

A Gender Media Audit of the Beirut Blast Aid, Response and Coverage

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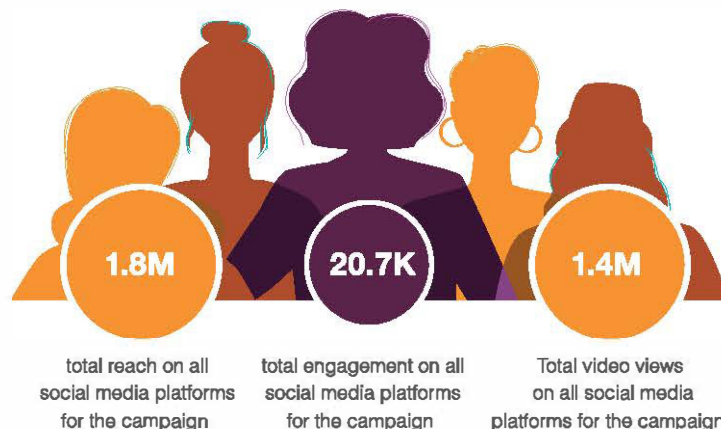
Introduction

After the Beirut Port Explosion on **August 4, 2020** the lives of all Lebanese were changed irrevocably, but for women, girls, and other marginalised groups, this was especially significant

Women's rights activists and feminists signed a charter then of demands after the blast, expressing their concern that well-intended aid would not be used for necessary and gender inclusive relief, given that the government's response had not been gendered.

The fact that women have historically had lower participation in economic and political decision-making, has not stopped them from responding to the crisis, and performing tasks that are typically attributed to men, such as their role in civil defence and their post-blast volunteerism in reconstruction efforts. Unappreciated efforts by women and adolescent girls who volunteered in relief were compounded by a feeling that they were under attack from those who were supposed to protect them from vulnerable situations, such as the state's authorities, who discriminated against them.

Supported by Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, Fe-Male in partnership with UN Women Lebanon launched a gender media audit on Beirut Blast as part of an intervention to address, highlight, and acknowledge the needs, challenges, and contributions of women and girls and marginalised groups to peace building and recovery efforts.



Fe-Male also got main national actors together to discuss response plans from gender perspective and push for women to be included in decision-making and recovery plans after the blast.

The gender media audit included consultations and one-on-one coordination meetings with relief and response actors; an advanced training workshop on storytelling and mobile journalism (MOJO), targeted at adolescent/young

girls; production of multimedia content amplifying women, girls and the marginalised voices and needs; monitoring of media coverage related to the blast from a gender perspective; and a culminating event intended to raise the voices of women and girls and share their experiences with local community actors, partners, and donors.



Why a Gender audit?

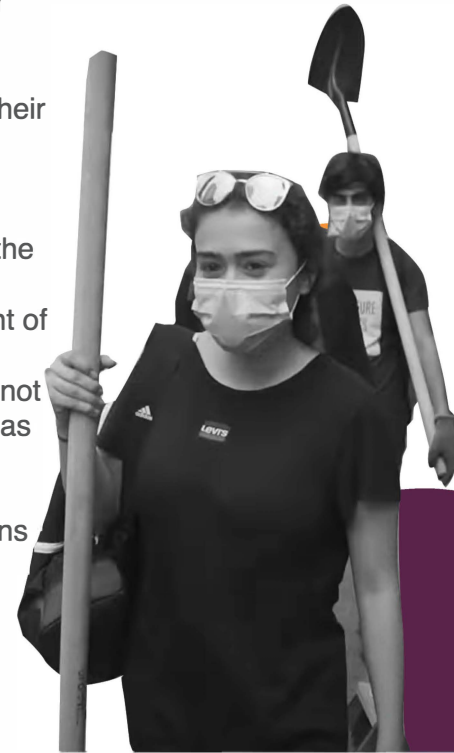
Marginalised groups not restricted to women, girls, LGBTQ+ communities, refugees, migrant workers, and women with disabilities were excluded from or neglected in the context of the explosion, and neither the recovery efforts nor their impact on the lives of the most vulnerable and affected were given gendered consideration.

According to a rapid gender analysis of the Beirut Port explosion, “From a sample of 45 UN and NGO assessments published in response to the explosion, over one third of them lacked sex disaggregated or gendered findings. When gender analysis was included within assessment findings, the mention of gender was often limited or marginal.”

During the project's duration, Fe-Male sought to serve as a platform for underrepresented women and girls, documenting their experiences and advocating for their needs and priorities; promoting gender equality through informational and investigative reports; and introducing solutions based on the reality and needs of women and girls in the local community.

Fe-Male recognized that gender biases are mirrored and reinforced in the media. It matters that men are more frequently identified as experts and that we hear their voices more frequently in the media that we consume.

In order to prevent their gender biases from affecting how they organise and conduct their research as well as the content they publish, journalists and content creators bear some of the responsibility. This is especially crucial in light of recent revelations that news organisations do not often welcome women as employees and that gender biases held by people and organisations can have a variety of negative effects.



Through this gender media audit, Fe-Male aimed to redefine the production and digital media campaigning on the rights and needs of women and marginalised groups affected by the Beirut blast and accumulating crisis in Lebanon.

In addition to providing a space for them to share their stories and amplify their voices calling for more support and involvement in peace-building, recovery efforts and decision making, Fe-Male was keen as well to highlight the situation and gaps through evidence based multimedia content that allowed people to grasp the findings of different researches and assessments related to the response for the blast via understandable and simplified info graphics and image and to introduce and promote the initiatives and tireless work of local, women-led and women's rights organisations who were among the first to respond to the catastrophe after the devastating Beirut Port Explosion on August 4.



Facts and Figures

Within this gender media audit, we conducted in-depth desk research on the available data and information about gendered responses and needs after the blast.

The main findings reflected an alarming situation and challenges mainly for women, the elderly, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community, migrants, and refugees who had challenges getting to the aid that was allocated for the communities affected by the explosion in Beirut.

Despite all the calls for the need to prioritise women's and girls' needs in the relief efforts, adequate attention has not been paid to their specific vulnerabilities;

150,000 women were displaced

as a result of the explosion at the Beirut port including **84,000** women and girls who were of childbearing age.

A significant portion of the affected population is made up of vulnerable women, with households headed by women making up **51%** of those households and elderly women living alone making up **8%** of those households.

The data also showed that displaced women require additional support in the areas of health, family planning, nutrition, sanitation services and psychosocial care.

More female-headed households (**42.2%**) than male-headed households (**40%**) said they had at least one member with a mental or physical disability, with access to healthcare and services related to sexual and reproductive health for women and girls being at risk because **50%** of Beirut's hospitals were not operating, and a decrease in the availability of reproductive health services for households with pregnant or breastfeeding women, where 40% of women say their babies and mothers need health care. Two years after the explosion, access to health services, especially first aid, is still urgently needed for women and marginalised groups.

Women played an important role in the official and non-official humanitarian response to the blast. Still, some spoke about the discrimination and harassment women responders face in this domain. Some women did not feel safe in the affected areas after the blast and discriminatory practises combined with the fear of harassment or abuse are deterring some women from receiving equitable humanitarian assistance.

According to the "In the Shadow of a State: Towards Gender Responsive Aid" study conducted by SEEDS for Legal Initiatives, the first aid shipment to Lebanon that was specifically directed at women arrived in 2001.

Between 1992 and 2020, the average amount of aid given to women and girls ranged from 0.1 percent to 8.39 percent.

The needs of LGBTQ people and households headed by women were the least specifically targeted by funders when they related to women or minority groups. According to the [UN website](#), women's mental health needs as well as the needs of volunteers and first responders who are female were never specifically targeted.

The Beirut Blast recovery initiatives received **167 million dollars** in total funding, with about **3.8 million dollars** specifically earmarked for women, or about **2.28%** of the total fund.

The review of Gender Equality in the Humanitarian Response to the Beirut Port Explosion by UNOCHA and UN Women found that women make up **62 percent** of Lebanon's humanitarian country team, one of the highest percentages of women in comparable teams worldwide.

To further help translate the gender inclusive humanitarian response and social accountability into practice we, at Fe-Male have worked on an explainer that reflects the latest coordination mechanisms, frameworks, and commitments towards gender equality.

[Click here to check all infographics & references](#)



Stories and Voices

Journalist Mirella Abou Khalil

took it to the street and explored the gendered experiences and urgent needs through conducting a series of interviews with members of underrepresented communities, such as sex workers, ex-offenders, elderlies, single mothers, daughters, and members of the LGBTQ community, whose perspectives are rarely represented in mainstream media. We learn from Mirella's interviews that many women, particularly those from underrepresented groups, were denied their right to justice following the August 4th explosion.

Despite the difficulty in reaching the most vulnerable and convincing them of the importance of echoing their voices and showcasing their recovery journey, the brilliant women we met were willing to share their stories, both the challenges they had overcome and the successes they had enjoyed.

The exclusion of trans people in Lebanon is exacerbated because of the dearth of resources catering to their needs and the challenges they encounter when trying to obtain identification documents that accurately reflect their gender identity and expression. Aid given to trans people, who are already marginalised, was discriminatory and got worse after the explosion. Sonia (pseudonym) reflected on how the crisis among Lebanon's trans community after the blast, and anguished yelping into the void.

[click here to watch video](#)



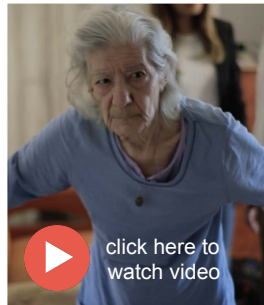
From the interviews conducted by Mirella, we learn that many women, especially those from underrepresented groups, are denied access to aid and support and their right to justice after the August 4th blast. Many workers, including sex workers, were not included in the blast relief programmes because they did not have formal employment. There are many obstacles in the way of sex workers receiving aid and justice. Since sex workers' experiences are rarely heard in the media, Nagham (pseudonym) spoke up for other women saying, "All I wanted was a safe place to come back to, but sadly, with the stigma that comes with being a sex-worker, I was denied aid-and just like everyone else, denied justice."

[click here to watch videos](#)



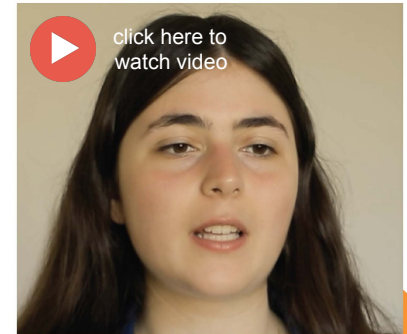
Rim (pseudonym), who had previously served time in prison, experienced feelings of alienation from society as a result of her limited access to social assistance programs. This was especially true after the explosion, when she witnessed the destruction of her home. Rim takes us on a journey through her life while she is forced to continue living with her parents and siblings in an unstable home.

A senior citizen in Lebanon named Seralpi Kattah is also fighting for survival, just like Rim. Almost two years after the deadly blast tore through Beirut's port, some residents of Lebanon, including Kattah, received aid that was sporadic, late, and insufficient—despite hundreds of millions of dollars of pledged international aid and the fanfare surrounding it. Kattah continues to suffer in isolation, with no one to comfort her in her time of need.



On the evening of August 4, 2020, 16-year-old Ariana Papazian lost her mother, Delia, in the Beirut port explosion. In a moment of panic and utter chaos, she was forced to choose between holding onto her mother's lifeless body, which she discovered lying on the floor of what had once been their home, now completely destroyed by the blast, and fleeing the building with her friend and her brother. Nearly two years after the blast, Ariana translated her pain into ink and published a book titled "Delia: A Survivor's Story" to talk about her mother and their journey. The book describes the emotional destruction brought by the cruel and sudden setting in which her mother was killed, as well as her own life after that tragic loss.

Political leaders from different factions in Lebanon are banding together to thwart any accountability. The injustice only makes Ariana's suffering worse and pushes her to the edge of yearning to leave her homeland. She has grown to feel more abandoned and disappointed as the months and years have gone by due to the general public's indifference.



The injustice is also a demand for at least 800 people who have been reported to have suffered temporary or permanent disabilities as a result of the explosion, including Mirna Habboush. The 36-year-old mother was driving with her 1-year-old son while taking the highway that parallels the port on that fateful day. Her body was covered in glass, her car was severely damaged, and everything inside was on fire. Like many other victims of the explosion, Habboush has had to spend millions of Lebanese pounds on surgeries and medical care. She has had several operations since the explosion at the port. Habboush was refused payment for the procedures and finds herself struggling to get medication and proceed with the other operations.



Discrimination arises out of an ocean of unfairness. After escaping the blast in Beirut, Lulu, a migrant worker in Lebanon, found her life plagued by health problems and increased marginalisation. She called it a "violent and traumatic experience" in which locals were indifferent to her plight because she was not one of the lucky few to have made it out alive. Lulu insists she has never forgotten what she has been through.

In the wake of the bombing in Beirut, single mothers faced major challenges as they tried to gather the supplies they would need to begin the recovery process. Sonia Apanian, a single mother, talks about how difficult it was for her to make ends meet during the economic downturn and the Beirut blast on August 4. "I strive to help my family, my neighbourhood's underprivileged residents, my community at large, and, ultimately, myself," Apanian's perseverance helps her survive each day in the aftermath of the explosion and the severe economic impact on Lebanon.



Another sad story of a broken mother which we highlighted is that of Lilian Cheaito, who two years ago had her son taken away from her, her access to healthcare denied, and her life threatened by the failures of the state, banks, and courts in Lebanon. With tears in her eyes, Cheaito's sister explains that Lilian's lungs must be constantly cleared of phlegm by a nurse using a suctioning machine. Cheaito and her family are caught in the grip of their country's multiple crises. A couple of months ago, she said her first words in nearly two years, "mama" as a cry for her toddler Ali, whom she hasn't seen since the explosion due to a custody battle with her husband. It is worth mentioning that after publishing the report we produced about Lilian and after months of pressure from Fe-Male and other feminist groups and activists and media outlets, she was finally allowed to meet her son after two years of suffering.

A Collective Effort: Documenting Initiatives



There was no doubt that the Beirut blast had a disproportionate effect on Lebanon's most vulnerable populations. It was not a matter of if they were affected, but rather the extent to which they would be, the nature of the inequities that would emerge, and the potential solutions that could be implemented through various platforms and policies.

Local and women's rights organisations and grassroots collectives and initiatives took heartening steps to collect data on impacts, hear from marginalised groups such as women, migrant workers, and the LGBTQ community, and review evidence on policies that were shaping up (or had worked in the past) to mitigate impacts. Many collaborated with one another to identify gender-responsive policies and programs that would centre women in all their diversities in what would have to be an unprecedented recovery effort.

One of the heroes is the **Anti-Racism Movement**, which was founded by young Lebanese feminist activists in collaboration with migrant domestic workers. They organised a fundraiser to help migrant workers and refugees affected by the explosion, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Lebanon's deteriorating economy, and explained through their social media channels the impact of the crisis on the many non-Lebanese who became homeless due to the close proximity of their homes and jobs to the explosion site. In their relief response, ARM showed that solidarity with migrants and refugees in the face of racism is more important than ever.

LGBTQI+ community members who felt displaced due to the blast's destruction of their homes, businesses, and places of employment were assisted by **Haven for Artists**. "Moving away from your home is not always considered displacement. The only places where we felt secure, met people, and felt protected were Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael. Since its members do not feel safe elsewhere in Lebanon, I believe that eliminating LGBTQI+ safe spaces had a significant impact on this community," Dayna Ash, the Director of Haven for Artists said.

Our first line of defence here at **Fe-Male** was to head out to the affected areas, assess the damage, and pitch in wherever we could with cleanup efforts and rebuilding initiatives. We also started a series called "Women of Beirut " that featured their stories in order to provide women and girls who were impacted by the explosion with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and share them with others. We also argued for the strengthening of protection measures because many girls were left more vulnerable to violence after the explosion because they were forced to leave their homes and felt unsafe walking down the dimly lit streets after the explosion. In the aftermath of the explosion in Beirut, the primary focus of relief efforts was on the distribution of food. The number of young women who reported not having access to menstrual products was not taken into consideration. Because their families had lost their homes and possessions, these young women did not have access to the safe and sanitary menstrual products that they required during their periods.

The subsequent recovery efforts that often reinforce social inequality and marginalisation, hindering paths to sustainable development, were a focus of ours.

For example, we've worked on ways to counteract the effects of inequality and marginalisation on relief efforts by introducing new ideas. An additional focus is on ways to support the mental health of all citizens, including those from diverse cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic classes.

Fe-Male feminist response to the Beirut blast

[click here to watch video](#)



Auberge Beity is an organisation that works to empower local communities in order to promote sustainable development. As part of its efforts to improve disaster management after the Beirut blast, Auberge Beity has focused on women who are business owners or household heads, women who are frontline activists, and elderly women who live alone. These three groups of women were among those who were most affected by or involved in the explosion that took place in Beirut.

The team from **Dar Al Amal** was one of the first to respond to the needs of the groups most left behind living in the affected areas, including sex workers and ex-prisoners. Sex workers usually live in poor areas. They live alone or with co-workers, and for these women, losing their houses means losing their only safe place. For a day or two following the explosion, a few sex workers stayed in the houses of people they knew, but they could not stay longer because their hosts started asking them for something in return, whether money or sex services. There are women who have fled Syria and were forced into sex work to make a living in a foreign country. For many, the blast triggered the trauma that they had been trying to forget. Their mental health was further affected, and two years later, they are still suffering from distress. Dar el Amal has also helped people who had previously served time in prison in order to let go of the feelings of alienation from society as a result of their limited access to social assistance programs.





A study on the recovery initiatives funded in the wake of the Beirut blast was conducted by **Seeds**. They have carried out a study evaluating donors' roles in promoting a gender-inclusive response and whether they took into account the recommendations listed in the Charter of Demands agreed upon more than 45 Feminist Activists and Women's Rights Organizations in Lebanon, published on August 27, 2020, as a guideline for their research.

Shababeek organisation has also become aware of the survivors' challenges.

Faten Zein, the founder of Shababeek, played an important role in the development of "Women for Beirut," a post-disaster initiative that was initiated by the non-governmental organisation FiftyFifty in response to the massive explosion that took place in Beirut. Because of this initiative, a lot of people learned about the various kinds of fieldwork that Lebanese women from all over the country had done in the past. In addition to this, all of the data that was available concerning the requirements on the ground was distributed to the appropriate parties. Additionally, it helped to coordinate donations and published maps depicting all of the damaged streets.



The Support Center, the Child Protection Unit and the Anti-trafficking unit at **KAFA** were quick to action when the explosion first hit. The teams immediately contacted KAFA beneficiaries in affected areas to assess their needs. In this vein, they compiled a list of needs assessments. Among the first steps that were taken was the distribution of food boxes to the beneficiaries, as well as non-beneficiaries who asked for help, in addition to packages of cleaning supplies and hygiene kits. Some emergency aid was also given to pregnant women, babies, and young children. This included diapers, formula, and other goods, as well as some medical help when it was needed. KAFA also gave out shoes, clothes, blankets, and home supplies that people gave them in kind.

Full initiatives documentation video



[click here to
watch video](#)

Later, KAFA started providing cash assistance to women who met a set of criteria for getting help after the explosion. They also started buying plane tickets for migrant domestic workers who wanted to go back to their home countries and fixing up partially damaged homes, mostly by fixing doors and windows.

Since the explosion in Beirut, **I Stand For Women** has been working tirelessly to provide assistance to as many businesses run by women as they possibly can. Help was provided to businesses that were listed in a database of companies owned by women. In order to assist women-owned businesses in reopening, Stand for Women provided these businesses with the machinery, computers, and supplies necessary to meet their needs. They promoted these companies' online visibility even further with the assistance of UN Women, which was very helpful.

Click to hear from warrior women on the frontlines responding to Beirut blast



Gender audit of mainstream media coverages

The gender audit of media organisations was conducted in the context of mainstreaming gender equality principles. The time frame covered August 10th through August 31st, 2020.

The objective of the audit was to identify and analyse the strengths, good practices, weaknesses, gaps, and challenges in the institutional mechanisms and processes for gender mainstreaming in Lebanese media.

Methodology

Data was obtained for the Media Gender Audit and analysed for this related project. The data is scraped from three television stations (MTV, LBC, and Al Jadeed), two print news outlets (Annahar and Al Akhbar), and two online websites (the National News Agency and Elnashra). When conducting the analysis of the television stations, our primary focus was on the prime time news.

We analysed 21 days' worth of data (August 10th to August 31st, 2020). Articles and news segments varied in length. The selected timeframe comes after considering that the first reports after the blast were chaotic as the situation was vague and uncertain. Also, the period we monitored witnessed a high concentration and percentage of coverages related to the Beirut port explosion.

Numbers

In total, we have looked at **77 news** items about the Beirut explosion.






Overall findings



Women were only mentioned six times out of 33 reports about the blast during prime time or in the interviewees' voices, regardless of whether they were survivors or experts. Women were also only mentioned four times in total across all print and online articles/coverages monitored

(44 articles/coverages in total).

	 Television (LBC, MTV, Jadeed)	 Online Websites	 Print outlets
Number of reports that were focused on women stories/ interviewed women survivors of the blast	4 (12%)	0 (0%)	2 (9%)
Number of reports that interviewed women experts	1 (3%)	1 (4.5%)	0 (0%)
Number of reports that tackled (were focused on or dedicated to cover) women/gender issues (like GBV, sexual and reproductive health, sexual violence, labour rights....)	1 (3%)	1 (4.5%)	0 (0%)

Conclusion

It is often assumed that all members of a population experience the impact of disasters in the same way. However, natural disasters, conflicts and crisis are not neutral: They have different effects on men, women, girls, and boys because of gender inequalities caused by socioeconomic conditions, cultural beliefs, and traditional practices that have repeatedly marginalised groups such as women, migrant workers, and the LGBTQ community.

These groups are also vulnerable to the indirect effects of disasters, such as sexual and gender-based violence, early and forced marriages, loss of livelihood, and access to healthcare, deterioration in sexual and reproductive health, and increases in their workload, all of which compound the gender-specific impacts of disasters.

The strength of post-disaster recovery lies in how well it responds to the needs of marginalised communities. Recovery has the potential to transform unequal power relations that contribute to gender-diverse vulnerabilities and provide a "window of opportunity" to promote gender equality. However, it is critical to recognise that efforts to promote women's rights are limited.

On the media front, it is crucial that organisations implement related strategies across the board, especially for coverage of disaster recovery, in order to make significant progress toward gender equality.

The role of the media in combating gender biases and ensuring that women and those who are marginalised are at the centre of coverages and priorities, particularly during times of crisis when they are typically more susceptible to violations and exclusion than at other times of the year.

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