

Effects of economic crisis on gender-based inequalities- Case of Lebanon

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Lebanon has been assailed by a series of crises starting with the economic crisis amidst the spread of a pandemic, followed by the 4th of August Port explosion. Among all these crises, the financial one has led to drastic changes in citizens' everyday lives and has increased inequalities among men and women. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA), more than 55% of the population now belongs to the poor class (UNWomen, 2020). Poverty has experienced a threefold increase from 8% in 2019 to 23% in 2020 (UNWomen, 2020). These current crises have negatively affected women, irrespective of their ages and occupation. In this paper, I will dwell deeper into how the economic crisis aggravated by the spread of COVID has affected women's participation in the economy. The effect of the current economic crisis is not only limited to work women but also affects young female disproportionately. For that, I will also shed light on the impact of the crisis on girl's education and particularly on Syrian and Palestinian refugees. In the end, I will provide recommendations that can help overcome these problems.

Lebanon's economic crisis has negatively impacted women's engagement in the economy of the country more than men. Even before the start of the financial crisis, women's unemployment rate was ranked amongst the lowest in the world. According to Salti et al, the authors of "Women on the Verge of an economic crisis", women's unemployment rate has increased from 14.3% in 2019 to 26% by the end of 2020. This data can be translated to an 82% percent increase in women's unemployment rate in Lebanon with the surge of the financial impasse. At the same time, the number of women who have either stopped working or lost their jobs in 2020 has increased by 63% jumping from 81200 to 131500 women (UNWomen, 2020). One can conclude that the economic crisis in Lebanon has disproportionately affected women's participation in the economy.

We have a large proportion of people who still believe that women do not need to work as men do. They should instead leave the paid workforce and take care of their homes and families. Besides, women who preserved their work faced multiple barriers that contribute to a refrain in their career growth (ILO, 2020). These barriers include cut in wages, and decreased promotion opportunities limiting women's ability to support themselves and their families in the long run, hence promoting their fragile labor force participation status. In my opinion, the dramatic increase in women's unemployment can further negatively affect the social and economic situation in Lebanon. This increase will decrease women's access to pensions and health care insurance leading to an increase in women's dependence on their men relatives. This situation can promote domestic violence at home since the male will become the only income receiver at home. As such, the financial crisis exhausting people's mental health, can push violent men to get it out on their wives. Therefore, women cannot enter hospitals in that case since they lost their jobs and their access to health insurance plans. They can no longer pay since they depend on their husbands. That is why, women's participation in the economy can create more inclusive societies and attract other dependent women to enter the workforce labor market. It will encourage women to become independent and to feel that they create a positive impact in the society.

On the other hand, the education sector in Lebanon became highly susceptible to the economic crisis and has disproportionately affected young teenagers. The gloomy economic situation has deteriorated citizens' ability to pay their children's school tuition fees. Moreover, private school tuition has become highly unaffordable, pushing children to attend public schools instead of private ones (Reliefweb,2020). As a result, the Lebanese public school system reached its maximum capacity with Lebanese children, not allowing Syrian and Palestinian children refugee to have access to free education (Reliefweb,2020). In addition, lots of private and public

schools moved towards e-learning to adapt to the lockdown measures imposed amidst the COVID pandemic. Therefore, parents had to bear additional costs to purchase e-learning supplies such as laptops, wifi routers for their children to attend their classes. The drastic increase in school tuition as well as in e-learning supplies costs has potentially led to an additional decrease in student enrolment and more particularly among female teenagers (ILO, 2020). Illiterate parents or parents from a limited education background do not support the e-learning process and do not believe in the necessity of education for their daughter as much as for their son. This statement was proven through interviewing 10 Syrian families having their girl child enrolled at a public school here in Lebanon. I have noticed that 6 out of these 10 families have dropped their daughters from schools with the start of COVID since they believe education is not as important for girls as for boys. Besides, a 10-year-old girl reported that she and her family only have one smartphone that she shares with her siblings to attend her classes. Sometimes she does not attend any classes because her father takes the phone for work. In my opinion, dropping children and more particularly girls out of school will expose them to higher risks of early marriage or street work since they have limited educational knowledge on how to prevent themselves from falling into tragic situations.

The UN Women is working on providing Lebanese women an equitable society that values their rights and their impact in the workforce market. Hence, it is crucial to reform the agenda and implement progressive strategies that help in reducing inequalities among men and women in work. The reformed agenda should also focus on distributing growth in the firm equally among men and women. The UN started supporting unemployed women through a “global grant-making mechanism” known as The Fund for Gender Equality (UNWomen, 2020). This mechanism aims at empowering civil society sectors led by women through financing them. Hence, women can

invest in initiatives that provide women new jobs opportunities and that help them reach leadership positions (UNW, 2020). On the other hand, to combat the education crisis young girls are facing, the Ministry of Education and education actors such as NGOs and the UN should cooperate to provide educational opportunities for as many teenagers as possible. Their role is crucial in attracting national and international donors that can assist students in paying their tuition and in buying them e-learning tools that can help them have equal access to learning despite their financial situation (Relief web, 2021). At the same time, I believe that it is important to implement strategies that allow all students to learn from home despite their financial background. Therefore, the Ministry of Education can provide communities free wifi connections and homes one device that offers students online access to their lectures. In addition to the role of the government, schools can make e-learning accessible to all their students through offline portals. Besides, schools can provide their students weekly hard-copy lectures with a detailed explanation of the materials that can keep students up to date with the learning process. If implemented, these simple recommendations can positively impact girls' future. They can prevent teenagers from being prone to child labor, child abuse, or even early marriage.

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