods of conflict exceeds the dangers of sexual violence outside the family, loss of spouse or children or property, or their transition to weak refugees or internally displaced peoples or otherwise. The war invades the most private space of women; i.e., the family, where their sense of security and identity is deeply threatened.

- **Women's Role in Production and Related Violence:**

Although crises may exacerbate gender inequality and increase the risk of exclusion and gender-based discrimination, they may create an opportunity for positive change. One example of this is the production role, especially in an environment where the participation of women in the production process is necessary and essential, leading to changes in social norms and traditions. In this context, women and girls who earn money are seen as a threat to current power structures, and they may be met with violence by family members.³⁰ Women are obliged to assume unfamiliar roles that require them to acquire and strengthen new skills to overcome emerging livelihood and economic difficulties.

There has been a shift in the traditional roles of women, as women refugees have been forced to work to support their families. Many have been the only source of income in the family. At some stages of refugeehood, one in five refugee families was headed by a woman.³¹ The beginning of change in the lives of refugee women lies in their production role, in order to lift their families out of poverty and economic distress. One of the women refugees states: "Our economic and physical situation deteriorated very dramatically, as we spent days without eating. My husband was in the tent all day and asked me to go and look for work and bring money. I used to clean

³⁰Minimum standards for prevention and response to gender-based violence, United Nations Population Fund, September 2015

³¹Why Syrian refugee women in Lebanon face sexual harassment and exploitation? February 2016

<https://www.amnesty.org/ar/latest/campaigns/2016/02/why-refugee-women-syria-lebanon-face-sexual-harassment-exploitation/>

houses, cook in associations and pick apples. He also asked my kids to go to the garbage containers and look for what could be sold like plastic, aluminum, etc.”³²

In this painful reality, refugee women had to adapt to the new circumstances resulting from their refugee status. Men remained prisoners of the house and women held more responsibilities inside and outside the home to meet family needs. This change in roles has several reasons, including:

- The illegal status of men who are not allowed to search for work, for fear of arrest at checkpoints, security and military points.
- Men’s sense of shame and embarrassment resulting in refusal to receive food aid and relief services.
- Many women must support the family due to the absence of men because of death, arrest or travel, or due to their involvement in the fighting in Syria.

Given the changing roles, and women’s work both inside and outside the home, women have become subject to various forms of pressure, including:

- To acquire food subsidies, health and education services, women are exposed to different sorts of humiliation. One of them says: “Women did not use to work. Today they are queuing for aid and relief, where we are subjected to humiliation, harassment and disgrace.”³³
- Persistent psychological pressure in the search for work, especially in the case of death of a husband or divorce, which forces the refugee to live with her family or her husband’s parents. One of the women refugees says: “I came to Lebanon after my husband died of a terminal illness. I lived with my father, his wife and my son. The problems started because I had been looking for a job and they thought it would badly affect the family’s reputation. They yelled at me every day the same words “what would people say seeing you going out every day.””³⁴
- Women are those who make the money but have no decision-making powers in any of the economic aspects. One of the women says: “We do not decide when and how to spend the money, in addition to that, our contribution is not received by any appreciation or gratitude.”³⁵
- Compelling them to work in hard, tiring jobs, for long working hours and without a fair wage, while the husband rejects any job or profession that he does not like.

Not only do refugee women work to secure the necessities of life in Lebanon, but a number of them send money to their husbands or children who have migrated illegally to other countries in the world, or to those who remained in Syria. Moreover, sometimes, some refugee women bear the responsibility of supporting their married daughters and their families.

³²Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, October 2018.

³³Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, October 2018.

³⁴Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, October 2018.

³⁵Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, October 2018.

This change in roles has had a bad effect on women refugees. Family problems have been exacerbated by the lack of acceptance by men of the new role of refugee women as a breadwinner, and men's sense of disability and economic dependence on women. This has resulted in divorce, as well as physical and psychological violence at home. A refugee says: "As if I were the man, and he was the woman, as I am burdened with all the responsibilities of the house and the children on my own. I arrange the tent before going to work and upon my return, I am blamed for any negligence."³⁶At the same time, the working environment is not flawless. Women are exposed to exploitation at work, in terms of unfair wages, poor working conditions, harassment and sexual exploitation in the workplace.³⁷

Most Syrian refugees are forced to find men and women seeking workers in the private sector because of restrictions on their access to jobs in the public sector in Lebanon. Working in the informal sector places them at an increased risk of abuse and exploitation. The majority in Lebanon resist granting work permits to Syrian refugees.³⁸The complex conditions of residency greatly restrict the movement of refugees.³⁹ At the Donor's Conference in February 2016 in London, Lebanon was committed to reviewing the existing legal frameworks on residency and work permits for Syrians.

Taking on a production role represented an opportunity of salvation for many refugee women, by allowing them to leave and bypass the walls of the house, which was but a dream for them in Syria. They have gained confidence in themselves and feel that they are useful and important in society and that they can be independent and make opposing decisions. Therefore, they continue to work with local associations and keep up with all activities, courses and meetings.⁴⁰

- **Sexual violence**

"Let us leave here with an unmistakable message: We will not tolerate anyone committing or condoning sexual exploitation and abuse. We will not let anyone cover up these crimes with the UN...Let's work to turn the slogan of zero tolerance into reality." Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres.⁴¹

³⁶Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, October 2018.

³⁷Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, October 2018.

³⁸ Lebanon resists granting work permits to Syrian refugees., Martin Armstrong, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanon-syria-refugees-jobs-554259285>

³⁹Lebanon: New asylum policy step forward, Human Rights Watch, for more information: <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2017/02/14/300040>

⁴⁰From the statements of the women who met them in the concentrated group that was set up for the report in Saadnayel, Bekaa on 25 November 2018.

⁴¹<https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/ar>; <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/un-secretary-generals-address-high-level-meeting-un-response-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>

The latest UN reports confirm that refugee women and girls are trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation through temporary marriage, child marriage or forced marriage, and are often forced to marry according to the will of parents who see this a way to ensure the safety of the girl and to create a financial resource from her dowry.⁴²

Women often hesitate to talk about sexual violence. However, during interviews with some of the women refugees, they were bold enough to talk about sexual abuse within the family, especially in a society where women's sexual services are considered part of their duties to obey their husbands.⁴³

Performing intimate relationships between spouses in overcrowded accommodation is regarded as a form of violence that oppresses and torments women. One of them says: "I care a lot about my children's opinion of me. How would I look them in the eyes after being obliged into an intimate relationship in the same room? This is intolerable."⁴⁴

Another form of violence that refugee women frequently declare is marital rape. This is due to the "supposed pride of men" in exchange for "fatigue and exhaustion of women". Because women have no opinion on this subject, women's sexual services are part of their duty to obey their husbands.⁴⁵ In addition, there is a parallel practice to violence: "abandonment and the establishment of multiple relationships."⁴⁶ Most of the reports confirm the rise in violence from the intimate partner after arriving to Lebanon.⁴⁷

Things escalate further, particularly in cases where the husband forces the wife or his daughters to have sexual relations for money. Refugee women have cited many instances of where the wife or the daughter is coerced in to establishing sexual relations in return for money. According to one refugee women: "there is a different price for both mothers and daughters in many cases."⁴⁸ This coincides with other reports indicating that Syrian women are at high risk of trafficking through forced prostitution and sexual exploitation in Lebanon,⁴⁹ as well as exposure to various other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.⁵⁰

⁴²Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in human beings, especially women and children, to the Human Rights Council, 2018 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/226/98/PDF/N1822698.pdf?OpenElement>

⁴³43E/CN.4/2002/73/Add.2

⁴⁴Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, October 2018.

⁴⁵E/CN.4/2002/73/Add.2

⁴⁶These expressions are derived from statements made by women who participated in the focused group that was set up for the report in Baalbek, Bekaa, on 15 November 2018.

⁴⁷The Syrian crisis: the dimensions of gender-based violence against Syrian refugees in Lebanon, forced Migration Bulletin, Ghida Anani

⁴⁸Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

⁴⁹Syrians at risk of sexual trafficking in Lebanon, Human Rights Watch, 2016/For more information see: <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2016/07/29/292593>

⁵⁰<https://www.truthdig.com/articles/pity-nations-female-refugees-lebanon/>

When asked about incest, refugee women do not deny its considerable occurrence, but it remains a “closed topic” because of the social culture that restricts talking about it, as well as fear of stigmatization, especially since many families in the same camp would be related.

The most prominent feature of Syrian women refugees in the context of sexual violence within the family is marrying off the girls. According to UNHCR’s assessment figures, “Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2017”, the following figures are available:

- 22% of refugee girls married between the ages of 15 and 19.
- 18% were associated with men who are 10 years older or more.

In terms of geographical distribution, the percentage of married minors was as follows:

- Southern province: 15 to 19 years old (37%).
- Akkar Governorate (27%).
- North Governorate (27%).
- Bekaa Governorate (16%).⁵¹

This data is consistent with the study “**Attempting to understand the marriage of children among Syrian refugees in Lebanon**”, which showed that about 95% of those who wrote stories about the marriage of minors considered it negatively and acknowledged its negative, current and future, effects on girls, and yet they commit it.⁵²

In the analysis, it seems that the economic situation is the most prominent factor in the marriage of girls who are minors. One of the female victims of child marriage says: “A young Lebanese man proposed to me. Unfortunately, I agreed due to my poor condition, displacement and homelessness. I did not know him well. The engagement lasted for one month, and then we got married.”⁵³

It is not only about marriage of girls to men close to their age but it extends to compel them to marry elderly men. One refugee says: “An old Lebanese man proposed. He is 84. He is well-off, and he has a high rank in the state. I can’t mention his name. My father’s wife urged me to agree. I finally agreed due to the bad situation I was living in.”⁵⁴

A large number of girl marriages, according to refugee women, are to old married men. A 19-year-old woman recounts the story of her marriage at the age of 15: “Life was difficult and bad, and my father was always complaining about the situation and lack of space. In 2014, a 47-year-

⁵¹Exploitation of adolescent girls in pleasure and forced labor: Stories in the "Al-Iraqia" tents. Saadi Ouda <http://legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=4776>

⁵²Recently published by the "Dimensions" organization (July 2018).

⁵³Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

⁵⁴Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

old Syrian man proposed. My father agreed [to the marriage] to ease his [my father's] burden. I, now, live with him [my husband], his wife and his five children in the same tent."⁵⁵

In addition to the economic factor, the desire to protect is one of the main reasons for marrying girls, especially among mothers. A refugee woman justifies it by saying: "I forced myself to accept my 14-year-old daughter's engagement, although I am against early marriage for girls, but I couldn't do anything about it."⁵⁶

Most reports indicate that early marriage as a traditional practice was popular in rural Syria even before the war.⁵⁷ But of course, it assumes different dimensions and forms in the case of refugees.

According to a study conducted in 2016 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the American University of Beirut and the Sawa Association for Development and Aid, child marriage rates are four times higher among Syrians now than before the crisis. The same study showed that school enrollment rates are lower among girls as their age increases. The proportion of girls aged nine years old attending school is at 70%, while the percentage of girls aged 16 and above attending school is at 17%.⁵⁸

- **Psychological and mental violence**

Psychological violence remains among the most severe and difficult forms of violence to detect as it does not leave any physical marks, yet most harmful to women and girls, as it aims to insult women and to undermine their self-esteem or value and isolate them from their surroundings. It is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by Syrian women refugees in Lebanon within the family. The following are some examples:⁵⁹

- The threat of marrying a second wife, often threatening to marry a younger girl.
- The threat of divorce. Women speak of a high prevalence of divorce among Syrian refugee women in Lebanon, as well as many incidents of women who have been divorced after their husband's travel, where the divorce takes place under the pretext of marrying a second wife, or on the grounds of difficulty in reuniting, leaving the burden of raising the children on the woman.
- Many refugee women want divorce, but they lack the ability to make the decision due to lack of choices.
- Permanent threat of treason or its actual occurrence.

⁵⁵Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

⁵⁶A statement from the words of a woman who participated in the focused group organized for the report in Shatra, Beqaa, on 13 November 2018.

⁵⁷Pity the Nations: Women Refugees in Lebanon, December 2017, <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/pity-nations-female-refugees-lebanon/>

⁵⁸<https://news.un.org/ar/story/2017/02/270072>

⁵⁹Statements by women who participated in the focused group organized for the report in Chtaura, Beqaa, on 13 November 2018 and in the focused group organized on 25 November 2018 and from the total number of individual interviews with women, all of which were organized for the benefit of the report.

- Accusing women of having sexual relations and the constant questioning on the subject of “honor”. One refugee says: “The problems started between us because of housing with strangers. He started doubting me when he found out that there were young males in the same school where we live. I tried to avoid going out unless I go out with him. Despite this, his doubts continued.”⁶⁰
- Withholding identity papers from the wife by the husband is another mean of psychological pressure that besieges women refugees and restricts their chances of addressing any domestic violence they face.
- Women are held responsible for neglecting the home as a result of going out daily to seek assistance or for work.
- Lack of privacy. It is a complicated situation for women living in shared shelters that do not have the most basic of living standards, which reflects a sense of instability and poor relationship with the husband. The lack of private health facilities, the inability to wear comfortable clothes and the inability to remove the headscarf throughout the day, make women’s lives unbearable, making the house a prison instead of a place to rest.
- Deprived the right to self-determination. Women refugees speak of the lack of opportunity and choice regarding the most basic of issues in their lives.
- Violence by the husband’s family, including psychological pressures that women refugees are subjected to, mainly by the husband’s mother, and which are manifested in various forms. For example, forcing her to get pregnant and accompanying the young wife in her regular visits to the female doctor.
- Pressure faced by refugee women considering their weak ability to confront or prevent violence.
- Another manifestation of violence expressed by more than one refugee is when a woman refugee marries a non-Syrian man. In this case, violence takes on another dimension, connected to humiliation, whether by the husband or his family under the pretext of “marrying a Syrian woman”.
- Coerced repeated pregnancy is another manifestation of psychological violence that women are forced into in order to get more aid, or because of parental intervention, or the threat of marrying a second wife.
- Social violence with established roots in domestic violence is another form of psychological violence expressed by Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. Women are abused in the name of customs, traditions, social norms and culture, and based on stereotypical social roles. It is one of the most negative practices against women because it besieges them, restricts their chances of contact with their surroundings, limits the opportunities for their involvement in the community and exercising their roles.⁶¹

⁶⁰Statement quoted from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

⁶¹Regional guide for monitoring and documentation on gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence against women in the Middle East and North Africa region, a feminist study, October 2016.

- **Physical violence:**

Women are subjected to various forms of physical violence, portraying painful images expressed by refugee women. One of them says: “My husband has become edgy. He gets angry at trivial things; yells inappropriate words; violently and constantly beats me in front of the boys with any tool in front of him. He hits me whenever he feels like it.”⁶²

Another refugee states: “I was four months pregnant. My husband returned at noon and I asked him to confirm our marriage in court before my delivery, but he refused, and even refused to give me my legal marriage document. We had a long argument. He attacked me and hit me with his belt. He threatened to hit me again if I asked him to confirm the marriage again.”⁶³

Another similar incident: “He hit me outside the tent. He was carrying a pistol which I grabbed and told him if he didn’t kill me, I’d shoot him. He beat me and tossed me onto the ground, took the gun and hit me on the head and face.”⁶⁴

A third refugee recounts an incident of physical violence that led to attempted murder, recalling an incident of forced abortion, which would have killed her.

Another example summarizes all levels of physical violence on women: “He asked me to take off my clothes. I thought he was joking. But he kicked me out of bed and yelled at me. I was afraid of him, so I took off my clothes. It was freezing cold. He made me stand facing the wall. I was shaking from fear. I couldn’t understand why he had asked me to do so. Then, he brought a jug of water and splashed me. He hit me with a stick and threatened me with more severe beating if I move. I was crying, thinking I was going to die. He went on beating me for half an hour as he laughed and insulted my father. My whole body went numb because of the beatings and the cold. He threatened with spreading rumors about my behavior if I tell anybody of what he had done.”⁶⁵

Physical violence is not limited to the husband only. One of the refugee women tells of attempted abortion by her husband’s family.⁶⁶

- **Verbal violence**

According to most women we met, verbal violence is a daily behavior that comes with marital life. It is another manifestation of violence that women refugees endure almost on a daily basis. Some justify verbal violence to the bad conditions that men suffer from, especially the poor economic situation and unemployment. Some justify it by the facts that men are subjected to

⁶²Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018

⁶³Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018

⁶⁴Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018

⁶⁵Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

⁶⁶These expressions are derived from statements made by women who participated in the focused group that was set up for the report in Baalbek, Bekaa, on 15 November 2018.

verbal violence outside the home by Lebanese people, making verbal violence the only tool of expression, as more than one refugee women said.⁶⁷

On the other hand, many refugee women reject this form of violence against them. A woman refugee says: “It was the worst for me when he insulted me. I’m willing to take the beating every day, but not hear him insult me with one bad word.”⁶⁸

4. Influencing Factors in Domestic Violence against Syrian Women Refugees in Lebanon

There are many factors that contribute to the vulnerability of refugee women who have encountered domestic violence. Some may be related to their position as women, while others would be related to refugeehood itself. However, most of these factors lie in the societal context. Meanwhile, one cannot ignore factors associated with the official system, or the protection system, and the services afforded to women. This section attempts to analyze the roots and causes of women’s vulnerability to certain forms of domestic violence.

- **Individual factors**

Individual factors are mainly attributed to women refugees’ lack of awareness or weak knowledge about gender-based violence, its types and consequences. This is a result of decades-long lack of women’s awareness and the culture of discrimination and violence within the family. According to many of those we met, many refugees do not realize that what they are experiencing is “violence”, as they call it “injustice and persecution”. This is reflected in the attitude of women themselves towards violence.

The culture of justifying men’s violence by “letting some steam out” is widely spread. For example, “to let some steam out” because of the burden of war and because being refugees is heavy on men (arrest, torture, concealment, loss of economic resources, etc.). Meanwhile, women are not given similar justifications.

Among other excuses women give to justify their husbands’ behavior:

- “He was angry and upset, with no place to go and no money”.
- “Violence is a manifestation of masculinity and a compensation for the loss of a man’s job and source of livelihood”.
- Some women blame themselves for making the man angry.
- In factors related to women themselves, we cannot disregard a major factor; “women’s vulnerability”. According to more than one woman: “Women are basically weak and

⁶⁷More than one refugee expressed this during the concentrated group that was set up for the report in Barr Elias, Bekaa on 25 November 2018.

⁶⁸Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

incapable of confrontation”.⁶⁹ A lot of women even refuse to talk about what they have been exposed to. One of them says: “When I arrived at the hospital, the doctor asked me about the cause of the accident. I told him that I fell on the ground, I did not dare say that my husband hit me because I am sure that if I spoke, he would hit me again more violently.”⁷⁰

It is true that violence multiplies and feeds on war and refugees, but its origin goes back to pre-refugee status, and its ramifications extend beyond it. The historical roots of violence cannot be overlooked or imagined by simple initiatives, or in a short time.

Violence among refugees is often considered by men to be a mechanism of confrontation and rejection to the realities of war. The weakness and women’s inability to confront is chronic and a reflection of the system of values in the society that justifies and legitimizes violence, rejects divorce completely, sanctifies the idea of the family and its role, and assumes women’s greater and main role in protecting and preserving the family. Such system is rooted within individuals who identify with it and become part of it.

- **Factors related to refugeehood**

“Our lives were normal until we became refugees.”

A phrase frequently used by the majority of refugee women whom we met. Being refugees is a new phase in their lives. A phase full of different and emergent features: change in husband, change in relationship, challenges, and unprecedented anxieties. One refugee woman says: “I lived a simple life in the city of Homs with my husband and two children and didn’t complain of anything. Our life was normal with an average income and a stable life until we sought refuge in Lebanon. His injustice and dominance increased after leaving Syria in 2012.” Another woman asserts: “In Syria, I was an Arabic language teacher and my husband was a worker. Our life was as good as any Syrian family in Homs until the war began.”⁷¹

Housing in the camp is one of the factors affecting women’s vulnerability to domestic violence. In the camp, there is more than one story and more than one painful experience for women. One of them says: “The living situation in the camp is uncomfortable, and because of limited employment opportunities. My husband, my children and I live in one tent, four meters in size.”

Another woman refugee adds: “The situation in the camp is unbearable, the tents are small and close to each other. Services and infrastructure are not available.”

⁶⁹Statement made by more than one refugee in the three focused groups that were conducted for the benefit of the report.

⁷⁰Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

⁷¹Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018.

Another dimension is expressed by other women refugees. One of them says: “Most people in the camp know each other’s situations.”

In certain cases, the situation worsens. One refugee woman says: “I moved with him to a tent in Majdalun area in Baalbek, where I lived with him and his wife and five children, the eldest being 13 years old, in the same tent. Living there was very difficult because the tent consisted of only two rooms.”⁷²

In a related context, the lack of privacy is the most prominent problem for women refugees. A reality expressed by women refugees forced to establish sexual relations despite the presence of children in the tent. If they refused, they would be exposed to marital rape or physical violence.

Refugee women are insecure in refugee communities. According to them, these communities are unsafe environments for girls, considering the stereotype of refugee girls, which makes them easy targets for sexual exploitation in various forms.

“Shawish”,⁷³ is the head of the authoritarian hierarchy and the primary administrator of the camp. He has the power to exercise large-scale domination and tyranny if he wants against all members of the camp, especially men.⁷⁴

- **Economic situation**

“We were a normal couple in Syria, without problems. We lived in an ordinary house, we did not lack anything, and lived fairly well.”⁷⁵

Using that phrase, many women refugees describe their pre-refugee status to compare with their current fragile and disadvantaged economic situation.

Another woman refugee says: “In Syria, I was an Arabic language teacher and my husband was a worker. Living standards were as well as for any Syrian family in Homs, until the war broke out, and then our life changed completely. After six months of refugeehood and tragic and miserable living conditions, my husband began to change.” (repetition of affidavit in previous paragraph. It’s suggested that it’s deleted from the previous paragraph)

The poor economic conditions place women in a state of constant fear of missing basic needs, especially in the absence of the breadwinner, and women’s weak eligibility to play an economic role.

⁷²Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, October 2018.

⁷³It’s useful to talk about who gave him power and authority.

⁷⁴Statements confirmed by most of the women we met in the three focused groups organized for the benefit of the report.

⁷⁵Statement from an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, Bekaa, September 2018

According to reports, such economic situation prevents women from disclosing violence and even eliminates any desire to build a new life. In addition to food, clothing, health supplies and other basic household necessities, there are the housing and tents' rents. The rent rate of a small house is about \$189 a month, a sum that many are unable to afford. The monetary assistance that is supposed to alleviate the financial burden is not enough and is not available to all refugees. Therefore, more than 70% of Syrian refugees live in poverty, and the average debts that families owe are about \$857.⁷⁶

Refugee concerns about health care are increasing as it is a major source of costs. UNHCR health insurance covers only critical cases and obstetric operations.

- **Community factors**

- a. *Women refugees and the loss of family and community.*

Conflict and forced displacement create an environment that increases the vulnerability of women and girls. The patriarchal and masculine authority inherent in many cultures throughout the world increases the difficulties faced by refugees.⁷⁷

The causes of domestic violence suffered by refugee women are linked to attitudes, beliefs and cultural structures that distinguish between the sexes and imbalances the power between them.⁷⁸ Humanitarian crises increase the risk of gender-based violence, as women are displaced from protective and nurturing environments within their families and within their communities. During crises, norms of social behavior break down. Attitudes, beliefs, customs and structures that reinforce, condone, or allow domestic violence are rooted. It is in the name of this cultural system that all mechanisms of discrimination and repression against refugee women and girls are rooted, as are the justification and tools for defending the violence against them.

One of the reasons for the vulnerability of many refugee women is that the pre-refugee environment had been a conservative one, where violence was not addressed before. "It was an unsupportive environment for women before, so what would it be today!"⁷⁹

- b. *Syrian family identity; all impose their will on women*

Another dimension of importance relates to the identity of the Syrian family. It is a patriarchal, agricultural, large-scale family where power extends to some of the relatives. A large number of refugees, especially those living in camps in the Bekaa Valley, came from rural communities in

⁷⁶When the return is voluntary. Conditions of asylum in Lebanon, Bulletin of forced displacement, number 57 February 2018, Mai Keith and Noor Choi <https://www.fmreview.org/ar/syria2018>

⁷⁷The Response to Syrian Refugee Women's Health Needs in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan and Recommendations for Improved Practice, 2014.

⁷⁸Preparation of media reports on gender-based violence in the Syrian crisis, press manual, United Nations Population Fund. To see more:

https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA%20Journalist%27s%20Handbook%20Arb_0.pdf

⁷⁹Statement made by a social worker we met in the course of preparing the report, Beirut, October 18, 2018.

Syria, where marriage to relatives is frequent, thus strengthening the overall social compatibility of the whole concept and role of the family. The presence of a husband is fundamental to the concept of this family, based on the need for a sense of safety and fear of loss.

Also, the culture of the extended family prevails and extends its control, where intervention intrudes the privacy of its members, especially women. Therefore, women cannot risk any behavior that deprives them of their families or causes a shake in the family structure or its role, as there is no economic and social alternative to the family unit. This cultural system is exacerbated in the refugee community in Lebanon.

c. Stigma and rejection when not having children.

Many of the violations of women's sexual and reproductive health rights are deeply rooted in societal values. For example, patriarchal perceptions of women's roles within the family mean that women are often evaluated on the basis of their reproductive capacity. As such, early marriage, early pregnancy and frequent pregnancies predominate (often due to efforts to have boys who are preferred over girls). These concepts do not consider women's health, and instead blame women in the event of infertility and outcast them.

d. Parents' support; a losing bet.

For refugees, the hierarchies of social behavior weaken and the positive social traditions that once protected women are shattered. This was caused by the separation of women from their families and living in a strange country. A refugee woman recounts what happened with her: "I did not have any refuge after I had been beaten by my husband in front of my brother, who did not bother to defend me. I was helpless as my family resides in Syria and I have lost contact with them, and I do not have a private phone to contact them."⁸⁰

Another refugee woman speaks about the attitude of parents towards women who confront and stand up against violence, by telling her: "This is life. You better endure and be patient with your husband's tantrums. He's exhausted, and it's natural for him to take out all his frustrations at home."⁸¹

For some refugee women, the attitude of their parents is due to the tight living conditions and the family's difficult financial situations, which in some cases force the families to refuse receiving their daughter when seeking relief when her husband is violent.

A refugee we met talks about one of the painful incidents she was subjected to: "When I resorted to my family, they refused to receive me. My father asked me to go back to my husband's house. He screamed at me and at my mother, and threatened her with divorce and sleeping outside the tent if she were to let me in. As I was concerned about my mother, I returned to my

⁸⁰Statement from an interview with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon conducted for the report, Bekaa, September 2018.

⁸¹Statement from an interview with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon conducted for the report, Bekaa, October 2018.

husband's tent, but he refused to let me in, despite having my baby daughter with me. So, I spent the whole night with my daughter outside the tent.”⁸²

The lack of solidarity from the parents with abused refugee women affects their ability to confront violence. One of them says bitterly: “My mother did not care about my feelings in those difficult times and the extent of my psychological suffering. I was hoping that my mother would stand by me and find a solution, but I was disappointed.”⁸³

- **Legal factors related to access to justice**

Despite the overall legislative efforts to guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Lebanese legislative system still has many basic structural gaps affecting all women in Lebanon, with a two-fold effect on refugee women. These legal gaps provide no protection from domestic violence, and some even create an environment conducive to all forms of domestic violence against Syrian women refugees.

- The first gap lies in the Lebanese Penal Code. This law is the main base of discrimination against women in the Lebanese legal system. The Lebanese Penal Code does not provide for adequate punishment that can alter and deter stereotypical and discriminatory behavior against women.⁸⁴ There is no definition of sexual violence in the Lebanese legal system. It does not criminalize marital rape. It classifies abortion as a crime, and does not address the issue of sexual harassment.⁸⁵
- With regards to personal status laws, Lebanon remains subject to an array of legislations and courts. There are 15 personal status laws recognized in the country, which are applied by 18 different religious communities. Women and girls are subject to different discriminatory provisions under personal status laws because there is no single civil law in Lebanon that regulates personal status issues.⁸⁶

⁸²Statement from an interview with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon conducted for the report, Bekaa, October 2018.

⁸³Statement from an interview with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon conducted for the report, Bekaa, September 2018.

⁸⁴ICJ report on Women access to justice, Lebanon, 2018

⁸⁵As to Article 522 of the Code, it applied to all the offences set forth between Articles 503 and 521, which exempts the perpetrator of one of these offences from punishment if he married the victim. It is true that the offence of rape was removed in 2017 but retained in articles 505 and 518. Article 505 states that the rape of a minor under the age of 15 is a punishable offence (regardless of the consent of the minor). Any person who is a minor over the age of 15 years and under 18 years of age shall be sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Longer sentences of imprisonment apply if the victim is under 12 years of age or between twelve and fifteen. In the case of marriage between them, the prosecution is suspended. Article 518 reads as follows: A man who seduces a virgin with a promise of marriage will be punished, if the act does not require a heavier penalty, imprisonment for up to six months and a fine of up to 200,000 Lebanese Lira or one of the two punishments... In the case of a proper marriage between them, the prosecution is dropped.

⁸⁶Regarding nationality, Lebanon made reservations to Article 9 of the CEDAW Convention and it does not give Lebanese women married to foreigners the right to confer nationality on their families. As for the Labor Code, it prohibited discrimination against women on the basis of sex in any type of work, in the amount of wages, promotion, upgrading and efficiency, and clothing, but lacked a clear mechanism for ensuring private sector

- Limited protection laws: in 2011, Law No. 164 on the Punishment of Human Trafficking was issued, but with only a few regulations set in accordance.⁸⁷ This is in addition to the inadequate attention paid to victims of trafficking among Syrian refugee women.⁸⁸
- On 1 April 2014, the Lebanese Parliament passed Law No. 293 regarding the Protection of Women and Other Family Members from Domestic Violence. Despite its importance, there are still challenges, gaps and problems facing its implementation.⁸⁹ Although it defines domestic violence, it does not provide adequate protection against all forms of abuse, such as marital rape. Considering the fragile legal status of refugee women, it is difficult for them to reach concerned authorities in charge. Even if they have access, they will not find quick solutions –such as shelters specialized in the care of abused women, if they choose to distance themselves from the cause of domestic violence.

The features that characterize the legal services needed by abused Syrian women in Lebanon and impede their access to justice are exacerbated in humanitarian crises. These features are:

4. Fear of violence as a form of retaliation, and repeated violence. In some contexts, justice systems do not meet the needs of survivors and could cause more damage. Survivors may face significant economic, social and cultural problems that prevent them from reporting violence and access to legal services.⁹⁰
5. Not knowing the law and protection procedures.
6. There is no map indicating legal service providers.
7. Lack of funding sources.
8. Not confiding in the law, and the widely-acknowledged discrediting of the rule of law, and the stereotyped image formed about law enforcement officials.
9. Rooted social norms continue to hinder women’s access to justice, by undermining the enthusiasm of the abused women and persuading them not to file a complaint seeking justice.
10. The high cost and fees required to carry out legal proceedings in Lebanon. Religious courts do not provide money to cover the expenses, despite the existence of “judicial aid” designed in a gender-neutral manner and reserved for specific type of lawsuits. Women refugees do not know how to benefit from this kind of aid.

surveillance and determining penalties for legal breaches. This law also does not include reference to certain groups in its provisions such as domestic workers and farmers.

⁸⁷In 2014, the government issued a ministerial decree establishing an office to combat human trafficking in the Directorate of Internal Security forces and to manage investigations on human trafficking. There are no official statements by the Office that frame investigations and disaggregate data in relation to trafficking offences.

⁸⁸Article 523 of the Penal Code criminalizes imprisonment from one month to one year for any person who engages in clandestine prostitution or facilitates this practice.

⁸⁹On 7 April 2017, the Ministry of Justice and the Organization "Enough Violence and exploitation", in partnership with the National Commission for Lebanese Women, launched a bill to amend Law No. 293. On 3 August 2017, after the cabinet meeting, a bill was approved to amend the Law on the Protection of women and other family members from domestic violence, as reported by the Ministry of Justice.

<http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/News/Pages/Details.aspx?nid=24331>

⁹⁰From an interview with a lawyer working on the provision of legal support to refugee women victims of domestic violence, conducted for the report in Beirut, 10 November 2018.

11. As for law enforcement agencies, the state security establishment plays a role that cannot be ignored in confronting gender-based violence, but there are still some gaps that need to be dealt with, particularly in terms of behavior with refugees, or the anxiety caused by bringing lawsuits given the concern about refugee legal status, or for security reasons.

Finally, in the context related to the legislative aspect, the impact of Syrian legislation on Syrian women residing in Syria or those who are refugees cannot be ignored. There are many discriminatory provisions against women in the Syrian legislation. The strong link between the Syrian legal framework, the persistence of negative cultural patterns, and of violence against women and girls cannot be denied. Discrimination and violence against Syrian refugee women within the family space is a form of predetermined pattern of relationships, rights and roles. The pattern extends from the pre-refugee stages, and it is attributed to many factors, including Syrian legislation. For example:

- The Constitution does not include a definition on discrimination against women in line with Article 1 of CEDAW.
- Syria ratified CEDAW with reservations made to Article 9 (paragraph 2), Article 15 (paragraph 4), Article 16 (paragraph 1: a, c, d and g), Article 16 (paragraph 2), and Article 29 (arbitration in the event of a dispute).
- Article 3 of the Syrian Constitution strengthens the rules of religious communities.
- Discriminatory provisions against women are found in various articles of the Syrian Penal Code;⁹¹ such as the non-criminalization of marital rape, the arrest of rapist by arrest of the rapist by marriage,⁹² the absolute prohibition of abortion; including in rape pregnancies, the absence of a text criminalizing sexual harassment and the mitigation of honor killings.
- Discrimination in the provisions of personal status law, especially provisions related to the unequal rights of women and men regarding marriage, divorce and guardianship (where guardianship is granted to fathers), polygamy, child marriage and/or forced marriage. The minimum age for marriage is 17 but the judge can authorize a marriage for a girl who is 13 years old. As for custody, the mother has the right of custody over her male children until the age of 13, and over her female children until the age of 15. Polygamy is permitted under the Personal Status Law, and the law defines inheritance rules that follow the principles of Shari'a.
- In accordance with the Nationality Act of 1969, women do not enjoy the same rights as men in transmitting their nationality to their children or to their foreign spouses.
- Syria has no law on domestic violence.

⁹¹ Articles 473, 475, 474, 508, 548.

⁹²Continued exemption of Decree No. 1/2011 and Article 508 of the Penal Code, although amended by Decree No. 1/2011, rapists are punished if they marry their victims

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx?CountryCode=SYR&Lang=AR

- **Factors related to services**

- a. International organizations are far from the needs of refugee women.*

International and local NGOs are addressing the increasing rate of gender-based violence directed against Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. This is done through centers that facilitate women's access to legal, medical, social and psychological assistance. These centers are often safe shelters for women that allow them access to services, vocational training, and to participate in support groups and discussions on gender-based violence in a safe environment.

NGOs enable women to protect themselves, their families and their communities. Some organizations also target men to sensitize them to gender-based violence and to guide them on how to control stress and anger, as they are both contributing factors to violence. Despite the importance of the work of women human rights and development organizations in Lebanon, there are still problems at the levels of: planning, approach, implementation, as well as the provision of services. This results in the lack of access to services and information on gender-based violence by many refugees.

The term “**packaged programs**” summarizes this problem, which some attribute to the funding policies of the donor organizations, while others attribute it to different approaches towards the needs, problems and priorities of the organizations and civil society institutions.

Not being aware of the cultural, social and economic context of refugee women in Syria has contributed to the widening gap between service providers and refugee women. There is no guarantee of success for any intervention without understanding religious beliefs, social relations and ethical values, as well as customs and traditions of refugee groups. This is partly due to the absence of a community-based approach, which has been recently slightly adopted by organizations.⁹³

- b. The problems of refugee women are beyond mere depression.*

The second problem is the preparation of projects and programs outside the framework of international resolutions related to security and peace, which necessitates the integration of gender into the protection approach, i.e., extending the umbrella of protection and moving from the concept of general protection to specific protection based on specific needs that takes into account a special set of factors entitled “women in light of refugeehood.”

Most organizations adopt approaches to dealing with problems considering them as post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychosocial problems in emergencies include much more than post-traumatic stress disorder or disaster depression. In Lebanon, these disorders are dealt with as unrest on an individual level. While the International Guidelines on Mental Health and

⁹³A guide to the community-based approach to combating violence against women and girls _ community committees surrounding safe spaces for women and girls-a guide for the deportation organization

Psychosocial Support and Social Security in 2007 recommend that the nature of primary psychosocial intervention in acute emergency contexts be more societal than individual.⁹⁴

c. Lack of funding.

The United Nations Humanitarian Response Plan to deal with the refugee crisis in Lebanon suffers lack of funding. The expected work of international and local organizations has not been achieved for three reasons:

1. Poor resources.
2. Not investing the resources in the right place and form.
3. The ability to cover all cases of gender-based violence is undermined by legal, social and cultural constraints.
4. Not being able to reach all refugee women. The majority of the main organizations working on gender issues are located in Beirut or in large cities. The geographic dimension of the large refugee communities complicates access to services, especially since these communities are random and represent hundreds in numbers. One refugee tells her story by saying:

“I decided to get psychosocial support because I was at an advanced stage of anger and tension. One of the associations invited me to attend psychosocial support sessions, and I was referred to a psychiatric treatment in Beirut. I attended three sessions. When I started sensing positive results, I stopped going to the sessions due to urgent family reasons. I couldn’t enroll again in these sessions because I missed attending them for three consecutive weeks. Later, I learned about another organization in Shetilla, in Beirut, which provides psychological support. I went twice to the clinic, but the place was far away, and I did not have the money to go daily to Beirut.”⁹⁵

5. Effects and Results

Women’s vulnerability to violence may create many health and social behaviors that negatively affect the enjoyment of physical, mental and social well-being. However, it is important to recognize that many women in Lebanon, especially refugee women, do not have a good quality of health, especially reproductive health, not only because of the prevalence of violence against women, but also due to other factors, primarily due to the adopted health policies and their limited role in addressing gender-based violence.

⁹⁴Mental health programmes for Syrian refugees: the risks of transforming social misery into a medical condition requiring treatment-Hala Karbaj-Legal Agenda.

⁹⁵From an interview conducted for the report with a Syrian refugee, Aley, October 2018

The World Health Organization (WHO) asserts that the enjoyment of highest standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being.⁹⁶ However, vulnerable and marginalized groups, particularly women, bear an undue burden of health problems. The WHO also emphasizes that the right of women to health is linked to multiple rights, including the right to life, the right not to be subjected to torture, the right to privacy, the right to education and the right to be free from discrimination.

a. Physical symptoms “birth within the tent”.

Although there are many health problems suffered by Syrian women refugees in Lebanon, some of them are caused by the poor living conditions and scarcity of water, air and sun. Some are caused by infectious diseases such as lice, scabies and other skin diseases. However, the most important diseases are related to women and result from pregnancy, childbearing, premature births and abortion.⁹⁷

The relationship between violence against refugee women and health problems is based on the absence of the individual identity of these women, and in the absence of a culture that guarantees privacy over and protection of the body. Therefore, refugee women bear all forms of violence, such as repetitive pregnancy and unsafe childbirth.

According to a report by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), pregnant women often do not know where to go to give birth. There are women who have to give birth alone, without assistance, in a tent. Financial costs can also be problematic. The costs of prenatal care are very high in Lebanon, even for Lebanese women. Poor living conditions also pose a threat to pregnancy. Overcrowding, poor sanitary and sewage conditions pose real risks for pregnant women.⁹⁸

Refugee women suffer from many health problems, most notably:

- Prolapsed of the uterus.
- Urinary tract problems.
- Abortion.
- Vaginal infections.
- Acute anemia.
- Arthritis diseases.
- Continuous changes in menstrual cycles.
- Teenage pregnancy problems.
- Ovarian bags, etc.⁹⁹

⁹⁶<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs323/ar/>

⁹⁷From an interview with a female doctor who works with refugee women, who was interviewed for the preparation of the report on 19 October 2018.

⁹⁸<https://www.msf.org/ar/syrian-refugees-lebanon-pregnant-women-often-have-no-idea-where-go>

⁹⁹From an interview with a Gynecologist who works with refugee women, and we interviewed her for the preparation of the report on 19 October 2018.

b. *Psychological symptoms: “I am ashamed of the bruises on my face.”*

Violence against women and its implications are not confined to the physical aspect, but also to mental health. Many refugee women must cope with the trauma they, or one of the family members, have been exposed to as a result of the horrific scenes, the tragic experiences, or the injuries they have suffered from.¹⁰⁰ One of the manifestations of these psychological effects:

- Shame is one aspect of violence. One refugee says: “I go out to the street with bruises on my face. I feel very ashamed if somebody sees these bruises.”¹⁰¹
- Low self-esteem as a result of neglect, psychological and moral violence, and a growing sense of humiliation, whether due to domestic violence or the denial of basic rights.
- Anxiety and concern have become the norm for Syrian refugee women, and for all members of the family, whether in Syria or in Lebanon.
- Overlooking and ignoring their own problems as they are constantly consumed in solving others’ problems, even if dealing with their own problems is urgent.
- Suicidal inclination and death thoughts were expressed by more than one refugee woman.
- The constant comparison between past and current life, which makes the demand for safety and securing immediate needs an urgent concern for Syrian refugee women.
- Using force to protest is one of the mechanisms to confront adopted by some women. However, it’s no more than fake, soon-to-collapse confrontation mechanism due to its fragility and lack of support.
- The growing sense that children are the safety valve increases the anxiety of losing them or causing them any harm. One of the women refugees says: “The violence was reflected on my three children, R (11 years old), M (10) and H (7), who all suffer from involuntary urination. My son’s psychological condition (M) deteriorated, and he became isolated and did not speak to anyone, and he is always in a state of fear and weakness.”¹⁰² Things do not seem better to another refugee woman, who was deprived of her children as a result of her confrontation to violence by suing for divorce: “After the divorce, he took my children. They were in a bad psychological condition as they did not want to leave me to live with their father. I was prevented from seeing them, and even talking to them. I tried to get the right to see them, but he fled to Syria and took the children with him.”¹⁰³
- The relationship with the husband is in crisis due to constant threats of divorce, treason, or both.

Some refugees repeat some expressions of their psychological status:¹⁰⁴

- An internal sense of slow death all the time.
- I need to dream to continue life.

¹⁰⁰<http://www.ohchr.org/AR/NewsEvents/Pages/palestinianwomen.aspx#sthash.RpdtfM8e.dpuf>

¹⁰¹Statement from an interview with a Syrian refugee for the report, Bekaa, September 2018.

¹⁰²Statement from an interview with a Syrian refugee for the report, Bekaa, September 2018.

¹⁰³Statement from an interview with a Syrian refugee for the report, Bekaa, October 2018.

¹⁰⁴Expressions used by women in interviews and in focused groups organized for the benefit of the report.

- I fear death because I will miss my children.
- Fear and anxiety surround me day and night.
- I have already lost enough. I am not ready to lose my children too.
- My destiny is on the street. So, I don't mind what happens at home.
- If I thought about working in prostitution, who can blame me?
- I think of committing suicide all the time.
- I never felt humiliation as I've felt since I sought refuge in Lebanon.

6. Recommendations

To the Lebanese State:

- Afford protection to all refugees in Lebanon, including humanitarian protection, away from politics.
- Fulfill its obligations in line with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, especially those pertinent to the rights of refugees.
- Ratify and accede to the Refugee Convention.
- Endorse and implement the National Plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325.
- Repeal all discriminatory provisions against women and girls in Lebanese law.
- Adopt the draft amendment regarding the law on the Protection of Women and other Family Members from Domestic Violence (293). In addition, efforts should continue to promote awareness and knowledge of the law and of the services provided, through a national plan.
- Establish the Victim Assistance Fund provided for in Act 293, activate Article 5 thereof, and establish a specialized department to deal with domestic violence crimes within the Internal Security Forces.
- Include the implementation of the law protecting women and other family members from domestic violence for all women in Lebanon.
- Integrate issues and needs of Syrian women refugees into plans, strategies and measures against gender-based violence in Lebanon.
- Collect and standardize methods of data collection on the rate and prevalence of violence, especially sexual violence.
- Train police and law enforcement personnel on human rights approaches to ensure security, confidentiality and privacy when reporting and responding to cases of gender-based violence.
- Consider mental health as part of public health and adopt the National Health Strategy 2015-2020.
- Provide reproductive health services within an integrated plan that includes pre and post-natal and postpartum maternity to ensure optimal protection.
- Strengthen the practices of the internal security forces and public security in accordance with human rights standards.
- Form a special department within the police specialized in complaints submitted by Syrian refugee women in Lebanon, and ensure that relevant personnel are aware of women's rights.

To the Syrian State:

- Secure the safe return of all men and women refugees to their homeland and provide decent lives and livelihoods.
- Reassure women about their children's well-being, and that children and families will not be involved in the armed conflict upon their return to their homeland. The state should provide basic services, specifically education and health care, support housing and create a transitional justice mechanism that includes the release of detainees, the return of property to owners, prosecuting perpetrators of war crimes, and the disarmament of armed groups.
- Facilitate the access of refugees, including women refugees, to official documents that assist them during their stay in Lebanon, and in the follow up on their legal status with the Lebanese government and international bodies and humanitarian organizations.
- Deliver medical and food supplies to them, and cooperate with competent international bodies in this regard.
- Rescind all discriminatory provisions against women in Syrian laws and the Syrian constitution, and enact a law protecting against domestic violence.

To international and local organizations¹⁰⁵

- International organizations, including UN agencies, should bear their responsibilities towards Syrian refugee women in Lebanon.
- Study the cultural, social and moral context of refugee women when formulating plans and strategies.
- Provide legal education and knowledge among refugee women.
- Provide sustainable legal support, including through legal advice and representation.
- In an attempt to change the violent cycle, and on the basis of individual responsibility, empower and build the capacities of refugee women to monitor and document violations. In sum, build the capacity of rights holders, instead of working with them as beneficiaries or victims.
- Monitor and document data which helps in drawing analysis and provide indicators for planning and impact assessment.
- Coordinate for a multi sectoral team in order to combat gender-based violence in armed conflict and for refugees. As such, local, national and regional teams in the health, social, security and judicial spheres must coordinate efforts and work.
- Adopt a community-based approach and benefit from the projects adopted.
- Develop a referral system, establish and increase the number of shelter centers.
- Ensure that all aid organizations adhere to the principle of non-tolerance to sexual violence and exploitation, and establish mechanisms to report such cases.

¹⁰⁵The report highlights some gaps in the delivery of services and includes some recommendations for organizations working in this field. The authors of the report do not deny the importance of the role played by international, regional and local civil society organizations in the context of protecting the rights of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon.

- Establish reliable and confidential information collection mechanisms to track and report incidents of sexual exploitation and violence, and inform Syrian women and girls about such mechanisms.

Conclusion

Cultural dynamics produce the patriarchal family as the most important social mechanism for sustainability.¹⁰⁶

This statement summarizes the results of this report, which presented some aspects of the impact of refugeehood on family violence against Syrian women refugee in Lebanon. Those women who are subject to social violence based on power and control relationships, within a social structure, where an unbalanced value system prevails.

It is important to emphasize that fragmenting violence against women and dividing it into “isolated incidents” may sometimes be counterproductive, especially if not integrated into a comprehensive strategy. In some cases, merely suppressing a malicious practice may only change the problem, and resolve it, so long the root causes are not addressed. Accordingly, the failure to protect Syrian women refugees in Lebanon from violence can be comprehended; the lack of remedy to address the root causes of violence persist.

Finally, domestic violence against women in times of conflict is simultaneously a cause and consequence of decades-long of constant discrimination. It is structural in nature, manifested in the development of a social mechanism that pushes women to dependency. Therefore, the required responses need to consider both the current and historical realities for women. Violence against women is the most prominent form of gender discrimination which weakens or nullifies women’s enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

¹⁰⁶Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, 2015.