



Chronicles of Displacement

POLICY BRIEF

**Gender, Employment, and Internal Displacement: The Case
of Lebanese Women**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the disproportionate impact on women caused by war-induced displacement in Lebanon in 2024, women's employment rate decreased significantly. This paper investigates the effects of internal displacement on Lebanese women's employment and financial status. It emphasizes the lack of high-paying jobs and skill training and insufficient financial and social assistance. This policy paper also delves into the role of social and cultural limitations that hinder Lebanese women's economic participation and empowerment. The findings highlight the importance of implementing a gender perspective to the government's response. The absence of this element resulted in women's financial hardship and limited ability to recover from post-war consequences. This paper finishes with policy recommendations to alleviate the economic status of internally displaced Lebanese women.

These recommendations include:

- **Amending** labor laws to promote gender equality
- **Extending** legal protections to women in informal sectors
- **Promoting** women's economic participation and leadership
- **Strengthening** monitoring and enforcement mechanisms

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Lebanon war displaced 834,000 people, with women accounting for 52% of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) (UNRWA, 2024). Women faced challenges such as lack of opportunities, low pay, and limited technical skills. Addressing these issues is crucial as they limit women's financial independence and participation in the labor market (UN Women, 2022). For instance, a UNDP report predicts a 32.6% unemployment rate by the end of 2024 (UNDP, 2024). Specially, the unemployment rate will reach 15% by 2025, an increase from 11.57% in 2023 (Macrotrends, 2024; Trading Economics, 2024). The female unemployment rate in Lebanon rose from 14.3% in 2019 to 26% by mid-2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis (UN Women, 2020). Accordingly, displaced women face more vulnerabilities such as low educational attainment, limited access to legal safeguards, and cultural barriers (Moghadam, 2013). Hence, long-term solutions in post-conflict recovery strategies are crucial. One-size-fits-all solutions are insufficient for meeting the varied needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Therefore, gender-specific approaches and strategic partnerships are needed to understand IDP needs and provide targeted support (Yasukawa et al., 2023).

From this notion, this paper examines the economic status of Lebanese women during and after the 2024 war, focusing on factors contributing to their unemployment and the solutions needed to address this issue. War-induced displacement exacerbated existing gender disparities in the labor market and reduced women's prospects, especially with the lack of childcare provisions, other essential services, and skill training opportunities. As a result, the interconnected problems that cause women to experience a multifaceted situation during their displacement and the consequences that accompany it are highlighted in this paper.

Before the September 2024 war, Lebanese women, despite their significant employment in education, health services, and retail, had a lower labor force participation rate than regional and international averages (UN Women, 2022). The country's heavy reliance on the service sector disproportionately affects women, who are more likely to accept low-wage jobs (The Global Economy, 2023). The main reasons for this low rate of female economic participation include a deeply rooted patriarchal culture, inadequate laws and regulations, and a lack of a gender perspective in the Lebanese Constitution (UN Women, 2022). This results in women working in specific fields with few high-paying opportunities (UN Women, 2022; UN Women, 2020). Additionally, women in Lebanon are twice as likely to be unemployed, work under adverse conditions, and earn less money, especially in informal jobs (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2024).

In the case of displacement caused by conflict, research from South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Syria shows how women suffer excessively when large-scale violence erupts and causes them to become unemployed. War-related economic disruptions in these countries have pushed women into informal sectors or forced them to quit their jobs (UN Women, 2024). For instance, the relocation of Syrian refugees to Lebanon has exacerbated their vulnerabilities, particularly in terms of employment. Syrian refugee women, like Lebanese women, are frequently compelled to work in low-paying, unstable domestic or agricultural employment (UN Women, 2022). This strain on local resources and heightened competition for jobs makes it increasingly challenging for displaced women to find work and perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependency (Te Lintelo et al., 2018). Research shows that displaced women in Lebanon face poverty and dependency cycles due to the absence of stability and the limited presence of aid. Their labor force participation rates

differ from those of non-displaced women due to systemic obstacles and socioeconomic difficulties (Zetter & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011). Policies should consider displaced women's rights, long-term job market empowerment, and economic integration. Hence, understanding the dynamics of the armed conflict that led to Syrian refugee women's displacement is crucial for creating gender-sensitive policies and assisting women in unemployment (Mahmoud, 2017). These issues impact not only individuals but also the state's economy, necessitating a review of policies supporting gender-inclusive access to the job market and women's empowerment in post-conflict environments. (Fakoussa-Behrens & Kabis-Kechrid, 2020). Accordingly, policy interventions should prioritize displaced women's skill development and resource access and include their experiences in policy-making processes to enhance equitable labor participation.

In Lebanon, social and political instability caused supply chains to break down, labor markets to become dysfunctional, and people to lose their jobs, especially women. In this sense, women are disproportionately affected by violence-induced supply chain interruptions, particularly in labor-intensive businesses like agriculture (Khodeir, 2023). Hence, the unstable political atmosphere in Lebanon has worsened economic volatility and impacted low-skilled industries, such as retail and education, where women are concentrated (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2024; International Labour Organization ILO, 2022). As a result, post-war sociocultural norms limit women to traditional gender roles and societal expectations, hindering their economic empowerment (UNESCWA, 2020; World Bank Group, 2024). Their experiences during conflict are significantly influenced by gender, as they have limited access to resources, decision-making authority, and social safety networks (Murphy et al., 2022). Accordingly, women in these situations are more susceptible to financial hardship, forced migration, and sexual assault (Chan, 2024). These barriers to female empowerment and economic ramifications further increase gender inequality in Lebanon (Concern Worldwide, 2024).

POLICY ASSESSMENT

Many states offer models of efforts and programs related to policy measures as solutions for alleviating women's economic situations that declined because of the war.

Women in Ukraine comprised 72% of the unemployed population in 2024. This demonstrates that in times of atrocities, women are frequently the most impacted. As a result, the Ukrainian government implemented financial incentive schemes for businesses that employed IDPs throughout the conflict. To guarantee that IDPs and single mothers find work, the government paid businesses that hire unmarried women with children. In turn, this measure lessened the financial strain on the government and freed up funds for humanitarian organizations to use in other emergencies. This strategy allowed highly educated women to apply their expertise and contribute to the country's recovery efforts. Previously, in 2023, the Ukrainian government provided microgrants to help small and medium-sized businesses advance women's employment rates and support female entrepreneurs. This approach highlights the government's calculated measures to support economic growth and offer more economic opportunities to women. To illustrate, this resulted in thirty-one percent of senior leadership roles being occupied by women, and 60% of women who started their businesses benefited from these solutions (Bou Serhal & Al Khazraji, 2024).

Another example of a conflict-affected nation is Afghanistan, where during and after the war, women received microloans and business training from the "Women for Women International"

organization. Through this support, Afghan women were able to achieve some financial independence by establishing modest enterprises like tailoring and embroidery (Ganesh et al., 2013). A different organization named "Solar Sisters" trained rural Afghan women on how to start their solar energy businesses. Women were able to establish sustainable livelihoods, market and install solar household systems and gain access to clean energy (UN Women, 2023).

Similarly, through the "Women's Peace Hut Initiative", the government in Liberia, provided women with training in different vocations, including carpentry, sewing, and agriculture, allowing them to reconstruct their lives and earn a living after a conflict (UN Women, 2019). Likewise, in Colombia, government-led initiatives were implemented to provide women with financial assistance. These initiatives emphasized training for artisanal crafts, sustainable agriculture, and tourism, and assisted women in rebuilding their lives in the face of financial difficulties (Chemonics, 2017).

In the Lebanese context, many programs were established with the aim of helping women in distress. For instance, the Islamic University in Lebanon provides women access to different schemes such as scholarship opportunities, mentoring programs, and the chance to participate in international programs (Islamic University of Lebanon, n.d.). NGOs such as the Michel Daher Foundation collaborated with Anera and introduced women to a program that blends technical training and soft skills development to match the pace of the evolving job market (Michel Daher Foundation, 2023). Similarly, Berytech has been supporting women to delve into web and technology roles through a project connecting them with business ecosystems and providing them with the tools and resources needed to succeed in this field (Berytech, 2019). These examples further illustrate the potential of Lebanon's effective initiatives and their capacity for large-scale implementation.

The previously mentioned examples of governments adopting measures to alleviate the financial challenges experienced by women during violent wars lead to the following conclusions:

- The government and non-governmental organizations are responsible for empowering women economically, reducing their vulnerability, and creating a sustainable future for them.
- Women require training in technical and practical skills to access opportunities that enable them to generate income and reach financial independence.
- Systemic challenges must be addressed to support the successful participation of women in the job market and achieve economic empowerment.
- Academic and Community-based approaches suggest that training within communities can improve economic prospects.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative methodology, combining focus groups and interviews, to explore the realities of women's work in Lebanon, especially the consequences of war-induced internal displacement. Interviews were conducted with a local business owner and an HR recruiter, while focus groups were conducted with internally displaced women experiencing unemployment. The insights gained from this approach provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue being studied. The secondary data collection in this paper is based on preexisting data from journal articles, datasets, and case studies. The triangulation of data from multiple sources enhances the

validity and dependability of the findings. Furthermore, the data analysis of interviews and focus groups is conducted in order to understand women's experiences during the conflict, focusing on issues like job loss, skill development, discrimination, and unstable finances. It contrasts participants' diverse backgrounds with similar experiences, highlighting the impact of various critical issues on their post-war financial struggles.

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP

Interviews with a local business owner and HR recruiter reveal that laying off women in the Lebanese job market is more convenient than men. They argue that men need jobs more than women, and layoffs are determined more by lower losses for the firm or organization than by performance or competence. Despite corporate laws ensuring equitable practices, financial concerns are to be considered when making decisions. The challenge is to prevent women from being disproportionately impacted, and no purposeful measures have been adopted to lessen the impact of layoffs on women due to the dire situation in Lebanon. Moreover, limited funds for laid-off workers have forced women to rely on luck for better opportunities. Additionally, the lack of gender awareness exacerbates the discrepancies in layoffs, with women over forty and those employed only months before the war being among the first laid off. As a result, companies describe the conflict's financial impact on them and cite it as the reason why they are unable to provide financial support to those who have been laid off.

Four women who were laid off during the crisis discussed their experiences and expectations for solutions. They explain that finding a job during displacement was challenging due to a tight labor market, competition for well-paying jobs, and hyperinflation. The main obstacle was the absence of government funding for support programs or social services. NGOs could not provide financial or health assistance, instead preferring to focus on emergency assistance. Based on their answers, the most suitable assistance they would have preferred during unemployment was financial aid, skill development, and microloans. Participants also identified gender as a barrier to better employment possibilities and emphasized the need to consider societal bias. They also highlighted the importance of connecting with small businesses and potential clients.

In summary, the absence of sufficient programs and initiatives to alleviate women's economic situation during and after the displacement crisis was evident in this study. After their layoff, communication with them was limited and financial assistance was absent. Hence, state-level support programs are needed to address these challenges and improve the economic stability of women in political and social uncertainty.

FINDINGS

- Decreased women's employment rate across different sectors is caused by the war and displacement.
- Lack of opportunities for high-paying jobs limits women's economic independence.
- Limited access to skills training programs hinders women's career potential.
- Insufficient financial and social assistance led by the government and NGOs.
- Inadequate access to childcare and other essential services.
- Social and cultural constraints as well as gender-conforming stereotypes in specific jobs.
- Increased caregiving obligations due to the displacement and the need to provide support.

- Policy concerns are to be addressed from a gender perspective.

Briefly, Lebanon's reaction to the internal displacement issue has not taken a gender perspective into account, which renders women disproportionately susceptible to financial difficulties and impedes their ability to recover. The absence of gender as an important aspect in urgent solutions and critical situations resulted in women facing multifaceted difficulties. This reality limited their access to resources and support systems and eventually impeded their recovery process. As a result, Lebanon needs to address the gender gap to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness in the response plan. This conclusion is based on the responses from the interviews with the HR recruiter and the local business owner and the focus group discussions with internally displaced women. Moreover, it is important to adopt targeted intervention plans and policies that tackle urgent needs of internally displaced Lebanese women. Lebanon can develop a more equitable and long-lasting rehabilitation process for all those impacted by internal displacement by acknowledging and resolving the gender gaps in accessing resources and assistance. Accordingly, some solutions that might improve women's circumstances include having access to childcare services and financial and social support. Lastly, the lack of practical solutions that may have improved women's economic situation led to the formulation of this study's policy recommendations.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy recommendations derived from this study are based on improving the lives of women, especially in unforeseen situations, such as war-induced displacement.

Amend labor laws to promote gender equality

- The Ministry of Labor and Parliament should revise regulations to prohibit gender-based discrimination in hiring, wages, and promotions.
- Ministry of Justice must enforce stricter penalties for workplace harassment and gender-based violence.
- National Commission for Lebanese Women should lead awareness campaigns to inform women of their legal rights.

Extend legal protections to women in informal sectors

- Ministry of Labor must integrate domestic and informal workers, including migrant women, into labor laws.
- Trade unions and employers' associations should develop workplace policies that protect informal workers.

Promote women's economic participation and leadership

- Government and private sector should establish gender audits and equal pay policies.
- Ministry of Economy and business chambers must incentivize gender-inclusive hiring practices.
- The government and NGOs should provide women access to training, and mentorship programs to meet the demands of the labor market

- The government should strengthen social safety nets to provide income to women and their families.
- The government should increase access to affordable childcare and other social services to support working women.

Strengthen monitoring and enforcement mechanisms

- UN agencies and civil society organizations should support frameworks to track labor law compliance.
- Government and donors must ensure sustainable enforcement of gender-sensitive policies.

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