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Universal Periodic Review of Lebanon, 3rd Cycle

Annex to the UPR Submission by the United Nations Country Team¹

30 July 2020

The present annex is a summary of updated information for the period March-July 2020, including the human rights impact of recent developments including COVID-19, and the evolving socio-economic situation in Lebanon.

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I. Introduction

1. Since the preparation of the UNCT UPR report for Lebanon in March 2020, the socio-economic situation in the country has deteriorated even further. The accelerating economic crisis, exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to vast business closure, soaring unemployment and weak social protection measures. The country's most marginalized segments of society including low-income families, refugees and displaced persons, and migrant workers – especially domestic workers – have been hit hardest. Yet, even the country's middle class is shrinking significantly, many of whom are falling into poverty, while others are seeking to emigrate. The country's currency – the Lebanese pound (LBP) – has lost approximately 80% of its value,² sending inflation soaring, and making food insecurity a grave reality faced by many. Furthermore, the country's energy crisis has led to widespread electricity shortages. Alarming, this has also affected hospitals' abilities to operate, including Lebanon's main hospital tasked with caring for COVID-19 patients.³
2. Though the country has managed to maintain the lowest number of COVID-19 cases in the MENA region due to a commendable early response by the authorities, numbers have been rising in recent weeks following the lifting of containment measures and re-opening of the international air travel.
3. The Government has reached out to international and regional partners, and talks with the International Monetary Fund are on-going in an effort to unlock much-needed financial support. The dialogue with the IMF has been hampered by internal political disagreement, and the lack of a unified approach regarding a recovery plan that could lead to an IMF programme. In this context, the human rights situation in the country, in particular *vis-à-vis* economic and social rights, has taken a marked downturn. In addition, escalations in tensions during public demonstrations protesting the situation has at times resulted in violence, raising concerns of further deterioration into social unrest.
4. The country is in dire need of swift, economic solutions and deep structural and institutional reforms if it is to stem the widespread hardship faced by the population on a now daily basis, and build the foundations to put the country on the right track. At the same time, with global fears of a second wave of COVID-19, Lebanon will need to maintain vigilance while it seeks to re-open its economy, to avoid a surge in COVID-19 numbers that an overwhelmed healthcare system could ill support.

II. Promotion and protection of human rights

Detention

5. In line with efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19, some 600 persons were released from places of detention. Meanwhile, WHO is coordinating with partners the COVID-19 response in central prisons; an action plan was developed and is being implemented by all partners (Ministry of Interior and Municipalities/Internal Security Forces, Ministry of Public Health, WHO, UNODC, UNDP, ICRC, Lebanese Society for Infectious Diseases and Clinical Microbiology (LSIDCM) of the Order of Physicians of Beirut).
6. An initial risk assessment was conducted in the three central prisons (Roumieh, Tripoli and Zahle) in March 2020, followed by a preliminary training to health and non-health staff on COVID-19. A total of 60 persons were trained. In the first week of June, an in-depth risk assessment was conducted in Roumieh Central Prison with the objective of updating the infection prevention and control measures; the assessment was joint undertaking between partners. Following this assessment, WHO provided a medical team for the newly renovated building dedicated for quarantine/isolation of cases in Roumieh central prison.

7. In addition, following advocacy efforts, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities decided to close an overcrowded detention place in Beirut; WHO and UNODC are closely coordinating for the safe closure and transfer of detainees in line with COVID-19 prevention and control measures.

Enforced disappearance

8. On 18 June 2020, the Council of Ministers approved the composition of the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons. The Commission is established pursuant to Law 105 on Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons of 13 November 2018 and is tasked to investigate enforced disappearances with the power to access and collect information, carry out exhumations and identifications of burial sites and hand over to relatives the remains of their loved ones. It also enshrines the “right to know” for all families without discrimination. The decision was published in the *Journal Officiel* on 25 June 2020. Additionally, the members of the national commission on Enforced Disappearance were sworn in on 15 July 2020.

Freedom of expression

9. Since March, the UN has continued to receive reports of summons and interrogations of journalists, media professionals, and bloggers for views expressed about the financial and socio-economic situation in the country and the performance of public officials.
10. The UN has engaged in efforts to safeguard freedom of expression by raising the issue with different national parties. UNESCO has supported capacity-building of media professionals on safety matters (health, physical and gender), and on disinformation and Fake News.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association

11. The impact of sustained lockdown measures, which exacerbated the rapidly deteriorating economic and financial situation, triggered renewed public protests. In early April 2020, mostly peaceful demonstrators joined convoys of vehicles to denounce the deteriorating socio-economic situation, sharp price increases and devaluation of the local currency. Some demonstrators called for the easing of the lockdown restrictions, while others decried their inability to feed their families.
12. However, by the end of April, some protests turned violent, with a number of banks in Beirut, Saida, Tripoli, and Tyre being vandalized and targeted by Molotov cocktails. This resulted in clashes in Tripoli between demonstrators and security forces involving the use of gunfire, rubber bullets and teargas, leading to the death of one demonstrator and injuries on both sides. It was reported that demonstrators also set on fire army vehicles, and targeted soldiers with Molotov cocktails. In a statement, the Lebanese Army stated that “infiltrators have carried out riots, vandalized public property and burned a number of bank branches.” On 27-29 April, 77 civilians and 159 soldiers were reportedly injured with security forces being particularly targeted by demonstrators.
13. In response to the escalation in tensions, on 1 May the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) called on everyone to exercise utmost restraint, to refrain from violence, and to respect property.⁴ OHCHR reminded law enforcement officers of their obligation to abide by international norms and standards on the use of force, particularly the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality. OHCHR also urged demonstrators not to resort to violence, and stressed that the right to peaceful assembly protects non-violent gatherings.
14. On 6 June, demonstrations deteriorated into clashes along sectarian lines. The Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces deployed heavily to prevent escalation. The Internal Security Forces used teargas to disperse protestors vandalizing private and public property near Parliament. Twenty-five soldiers and 48 civilians were reportedly injured during the protests.

15. In reaction to further devaluation in the Lebanese currency, demonstrations were held in Beirut and Tripoli on 12-13 June, which turned violent. Some 123 persons, including 26 Lebanese Armed Forces personnel, were injured. The Higher Defense Council convened on 15 June, following which the Lebanese Armed Forces arrested 36 people for acts of vandalism, damage to public and private property and attacking security forces.
16. With the renewed mobilization on the streets, the UN continues to urge demonstrators to exercise their right to peaceful assembly and expression within the rule of law and without resorting to violence and in line with preventative measures to avert the further spread of COVID-19. In parallel, the UN equally calls upon the security forces to abide by international norms and standards on the use of force, as well as the principle of legality, necessity and proportionality.

A. Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Adequate standard of living including housing

17. Housing challenges increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic hit Lebanon at a time of dire socio-economic meltdown and thus the impact on the human rights situation cannot be separated between these two crises. The pandemic brings to light the importance of having an adequate home as a basic human right, since the primary measure that was adopted for the prevention of the spread and the treatment of identified cases (not in need of hospitalization) was to stay home. Vulnerable communities living in dire conditions (overcrowding, lack of WaSH facilities, etc.) do not have the access or means to decent living conditions to stay protected from the pandemic. This was shown, for example, in the incident of the virus spread in two buildings inhabited by 74 migrant workers (of Bangladeshi and Syrian origin)⁵ in Ras El Nabeh (Beirut). Overcrowding puts vulnerable households at a higher risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19.
18. Additionally, the risk of eviction has seen an uptick in the past few months, as an outcome of the socio-economic challenges facing Lebanon. Many households are now at risk of eviction and homelessness. A particular example where the risk of eviction and homelessness intersected with the lack of labour rights of groups at risk is the case of Ethiopian migrant workers who found themselves without shelter when their employers let them go due to their inability to continue to pay their salaries.⁶

Education

19. Lebanon's economic crisis has had significant consequences for the country's education system. As parents struggle to pay private school fees, many have resorted to transferring their children to public schools. However, public education facilities are overstretched and struggling to absorb the uptick in students. As a result, it is expected that the dropout rate will increase in the next academic year. The situation has also led to increased pressure on the UNRWA education system for refugee children.
20. In addition, with the outbreak in COVID-19, 1.2 million children have been affected by school closure and have seen their learning routine disrupted. While Lebanon has switched to distance teaching and learning to mitigate the effects of such disruption, including through online platforms, TV and radio, challenges related to preparedness, infrastructure and capacity, as well as the digital gaps, have put additional strains on students, parents, teachers, and the educational authorities.
21. On 2 March, to better contain the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government closed all schools and educational institutions in the country. In line with this decision, the Education Sector recommended all Non-Formal Education (NFE) service providers to close their centers as well to ensure the health and safety of learners. Consequently, over 1.2 million school-aged children have been affected by school closure in Lebanon, including public, private, semi-private, and UNRWA schools. In the public

education sub-sector, approximately 495,000 students were affected including 205,000 non-Lebanese students. In addition, the education of close to 95,000 public technical and vocation education and training (TVET) students was disrupted.

22. In response, on 25 March, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) launched a distant learning plan for all public schools. The data from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education has indicated mixed results.
23. School closure has widened learning inequalities, affecting the most vulnerable children and youth disproportionately. The digital gap has prevented the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in Lebanon, including Syrian and Palestinian refugees, from having access to education. Refugee children enrolled in suspended non-formal and formal education programmes have been deprived of education due to their families' difficulty to access and manage distance learning opportunities. To mitigate the impact of the crisis on refugees, the UN in Lebanon has developed specific tools and resources to support children learning during the COVID-19 emergency: UN-paid teachers and education cadres have implemented in Palestinian camps a Self-Learning Programme, and the UN provided digital learning resources to the Ministry of Education to be used by Lebanese and non-Lebanese students.
24. Moreover, school closures have affected youth enrolled in vocational and technical education and training, as distance/remote learning is not appropriate for such kind of education.
25. In addition, the COVID-19 outbreak and ensuing school closures have disrupted the emotional and psychosocial well-being of students, creating a sense of fear and anxiety. This has required appropriate interventions to provide psychosocial support for learners, and to help children through this difficult time. In response, the UN in Lebanon has developed communication learning materials and special TV episodes, targeting teachers and parents, to raise their awareness on addressing the stress and psychosocial needs of children during distance learning.
26. The shift to distance learning has also represented a challenge for teachers, especially those lacking appropriate training in the use of ICTs. This has required special interventions to strengthen teachers' capacities in distance/online teaching and build their skills to use ICTs in education.
27. As schools are expected to re-open at one point, key decisions are yet to be made regarding the preventative actions and measures to be taken to ensure the safety and health of students and educational personnel.
28. Several UN agencies including UNESCO, WHO, WB, UNICEF, WFP, and UNHCR are helping to elaborate the 'the Back to School Plan' with focus on learning and teaching on the one hand, and on reaching the marginalized on the other hand. Agencies are also working with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to develop a comprehensive "Education Institutions Re-opening Framework". This framework sets out guidelines for all education institutions such as, universities, day care, basic education, adult education, etc.

Labour rights

29. Months into an already severe economic crisis, the COVID-19 outbreak brought business activity in Lebanon to an almost complete halt, further exacerbating conditions for workers, particularly those who are self-employed, or involved in the informal sector and dependent on daily income. The total number of unemployed has reached 550,000 or 30% of a total labour force. This number includes the 130,000 jobs lost in 2020 so far.⁷

30. Large number of households have suffered income losses during the period, due to layoffs, salary cutbacks, or the withholding of wages. A survey conducted by the World Food Program in June 2020⁸ showed that almost 30 percent of respondents from Lebanese households reported loss of work following the COVID-19 outbreak, while 23 percent reported a salary reduction.
31. The impact on women was more pronounced in terms of salary reductions, as 24 percent of female respondents said that their salaries were reduced during the period, compared to 21 percent of men. Non-Lebanese workers who are commonly more involved in informal labour were considerably more impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. Across Lebanon, nearly 90% of Syrians and almost 80% of Palestinians have either lost their income-generating possibilities or have had their salaries reduced since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak or even before.⁹ Indeed, women working in the paid care sector continue to report being underpaid and overworked. In Tripoli, some women working in nursing homes are sleeping on-site in order to protect the well-being of the elderly residents during COVID-19.¹⁰
32. Analysis from another recent assessment looking specifically at the impact of the crisis on vulnerable groups in Lebanon found that 48% of women reported being laid off, compared to 40% men.¹¹ Meanwhile, 7% of women reported wage reductions, compared to 3% of men.¹²
33. Given the already significant discrepancies between the rates of women and men in the labour market, that women are reporting lay-offs, as well as income and wage reductions at higher numbers is of significant concern and could result in a prolonged dip in women's engagement in the paid economy. Women do far more domestic and care work than men in Lebanon, where just over 50% of men say that they have ever participated in domestic work, compared to close to 90% of women.¹³ The lockdown measures and school closures under COVID-19 have amplified this dynamic, with women at the forefront of homeschooling, caring for the sick and the disabled, and cleaning. These conditions have made ever more difficult for women to look for and maintain jobs.

Health

34. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already strained Lebanese public health system that is suffering significant shortages – especially on medical imports – due to the prevailing economic and financial crises. Inability to afford medical costs is a major barrier to accessing health care services. Job cuts have increased people's inability to meet basic needs, particularly access to urgent health care, inability to afford the cost of the consultations at the health centers (even the subsidized costs), as well as the transportation cost to the health facilities. Such barriers in accessing healthcare increases the risk of a major outbreak in communicable disease, including vaccine-preventable diseases, such as Measles and Polio. In addition, given the reduced ability to access to PHC centers, caregivers of children under five years old and pregnant and lactating women are not seeking their regular malnutrition screening, which will have implications on their actual nutrition status that will deteriorate with time.¹⁴
35. The Government's National Committee for COVID-19 shared with UN and donors its National COVID-19 Response Plan in March, which is aligned with the UNCT pillars and aims at implementing the Health Emergency Plan while maintaining the basic essential services. The Government made clear that it does not have capacity to support non-Lebanese, increasing pressure on UN agencies to take on the support for refugees in COVID-19 response. The UN has advocated for "one response" in terms of coordinated response: UN compliments government with additional capacity to respond to and cater for additional cases.
36. The UN and partners have been working closely with the Government to plan and provide assistance in line with the national response under the leadership of the prime minister and the inter-

ministerial task force on COVID-19. The response is premised on the principle of a single health system under the oversight of the government and offering the same services to all, without distinction on the basis of gender, nationality or status. Joint efforts have included strengthening the preparedness and response capacity of the health system; increasing engagement and communication with communities; promoting good hygiene practices; and ensuring the continuation of critical pre-existing activities under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) that are an enabler of COVID-19 response.

37. In collaboration with the MOPH, UN agencies and health partners have been supporting the intensive care capacity through procurement of relevant and life-saving ICU equipment; by improving management and surveillance system, and by supporting health care services in the hard to reach areas of the country, which will contribute to the resilience and coping capacities of the most vulnerable patients and their families, through facilitating access to basic essential and life-saving services to decrease morbidity and health complications, and avoid further impoverishment caused by COVID-19. WHO in Lebanon has also undertaken several initiatives to support the Government's COVID-19 response, including the co-sharing of hospital fees for vulnerable persons.¹⁵
38. The centers in the National Primary Health Care (PHC) Network initiated screening for COVID-19 following the training conducted by the Order of Nurses in collaboration with the PHC department at the MOPH. PHC staff use a triage questionnaire including risk factors for COVID-19 infection (travel, contact etc). These PHC centers have been equipped by UNICEF since early March with basic personal protective equipment, which allowed them to provide services with high quality infection prevention and control and avoid any risk of infection. Where a positive case is suspected, the MoPH call center is informed and follows up.¹⁶
39. Municipalities have identified municipal isolation areas for mild COVID-19 cases that cannot isolate at home and separate arrangements for isolation and medical care is being established for Syrian and Palestinian refugees, including two isolation facilities established in UNRWA installations to serve both Palestine Refugees and other nationalities. One of the public health measures to achieve outbreak containment includes quarantine, which involves the separation of healthy individuals who may have been exposed to the virus, from the rest of the population, with the objective of monitoring symptoms and the early detection of cases. Quarantine is implemented as part of a comprehensive package of public health response and containment measures and, as per Article 3 of the International Health Regulations (2005), be fully respectful of the dignity and human rights of the concerned individuals. Quarantined persons are provided with health care, financial, social and psychosocial support, and basic needs such as food, water and other essentials. Noting that the needs of vulnerable populations is prioritized.
40. In coordination with UNRWA, the MoPH is carrying out random screenings of in Palestine refugee camps in an effort to measure the nationwide spread of COVID-19.

Social Protection

41. National efforts have been undertaken to support Lebanon's most economically marginalized in light of the current economic and health crises. In mid-March 2020, the Lebanese Government pledged around LBP 75 billion from its own budget to support families most in need in the form of food parcels and hygiene baskets. On 1 April, the Government announced that the assistance would be in the form of cash. In this vein, 400,000 LBP was distributed by the army to the most vulnerable families, who were affected by the economic and financial crisis, and the COVID-19 outbreak. The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) requested from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) that the household application for assistance would include a gender lens to enable analysis of women's socio-economic vulnerabilities. MOSA confirmed that a significant portion of the assistance would support female-headed households.

42. On 7 July 2020, the Minister of Economy and Trade, Raoul Nehme announced that the Government would fully subsidize “300 basic commodities, including meat and derivatives, oil products, vegetables, seeds, nuts, milk, tea, coffee, poultry, etc., and the exchange rate [would] be set at 3900.”¹⁷ The aim behind the broad list of subsidized items was to “secur[e] the majority of essential goods to citizens at low prices and boosting the purchase power.”¹⁸
43. UN agencies (UNICEF, ILO and WFP) provided technical assistance to rapidly guide the Government to identify the vulnerable and reach excluded groups (persons with disabilities, the elderly, people with chronic disease *etc.*), and distribution mechanisms. However, the Government relied on lists of beneficiaries taken from the Ministries of Social Affairs, Public Health, Education and Labour in the first wave of cash distribution, and these included mine victims, taxi drivers, parents of children in public schools, and non-food beneficiaries in the Emergency National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP), reaching a total of 140,000 households. A second wave of cash assistance is to follow under the National Social Solidarity Project (NSSP), whereby new beneficiaries will be added to those who benefited in wave 1, to reach a total of 200,000 households. The social assistance of 400,000 LBP per household is planned to be distributed on a monthly basis until December 2020, ahead of the upcoming the World Bank programmes, *i.e.* Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN).
44. On the policy side, the development of the National Social Protection Response Strategy, which was initiated in early 2020, has been adapted to take into consideration the repercussions of the economic crisis, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the social protection strategy is being developed with linkages to the emergency response, and will include immediate and urgent short-term priorities to be undertaken, along with the longer-term policy framework. The work has advanced in terms of consultations, discussions, and engagement with different government stakeholders, as well as non-state actors. In June 2020, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Social Policy, overseen by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Social Affairs, endorsed the work and agreed to establishing Technical Working Groups to contribute in the development and drafting of the strategy, and to serve as a platform for government and national experts to discuss and identify policy priorities and strategic orientation of the Strategy.

B. Groups at risk

Women and girls

45. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the impact of the COVID-19, as evidenced by the increased reports of domestic violence and abuse. Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse is incorporated across the local health plan response. The COVID-19 lockdown has exacerbated incidents of gender based-violence (GBV), particularly for women and girls, who may find themselves confined to their homes, many with their perpetrators. High levels of violence against women in Lebanon have already been compounded by quarantines and social isolation, and job and income losses have exacerbated individual, family and societal stresses. Incidents of harassment, discrimination and verbal, physical and economic abuses have also been reported amongst particularly vulnerable groups, including migrant domestic workers, LGBTQI+ communities, and youth.¹⁹
46. National and international GBV service providers have closely monitored trends related to the number of GBV incidents reported or calls received, but aggregated national analysis is not currently available. Initial reporting from Internal Security Forces (ISF) hotline on domestic violence (1745),²⁰ and hotline services run by several NGOs have also indicated an increase in calls and new incidents of violence including online discrimination, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, blackmail, and hate speech.²¹ ISF reported sexual harassment and blackmailing crimes to have increased by 184% through cyberbullying during COVID-19 lockdown.²² The age breakdown of these survivors shows

that 41% are aged 12-26 years old as compared to 27% that are 26 years or older.²³

47. Similarly telling, the Inter-Agency SGBV Task Force in Lebanon, conducted an impact assessment of COVID-19 on the SGBV situation in Lebanon. The findings showed that 57% of women felt less safe in their communities, while 54% felt unsafe in their own homes since the lockdown. Moreover only 54% of women and girls interviewed were able to seek services.²⁴
48. The State has sought to adapt protection services during the pandemic to ensure access to justice response to domestic violence cases through mobile and online platform services. 24/7 reporting lines for violence run across the country, including the national ISF hotline and those run by nongovernmental service providers. In addition, case management, psychosocial support, and information counselling are available remotely via phone or social media platforms, and service providers are working to adapt quickly to the current context, following new guidelines.²⁵
49. The attorney general of the court of cassation, Judge Aweidat, issued a circular in April 2020 addressing the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, public prosecutors, the Directorate General of Internal Security Forces, and the Directorate of General of Security instructing officers of the judicial police to immediately open all records of domestic violence. The circular further permitted lawyers to personally take note of domestic violence complaints and juridical officers to do the same through video technology or any other appropriate means.²⁶ The first online protection order in response to domestic violence was issued on 23 April, protecting the survivor, her children and extended family from the perpetrator.
50. The UN and partners have responded by expanding the capacity of shelters for female and male survivors of violence, strengthening capacity of hotlines and outreach services, awareness raising, advocacy, and knowledge production and documentation of the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, when it comes to GBV in particular.
51. Women and girls amongst Lebanon's refugee population (both from Syria and from Palestine), have faced significant suffering on account of their particularly precarious economic situation, exacerbated by the outbreak of the pandemic. Women and children have been at heightened risk of mental health issues as they have been more strictly confined to the house than men, curtailing their access to supportive social networks and peers, and women have largely been responsible for supporting children's education. For example, during the months of the lock down, UNRWA's legal aid unit recorded a significant increase in the number of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Child Protection (CP) related family law cases concerning Palestine refugees. The lock down also extended to the courts and civil registries, delaying the processing of these cases and thereby preventing women from getting divorced and delaying processes of birth and marriage registrations.
52. Other areas of concern specific to women and girls during this period have been ensuring women and girls' access to sexual and reproductive rights. There was a 45% decrease in the number of women accessing reproductive health services at MoPH primary health care centers between March and May 2020, compared to the same period of 2019.²⁷ The decrease appears to be due to factors related to both the pandemic and the economic crisis, including fears of being infected, movement restrictions, lack of transportation to services, and financial constraints. A multi-sectoral INGO assessment reported that up to 83% of female respondents in a recent survey cite fear of COVID-19 as a reason for not accessing sexual and reproductive health services (SRH), a critical and lifesaving service for GBV survivors.²⁸ Period poverty has also been on the rise in Lebanon, due to the economic impact of COVID-19, and the country's financial crisis itself. The same INGO assessment surveying over 1,100 respondents found that 53% of female care givers, and 66% of adolescent Lebanese and Syrian refugee girls do not have financial means to procure menstrual pad on a monthly basis.²⁹ On 10 July, the Government issued a list of 300 subsidized items and did not included sanitary napkins, only the raw materials for their production. Through the Gender Working

Group, the UN has advocated for the inclusion of sanitary napkins as a government subsidized item to support the needs and rights of women and girls.

53. WHO, UN Women, and UNFPA, in partnership with the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), continue to monitor and report on gendered issues throughout COVID-19 outbreak and response.³⁰ The latest gender alert on COVID-19 in Lebanon (3 July 2020) highlighted that working conditions for nurses are unsafe and often dangerous. While the stress of COVID-19 on the country's healthcare system has contributed to this, the underlying economic crisis is also largely to blame. Nurses in and outside of the COVID-19 response have been confronting massive lay-offs, withheld wages, sharp wage reductions against already undervalued remuneration, insufficient quality and quantities of PPEs in some locations, and skyrocketing patient to nurse ratios. While the Order of Nurses in Lebanon recommends a patient ratio of maximum 1 to 8, many nurses are being overstretched to provide care at over double that rate, at 1 to 18.³¹

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons

54. Lebanese civil society organizations have noted that the economic collapse of Lebanon led to increasing discrimination of LGBT people, in particular with regard to their socio-economic rights. NGOs announced the legal support project, to deal with LGBT workers' labour rights.

Children

a. Child labour

55. During the first phase of the general mobilization and country lockdown, Child Protection Partners reported a considerable decrease and withdrawal of children from labour, in accordance to overall business closure and the withholding of activities in informal sector. However, the ongoing economic crisis coupled with the country's gradual lift of the lockdown and ongoing school closure is registering a strong comeback of children's engagement in child labour, and the signs are suggesting an even larger increase in the upcoming phase. In alignment with worldwide projections, it is not only that the rate of child labour will increase, but the conditions of children are also likely to worsen. It is projected that children will engage in work that has lower pay rates, longer working hours, and worsened conditions including hazardous works and worst forms of child labour. There is real concern that such conditions will expose children to a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19.
56. The UNICEF Child Protection Sector is counting on integrated and multi-sectoral programming to be able to address different needs of children engaged in labour, with a focus on child protection interventions, adapted education and learning programs and social assistance. In addition to tools and guidance developed for remote case management and guidance for face-to-face modality for high risk cases, the sector is also counting on local engagement with municipalities and community-based structures to ensure a comprehensive and tailored intervention plan. To support such initiatives, an Action Plan targeting Street and Working Children during COVID-19 is being developed with the Ministry of Social Affairs to ensure that children working in the streets (who are most at risk of COVID-19 infection) are supported through a comprehensive approach that includes health awareness-raising, hygiene material distribution, PPE materials, PCR test when needed along with other cross-sectoral services; education, social assistance and child protection.

b. Juvenile justice

57. On 19 March 2020, the Higher Judicial Council issued a decision to allow for the early release of some prisoners to limit the spread of COVID-19 in places of detention. This decision was implemented by the Ministry of Justice in partnership with the Bar Association. UNICEF, through its

partners the Union for Protection of Juveniles in Lebanon (UPEL) and Movement Social, provided support and follow-up to juveniles who benefited from that decision and were released from places of detention. However, not all juveniles in detention were released, and this is due to the restrictive criteria that was used to identify beneficiaries.

Persons with disabilities

58. The non-governmental organizations providing educational and rehabilitation services to children with disabilities closed their premises following the Government's decision to close all educational institutions on 2 March. Local service providers struggled to provide remote learning and rehabilitation services to children with disabilities due to the parental response and attitude towards online learning/services especially in the lack of access to internet, data and devices. UNICEF provided data bundles to its partners to allow children with disabilities to have access to the internet.
59. User-friendly online platforms were created, and WhatsApp calls and chat groups were used for educational and rehabilitation services. However, one-on-one follow-up is limited, in addition to direct and individual support to caregivers and children with disabilities. With the gradual decrease in COVID-19 restrictions, specialized services for children with disabilities have resumed, though in lower capacities. Indeed, centres are not open daily, and have limited the number of individual sessions per day. Learning sessions have continued to be provided online.
60. The Government is setting up isolation centres for positive/diagnosed with COVID-19 (asymptomatic) or suspected case(s) who do not need medical care or people who do not have a place to stay. Children with disabilities do not have access to these centres. However, UNICEF is undertaking advocacy efforts for their inclusion and provision of specialized support during their stay in the centres.
61. Other UN agencies are also supporting access to information and outreach activities for persons with disabilities. WHO and partners have developed awareness and educational materials that are tailored to persons with disabilities such as translating them to sign language. Under the SIDA fund, UNFPA has collaborated with 10 implementing partners to conduct activities targeting GBV and SRH services, including awareness-raising, outreach, and advocacy at the community level, mainly through peer-to-peer activities. Through this initiative, the partners have been able to target more than 200 persons with disabilities, both within services and outreach.

Migrant workers

62. The COVID-19 pandemic and bleak economic situation have resulted in grave consequences for migrant workers in Lebanon. From March to June 2020, 94% of migrants who sought mental health support from MSF were female, 61% of them under the age of 30; 42% of these women seeking mental healthcare were survivors of physical and/or sexual violence, although the real numbers are likely to be much higher. For the majority, the abuse was perpetrated by their employer under the abusive Kafala system; others experienced abuse by an intimate partner or acquaintance.³²
63. Panic and fear of the COVID-19 virus is increasing xenophobia and abuse against migrant domestic workers, including abrupt termination of their contracts. Before the airport shutdown, migrant workers reported forced departures before their contract end dates and without prior notice.³³ In addition, pandemic-induced fear led some local authorities to apply discriminatory measures in late May, such as an entry ban for migrant workers in certain municipalities.
64. The Ministry of Labour asked migrant domestic workers' employers to consider any days that employees spent quarantined as paid sick leave. Nevertheless, as the economic situation

deteriorates, many employers are no longer in a position to pay salaries, least of all in foreign (USD) currency.

65. In June, the Ministry of Labour and Caritas sheltered a number of Ethiopian domestic workers who camped outside the Ethiopian Embassy, after losing their jobs and being forced out of their accommodations with employers. Meanwhile, a number of Sudanese migrant workers held a protest in front of Sudanese Embassy, requesting repatriation as they lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 crisis.
66. In Lebanon, the first experience of community-based quarantine in the context of COVID-19 was operationalized as a response to the cluster of cases among migrant workers from Bangladesh in Beirut. Several partners were able to support the quarantine sites, for nursing and medical follow-up, PPE, rental, site manager, transport and food, testing and medical monitoring. The nurses took the initiative of translating the basic instructions for self-care and monitoring of symptoms to the migrant worker's native language. This significantly improved the migrant workers compliance to instructions, and alleviated their apprehension towards quarantine.
67. On a positive note, the Minister of Labour announced the plan to reform the notorious Kafala system governing employment of migrant domestic workers. The Ministry is already working on a standard employment contract, which would guarantee labour rights to these workers, and the Ministry will also establish a hotline to receive complaints. Preparations for concluding agreements with embassies of countries of origin of migrant domestic workers are also under way.³⁴

Refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons

68. The still-unfolding economic and political crises have been exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak and the restrictive measures implemented to prevent and contain its spread. This is having a direct and dramatic effect on core protection concerns for refugee families, with living standards deteriorating exponentially over the past year.
69. Slowing growth, currency devaluation, and price inflation have diminished employment and livelihood opportunities and reduced purchasing power. As a result, refugees are now have difficulty paying rent, buying food, and obtaining medicines and basic necessities.
70. Families are coping with these circumstances in potentially harmful ways, for example by reducing food consumption, selling assets and going deeper into debt, and face increased protection risks including eviction, exploitation, and child labour.
71. In cooperation with MOPH, and as part of the national testing campaign, the UN and partners are conducting sample testing of Syrian refugees in informal settlements and collective shelters, and Palestine refugees in camps. In addition, a COVID-19 coordination group for Palestine refugees is being led by UNRWA.
72. Even though the travelers movement decreased drastically between Lebanon and Syria, UNICEF responded to the current situation by expanding support with nursing human resources for COVID-19 screening and provision of isolation messages and by providing PPEs for points of entry (border crossing points and airports) as well as training of general security officers on prevention and awareness of COVID-19.
73. Prior to COVID-19, many refugees from Syria, including Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS), without legal residency in Lebanon, restricted their movements to avoid contact with the authorities due to fear of detention and deportation. Anecdotally, these self-imposed limitations on movement among refugees from Syria have increased even further during the COVID-19- induced lock down period, while authorities have been more present in public spaces to control movements. As of July 2020, these challenges remained due to the high presence of authorities in response to ongoing protests

triggered by the economic and political situation. Where refugees without legal residency reside in camps, they are unable to enter and exit, posing a challenge to accessing basic services and justice functions.

a. Deportation

67. Around mid-March 2020, following the border closure between Lebanon and Syria and instructions to security forces to limit the number of arrests to reduce overcrowding in detention, deportations came to a halt.

b. Legal residency

69. On 17 July 2020, the Lebanese General Directorate of General Security issued a circular announcing a decision to facilitate regularisation of irregular stay for Arab citizens and foreigners. At the time of the present submission, the exact terms, procedure and consequences of this decision remained unclear. In particular, it was not clear on what terms Palestine Refugees from Syria were included.
70. With extreme poverty rapidly raising amongst the refugees due to the loss of livelihood, inflation and devaluation of the Lebanese Lira caused by the economic and financial crisis and exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation, very few refugees, if any, will have the capacity to pay the fee for a residence permit.
71. Given the exceptionally difficult socioeconomic situation prevailing in Lebanon and the centrality of legal residency for refugees' protection and access to essential services and civil registrations, a general fee waiver would be the most effective way to facilitate access to legal residency. This should be irrespective of whether the refugees are registered with UNHCR, and should apply to all categories. UNHCR will continue to support the GSO with capacity to process a higher number of residency applications.

c. Respect for due process

71. Loss of income and accumulated debt linked with lockdown measures and economic crises have led to a notable increase in the number of refugee families unable to pay rent and living under threat of eviction. The number of evictions had remained limited during the lockdown due to the understanding by the authorities that homelessness can exacerbate the risk of COVID-19 transmission, and to some landlords being understanding of the exceptional circumstances. However, with the ease of the lockdown measures and many landlords counting on rental payments for their own basic needs, more evictions are now taking place. In this context, it is essential that due process procedures are followed in the event of evictions, in accordance with relevant Lebanese law and international standards.

d. The situation of Palestine refugees

73. While prior to 2001, Palestine refugees were entitled to property ownership, this changed with the adoption of Law No. 296/2001 and they are now prevented from legally acquiring and transferring immovable property in Lebanon. This has led to insecurity of tenure as many have been forced into informal rental arrangements and have been deprived of the benefits of property ownership. While to date there have been more reports of threats of eviction than reports of actual evictions, this Law makes Palestine refugees from Lebanon (PRL) particularly vulnerable to the risk of evictions during the ongoing economic crisis and increases pressure on their mental health. Palestine refugee camps are overcrowded and have substandard infrastructure, sanitation and housing, which has made it very difficult for PRL to implement social distancing and other mitigating measures, while increasing stress levels and the risk of domestic violence. In addition, camp inhabitants have limited opportunities to improve their housing conditions; for instance, the movement of building materials into Palestine refugee camps requires the authorization of the Lebanese authorities, but individual

requests submitted by Palestine Refugees are rarely approved.

74. In cooperation with UNRWA, the MoPH is conducting systemized random testing in Palestine Refugee camps and (at the time of reporting) two isolation centers have been established in UNRWA installations, to serve as isolation centers for both Palestine Refugees and other nationalities. In addition, UNRWA is continually carrying out covid-19 awareness raising activities specifically targeting Palestine Refugees in Lebanon.
75. Following the COVID-19 related lock down of schools across the country, UNRWA similarly closed its 65 schools and activated its SLP for the 36,817 pupils. Core subjects across all grade levels have been adapted to focus on key competencies. Through social media platforms, self-learning materials are being widely used by students and caregivers across all grades and core subjects. Guides for teachers, parents and caregivers have also been developed to support self-study.

¹ The present annex was prepared by members of the UNCT in Lebanon, and supplements the UNCT submission dated 26 March 2020.

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53390108>

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/lebanon-s-main-coronavirus-hospital-forced-to-close-operating-rooms-due-to-power-cuts-a9604356.html>

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25854&LangID=E>

⁵ COVID-19 response – Lebanon bi-monthly situation report 29 May 2020

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Lebanon_COVID-19_bi-monthly%20situation%20report%20v4%20_202005029FINAL.pdf

⁶ <https://www.france24.com/en/20200625-abandoned-by-employers-ethiopian-domestic-workers-are-dumped-on-lebanon-s-streets>

⁷ <http://www.businessnews.com.lb/cms/Story/StoryDetails/8681/550,000-unemployed-InfoPro-survey-shows>, published on 26 June 2020.

⁸ Assessing the Impact of the Economic and COVID-19 Crises in Lebanon, WFP (June 2020)

⁹ In Focus: Rise in evictions due to increased economic vulnerability, July 2020 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/77872>

¹⁰ ACTED-UN Women livelihoods project in Tripoli. For more information, please see UN Women, Gender Alert COVID-19 Lebanon In Focus: Women, Gender and the Economy, May 2020, available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/05/gender%20alert%20lebanon%20may/gender%20alert%20o>

<n%20covidlebanon%20issue%202%20english.pdf?la=en&vs=5557>

¹¹ ILO, UNDP, IRC, MC, SC, DRC and OXFAM, "Rapid Assessment on the Impact of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Groups in Lebanese Labour Market," Forthcoming. From a sample of approximately 1,987 men and women surveyed on their reason for income reduction in March 2020

¹² *Ibid.* The same assessment also found that women agreed to the statement "my household's income has decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic" at higher rates than men (69% of women vs. 54% of men strongly agreed).

¹³ UN Women and Promundo, "Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMA GES) Lebanon," 2017, https://imagesmena.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/12/IMAGES_Leb_Report_Final_Web_Dec13.pdf

¹⁴ In response to the deterioration of the economic situation and the ad-hoc humanitarian aid in distributing milk and formula milk, which contradicts the statements of the International Code of Marketing Breastmilk substitutes and its subsequent resolutions and the Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices in Emergencies, more efforts are invested in raising public awareness on the type of proper food distribution.

¹⁵ WHO support includes Human Resource recruitment support for the medical screening team at the airport and supporting Infection Prevention and Control training for nurses in medical screening teams at border crossing points: Providing medical team and basic medical equipment for the established isolation centers that will host persons who are COVID-19 positive but asymptomatic or have mild symptoms but are unable to self-isolate at home (due to vulnerability such as living in overcrowded households, etc.); Implementing Infection Prevention and Control training for nurses working in hospitals and primary health care centers; Procurement of an automatic nucleic acid extraction machine, COVID-19 testing kits and laboratory reagents, personal protective equipment, respirators, portable X Rays etc.; Offering technical and logistical support to the MOPH's Epidemiological Surveillance Unit in conducting surveillance, contact tracing, testing, and modelling outbreak progress and projections; Establishing specialized mental health services for children and young adults affected by COVID-19. WHO is also supporting the continuity of services during COVID-19 by providing essential medications for acute and chronic diseases as well as mental health conditions.

¹⁶ UNICEF provides extensive and comprehensive support for the PHC centers in establishing linkage/referral between the primary health care and the hospitals, in orienting patients, in providing reassurance, in counselling via implementing partners by telecommunication, in setting up pre-triage pathway, in linking public health primary healthcare centres and public hospitals, and in indirectly limiting non-urgent admissions to hospitals. As such, UNICEF is supporting the continuity of immunization and maternal and new-born care. Also, the healthcare workers of the public hospitals designated for COVID-19 response are trained on IPC, PPE, proper triage and management of patients. By providing sufficient quantities of PPEs, supporting in the increase in staffing, contributing to the decrease risk of burnout and fatigue, will subsequently decrease the risk for healthcare workers to get infected by COVID-19.

¹⁷ <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/en/show-news/117544/Economy-Minister-Subsidy-will-include-300-commodities-at-3900-rate>

¹⁸ <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/273170>

¹⁹ UN Women, Gender Alert COVID-19 Lebanon In Focus: Access to Justice and Gender-Based Violence, 22 April 2020, available at

<https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/gender-alert-on-covid-19-lebanon> ; See also: UN Women, Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon In Focus: Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence, 3 June 2020, available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/lebanon%20gender%20alert%20issue3/update%20652020/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%203english.pdf?la=en&vs=3305>

²⁰ The 1745 ISF hotline received 151 calls in April 2020, compared to 97 calls in March 2020.

²¹ The NGO ABAAD received 1,198 calls on their helpline from January 2020 till May 11 2020, compared to 1,193 calls in all of 2019.

²² Lebanon Inter Security Forces, May 2020, <https://twitter.com/LebiSF/status/1257215652995182592>.

²³ Fatima Zein Al Dine, “أرقام صادمة حول العنف الإلكتروني ضد النساء والفتيات وناجيات يرفعن الصوت بالشاشة ما بتحمي”: أرقام صادمة حول العنف الإلكتروني ضد النساء والفتيات وناجيات يرفعن الصوت بالشاشة ما بتحمي” Sharika Wa Laken, May 8, 2020.

²⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/impact-covid-19-sgbv-situation-lebanon-inter-agency-sgbv-task-force-lebanon-may-2020>. In addition, the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) reports increases of several forms of GBV during the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same period months of 2019. Since the lockdown measures under COVID-19, the GBV IMS has observed the following: Disproportionate violence against women and girls (99% female survivors); 3% increase of violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member since the lockdown (69%), more than half were committed by current and former partners; 5% increase of physical assault incidents; and 9% increase of incidents that occurred in the survivors’ home (65%).

²⁵ UN Women, Gender Alert COVID-19 Lebanon In Focus: Access to Justice and Gender-Based Violence, 22 April 2020, available at <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/gender-alert-on-covid-19-lebanon> ; See also: UN Women, Gender Alert on COVID-19 Lebanon In Focus: Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence, 3 June 2020, available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/06/lebanon%20gender%20alert%20issue3/update%20652020/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%203english.pdf?la=en&vs=3305>

²⁶ Generalization number 77/2020 issued by the President of the Supreme Judicial Council on April 21st, to formalize an online mechanism to accept and rule upon complaints presented by emails before judges of urgent matters. For this purpose, email addresses of the courts dealing with domestic violence cases in the different Lebanese regions have been disseminated, increasing access to justice for survivors.

²⁷ MoPH Lebanon Data, June 2020

²⁸ Plan International Lebanon, “Covid-19 Needs Assessment,” April 2020, <https://plan-international.org/publications/covid-19-multi-sectoral-needs-assessment>. Also see <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/gender-alert-on-covid-19-lebanon>

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/gender-alert-on-covid-19-lebanon>

³¹ <https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Gender-Alert-on-COVID-19-Eng-Issue-4.pdf>

³² <https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Gender-Alert-on-COVID-19-Eng-Issue-4.pdf>

³³ ILO, “Impact on COVID-19 on migrant workers in Lebanon and what employers can do about it” (4 June 2020)

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_741604.pdf

³⁴ <https://twitter.com/lamiayammine/status/1270006732727689220?s=20>