

Policy Mapping

Violence against Women
(Domestic Violence & Sexual Harassment)

This policy mapping sets out to cover the trajectory of two issues – domestic violence and sexual harassment – under the umbrella of violence against women.

1. Timeline

| Date | Event |
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| 1972 | Lebanon ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, Lebanon has not ratified any related optional protocols. |
| 1972 | Lebanon ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. However, Lebanon has not ratified any related optional protocols. |
| 1977 | Lebanon ratified ILO Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration) and No.111 (Non-Discrimination). |
| 1991 | Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. |
| 1995 | Lebanon participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing and endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action. |
| 1997 | Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) with reservations to Article 9(2) (equal rights with respect to nationality of children), Article 16(1)(c), (d), (f) and (g) (equality in marriage and family relations), and Article 29(1) (administration of the Convention and arbitration in the event of a dispute). However, Lebanon has not ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol, which means that citizens cannot access the mechanism for international adjudication of complaints lodged against Lebanon under CEDAW. |
| 1998 | The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) was established to promote women’s rights and enhance gender mainstreaming in public institutions, following Lebanon’s endorsement of the Beijing Platform for Action. |
| 2000 | Lebanon ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. |
| 2004 | Lebanon ratified the Optional Protocol of the Rights of the Child regarding child prostitution and pornography. |
| July 2007 | NGO KAFA spearheaded the “National Coalition for the Protection of Women from Family Violence” ¹ to advocate for the first draft law on domestic violence in Lebanon. The drafting of the law was a participatory process involving judges and lawyers. The coalition’s work involved legislative advocacy, capacity building, and public engagement. |
| 2008 | Lebanon ratified the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. |
| 2010 | The Lebanese Cabinet approved the draft bill to criminalize domestic violence, proposed by KAFA. Upon initial parliamentary deliberations on the law, it was delegated to a parliamentary sub-committee to review it. |
| 2011 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The parliament passes the Anti-Trafficking Law (164/2011) ● The “honor crime” clause (article 562) was repealed from the Lebanese penal code. This clause was used to reduce the punishment of men who kill their female relatives “to salvage the family’s honor”² |

¹ The coalition was made up of over 40 women’s rights groups, NGOs, and individual feminist activists.

² Other clauses in the penal code – such as articles 193, 252 and 253 – remain in effect, and are used to reduce the punishment of crimes against women.

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| 2011-2013 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This two-year window witnessed a proliferation of feminist initiatives that served to raise public awareness on sexual harassment and violence, mostly led by “Nasawiya”, the “Feminist Collective”³, and the “Najdeh Association” in Palestinian camps. The most prominent of these initiatives were “The Adventures of Salwa”⁴, and a blog⁵ where survivors of sexual harassment can anonymously narrate their stories. • 2013 also saw the establishment of the first Title IX office⁶ at a university in Lebanon (the American University of Beirut). |
| June 2011 | Dar al-Fatwa, the highest Sunni authority, issued a press release condemning the domestic violence draft law (being studied by a parliamentary subcommittee at the time) because it is “a replica of Western laws that incite the destruction of the family”. |
| 2012 | The “Feminist Collective” initiated legal reform on the issue of sexual harassment. In collaboration with progressive scholars and legal think tanks, the collective drafted a law addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. This draft law was never presented at the Lebanese Parliament. |
| 2012 | The “Feminist Collective” – that had then changed its name to “Nasawiya” organized a protest in Beirut under the “Fight Rape” call. |
| July 2012 | The parliamentary sub-committee tasked with the review of the domestic violence draft bill finalized its work and called for a press conference to announce the results – a precedent in the history of parliamentary work. |
| July 2013 | The joint parliament committees approved the draft after making several amendments. |
| March 2014 | On International Women’s Day, 5,000 people took part in a demonstration organized by Kafa and the coalition, with the purpose of pressuring parliament to pass the draft bill on domestic violence ⁷ . |
| April 1, 2014 | Parliament approved the draft law on the “protection of women and other family members from domestic violence” following amendments by a parliamentary subcommittee. ⁸ |
| May 8, 2014 | The domestic violence bill was signed by the then President, Michel Suleiman. |
| May 15, 2014 | The law was published in Issue 21 of the Official Gazette. ⁹ |
| 2014 | MP Ghassan Moukheiber submitted a law proposal where both sexual and racial |

³ The “Feminist Collective” is group of grassroots intersectional feminists that existed between 2009 and 2013; and that was known as Nasawiya between 2011 and 2013. It disintegrated by a decision of its founders and members in July 2013.

⁴ <https://www.beirut.com/l/11890>

⁵ the organization is no longer operational, and the blog was taken down. However, the YouTube Channel for the series is still available.

⁶ Title IX is a federal civil rights law in the United States that was enacted as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. It prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or any other education program that receives funding from the federal government – in the US or abroad. AUB was the first university in Lebanon to create an office for it in 2013, followed by the Lebanese American University (LAU) in 2017.

⁷ The call for this demonstration was fuelled by a spate of highly-publicized deaths has turned the public’s attention to women’s predicament in the country. The successive stories of women killed by their husbands between July 2013 and February 2014. The crimes – the most notable of which are the killings of Roula Yaacoub, whose husband killed her in front of their two daughters after beating them in July 2013; and Manal El Assi, who was bludgeoned to death by her husband with a pressure cooker in February 2014; were massively covered by the media and made headlines for weeks.

⁸ Kafa and the coalition lobbied the MPs to keep the original draft. Their petition gathered 71 MP signatures out of 128, but none of them voiced their disapproval of the distortions on the original bill.

⁹ 25 women were killed by family members between 2010 and 2013 while the draft bill was pending in parliament. The real figure of women victims is likely to be much higher as there are no national statistics on domestic violence in the country.

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| | harassment would be legally criminalized. |
| 2017 | The MP Moukheiber 2014 draft law was brought in for parliamentary debate, during which it was ridiculed and quashed by other MPs. |
| 2017 | The Ministry of Justice and KAFA jointly launched a draft bill to amend a few clauses of the law on domestic violence. The Council of ministers approved the amendments later that year. |
| 2017 | A Ministry of State for Women’s Affairs was established. |
| 2017 | The Women’s Affairs Ministry, led by Minister Jean Ogasapian submitted another sexual harassment draft law. It was approved by the Council of ministers on the 8th of March 2017. |
| 2017 | Article 522 ¹⁰ of the penal code was repealed. |
| 2018 | The Internal Security Forces (ISF) launched a hotline (1745) to report cases of domestic violence. |
| 2019 | Two women machineries started working separately on drafting anti-sexual harassment laws: the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) and the Women and Children parliamentary committee chaired by MP Inaya Ezzedine. When the government resigned following the October 17 uprising, NCLW and the World Bank Group's Mashreq Gender Facility, were working on yet another sexual harassment law. |
| 2019 | The Centre for Inclusive Business and Leadership (CIBL) for Women at the American University of Beirut (AUB) honed in on the case of sexual harassment within the private sector. The CIBL built a multi-stakeholder network of partners interested in working together to advance anti-sexual harassment legislation. |
| October 2019 | The various systems of inequality that shape women’s intersectional realities in Lebanon were equally, simultaneously, and explicitly attacked during the October 17 protests. Feminist demands were at the core of the uprising, and feminist chants tied patriarchy to the multiple exploitative apparatuses, including sectarianism, clientelism, religious personal status courts, capitalism, and the banks. ¹¹ |
| 2020 | MP Inaya Ezzedin submitted the sexual harassment draft law she worked on to the Administration and Justice parliamentary committee. |
| December 2020 | The Parliament passes a law to criminalize sexual harassment for the first time ever. |
| 2021 | NCLW and KAFA proposed a draft law amending the law on the “protection of women and other family members from domestic violence”, initially passed in 2014. |
| March 2024 | <i>Opposition MPs propose comprehensive anti-violence law to combat surging violence against women</i> A comprehensive anti-violence law to serve as an additional legal deterrent to the rising violence against women, drafted by KAFA and proposed by a number of opposition MPs. |

¹⁰ Article 522 of the penal code stated that, in case a marriage took place between a rapist and their victim, all prosecutions and sentences had to be suspended. However, a note should be made that if a perpetrator of a sexual offense against a girl marries his victim he will be exonerated if the circumstances fall under articles 505 and 518 of the Penal code.

¹¹Some examples include: “(She is) Out to bring down the—patriarchal, sectarian, racist, capitalist – regime,” “Our revolution is feminist,” “Our struggles are many, our anger is one,” and “Bring down the Kafala system.”

2. 2024 General Contextual Updates

This is a general update on the situation in Lebanon between December 2023 and November 2024, prefacing each of the three policy mappings for 2024. Note that specific paragraphs addressing each thematic area, the civil marriage and personal status laws, violence against women (domestic violence and sexual harassment), and Women's political participation have been included in this section under their respective themes.

Between October 2023 and September 2024, the occupying Israeli forces pulverized Lebanon's southern border towns detonating houses, killing journalists and civilians, and targeting medical first aid providers and ambulances. September 2024 marked the start of the expansion of the Israeli aggression into Lebanon. On the 16th and 17th of September, Israel detonated thousands of electronic pagers, radios, and communication devices simultaneously across Lebanon, in an unprecedented mass terrorist attack killing over 30, and maiming nearly 3000, including 200 critically.¹² For context, people carrying pagers include civilian personnel working in Hezbollah-affiliated schools, medical, and youth centres.

The escalation continued as Israel launched hundreds of air attacks in southern and eastern Lebanon on September 22, killing around 500 people and injuring nearly 1645 in one day. Resultantly, thousands fled the south of the country towards Beirut and the North, jamming main highways, locked in their cars for at least ten hours amid intense shelling. Israel expanded its operations to include areas of the Bekaa Valley, along Lebanon's eastern border. Escalation continued through the months of September, October and November 2025. Israel dropped thousands of bunker buster bombs on residential neighborhoods in Beirut's southern suburb, on multiple occasions; and attempted to invade the border towns of South Lebanon, leaving the wholesale decimation of tens of villages in their wake.

According to the ministry of Health, the number of casualties, between October 8, 2023 and November 28, 2024, had reached 3,670 martyrs and another 15,413 injured¹³. Noteworthy that a ceasefire deal was reached and officially took effect on the 28th of November 2024. As of November 1, 2025, thousands of breaches from the Israeli side had been reported. Official numbers from November 2024 reveal that over 1.2 million Lebanese have been forcibly displaced, evacuating the South, Bekaa and the southern suburbs of Beirut in waves since September 22, to central Beirut, the North governorate, and Mount Lebanon, and settling in public schools and institutions turned makeshift shelters.

Based on a combination of data from national surveys, databases, consultations with women, and field monitoring, the UN Women issued a "Gender Alert" in September 2024, highlighting the disproportionate impact that women and girls in Lebanon - particularly women-headed households, widows and women with disabilities - endured as a result of the war. According to

¹² Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2024). *Exploding pagers and radios: A terrifying violation of international law, say UN experts*. Retrieved November 28, 2024 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/exploding-pagers-and-radios-terrifying-violation-international-law-say-un>

¹³ Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon (MOPH) (2024). Retrieved November 30, 2024 from

the Gender Alert estimates, among the thousands of families that have been displaced, nearly 12,000 are women-headed.¹⁴

The most significant issues disproportionately impacting women and girls throughout the war appear to be access to food, access to menstrual hygiene products, and heightened exposure to sexual and domestic violence, as well as human trafficking and survival sex.

The Alert points to an estimate of 50,000 of the displaced to be women and girls in reproductive age, and hence need immediate access to products of hygiene and well-being. Hunger and access to food also figured as a challenge facing women-headed households. Though this is a long-standing issue with roots in pre-war times, women and girls in war-affected areas faced limited access to food due to unequal control over resources, limited autonomy in household decision-making, and restrictive, discriminatory norms curtailing their freedoms. Noteworthy that more women-headed households in Lebanon were not able to meet many basic needs compared to men-headed households, particularly during the war¹⁵.

Lower pre-war income also limits women heads of households' chances to access decent shelter given the sharp rental fees.

However, the most vicious aspect of women and girls' reality during the war remains their intensified risk and exposure to domestic violence, sexual harassment and exploitation, as well as trafficking and forced prostitution. The UN Women Gender Alert traced the classic situation of women and girls' heightened risk to domestic violence in war, to the increase in stress, job loss, and the challenging access to legal protection and services. The limited privacy and scarce resources that feature life in temporary shelters in emergencies inevitably lead to more disputes, including gender-based violence.

Further, the report rightfully points to the classic scenario of sexual exploitation and abuse in aid delivery sites, listing survival sex, forced prostitution, and child marriage as “negative coping mechanisms” with the increased exploitation of vulnerable communities in emergencies. Among these communities are migrant workers and refugee women who are likely to become victims of human trafficking into/across Lebanon.

Indeed, anecdotal evidence that the AiW informally collected through individual communication with women working in the field, provide confirmations on all those counts. Domestic violence was prevalent in shelters, coupled with the absence of all means of reporting it and the weak presence of Internal Security Forces officers on site; cases of sexual harassment and human trafficking were also observed. Crucially, cases of transactional sex where landlords were soliciting sexual favors from women head of households in exchange for shelter.

¹⁴ Estimate from the Gender Alert is drawn based on displacement figures and demographic structures. This number does not account for the women who became heads of households as a result of the war.

UN Women (2024) *Gender Alert: When Crises Strike, Gender Inequalities are often Exacerbated: The Urgent Needs of Crisis Affected Women and Girls in Lebanon*. Retrieved January 10, 2025 from <https://lebanon.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/09/gender-alert-when-crises-strike-gender-inequalities-are-often-exacerbated-the-urgent-needs-of-crisis-affected-women-and-girls-in-lebanon>

¹⁵ The data in the UN Women Gender Alert, link above, is based on different reports and surveys, referenced in the Alert.

The Lebanese often joke about having seen tragedy of all shapes and forms, that the only predicament that has not yet befallen them is an asteroid striking Beirut. Indeed, the pre-genocide situation in Lebanon resembled a downward spiral, in which the more they struggled for their basic rights and hold onto shreds of their dignity, the deeper they sink into dysfunctionality, criminal negligence, heartbreak, and impunity. This brutal war unfolded against the backdrop of longstanding structural challenges, including an oligarchic governance that oversaw a financial and economic collapse and the severe devaluation of the local currency in 2019, and maintained an attitude of deliberate neglect vis-à-vis these crises, and the resulting disintegration of the services infrastructure. This systematic impoverishment of the vast majority of the population – highlighted by the banks' confiscation of people's decades of savings, was followed by a massive explosion in the capital's port that decimated half of the city in 2020, resulting in a mass exodus of the Lebanese. A World Bank report on poverty in Lebanon released in May 2024 shows that poverty has more than tripled over the past decade in the country, reaching a whopping 44% of the total population by 2022.¹⁶ The report not only shows that 1 out of 3 Lebanese was poverty stricken in 2022, it also points to an even deeper fall with the poverty gap rising from 3% in 2012 to 9.4% in 2022.

Due to the extreme vulnerability of the country's infrastructure, civil society organizations, and particularly women's rights NGOs collected funds to provide critical services for women like emergency cash assistance, shelter, and psycho-social support; shared calls for donations, and disseminated information on critical available services, such shelters, emergency numbers, and medications. This is a typical pattern that unfolds during crises in Lebanon, in which CSOs step in to fill glaring gaps left by the weak governmental preparedness.

In 2023 the Lebanese parliament convened to discuss the 2024 state budget. The draft budget, consisting of 96 articles, underwent review but was still under heavy criticism. Expectedly, think tanks and budgetary experts pointed to the budget's neglect of reforms, crucial to pull the country out of a financial meltdown that has been gutting the public sector for years, and the absence of provisions aimed at rejuvenating Lebanon's broken social contract¹⁷. Significant debate among economic experts revolved around the budget's heavy reliance on regressive indirect taxes like VAT and custom fees to generate desperate income to significantly boost state revenues, exacerbating the situation of the country's poorest citizens. The Policy Initiative think tank reported that the budget "disproportionately burdens middle and lower-income households compared to affluent ones"¹⁸ by lowering the threshold for businesses to pay VAT and offering tax exemptions for big businesses¹⁹.

It is worth mentioning here the status of the policy sphere, marked by a complete paralysis on the level of institutional politics: a 32-month presidential vacuum, a stalled parliament, a caretaker government that only started convening as the war expanded into Lebanon, and municipal elections that were supposed to take place in May 2022, but were postponed three times to May

¹⁶ World Bank (2024) *Lebanon Poverty and Equity Assessment 2024: Weathering a Protracted Crisis*. Retrieved December 3, 2024 from

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099052224104516741/pdf/P1766511325da10a71ab6b1ae97816dd20c.pdf>

¹⁷ The Policy Initiative (2024) *Lebanon's 2024 Draft Budget: Blindly Curbing the Fiscal Debt*. Retrieved November 24, 2024 from [The Policy Initiative - Lebanon's 2024 Draft Budget: Blindly curbing the fiscal deficit](#).

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

2025. Not even a full-scale war on the country could engender serious deliberations around a potential presidential candidate. The Lebanese presidency is still vacant, with the speaker of parliament and the caretaker prime minister leading the negotiations for a ceasefire on behalf of the country.

Pre-war 2024 also saw an escalation in the discrimination against, and forced deportations of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as an intensifying racist rhetoric about them²⁰.

Since the beginning of 2024 until May, reports began circulating that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Directorate of General Security (GSO) have resumed raids and deportations against Syrian refugee communities, with international and local NGOs documenting several deportations in the first few months of 2024²¹. While Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 [Refugee Convention](#), the state is still bound by the customary international law principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the deportation of any person who faces the risk of persecution in their home country²².

Refugee-led NGO Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) stated that while last year's LAF-led deportations dropped Syrians off at the border, enabling many to re-enter with the help of smugglers, this year, several deportees have been dropped off in Damascus instead²³.

On a relevant note, in 2023, authorities in Lebanon escalated their scapegoating of marginalized communities such as the Syrian refugees, and the queer communities, to divert attention from the pressing unattended crises, and to frame them as the enemies of an imagined, hetero-patriarchal, conservative model of a Lebanese family. The summer of 2023 witnessed an alarming escalation against the LGBTIQ community, in parallel with worsening economic conditions. In July 2023, 9 MPs proposed a law to decriminalize homosexuality²⁴; in response, they were subjected to online harassment campaigns resulting in one MP to withdraw their signature²⁵. Following this, a wave of hate and violence was unleashed against the LGBTIQ community by prominent politicians inciting violence against LGBTIQ individuals. Many politicians, lawyers, organizations, and celebrities followed suit in a wave of crackdown on the queer community.

For context, Lebanon has yet to repeal Article 534 of the country's Penal Code, which criminalizes 'unnatural sex'. Article 534 is Lebanon's most publicly debated regulation on sexuality. A legacy of the French colonial era, this article does not explicitly criminalize homosexuality, but has historically been used by state actors to persecute queer communities. In the summer of 2023, two proposed bills explicitly penalising homosexuality were put forward.

²⁰ N. Khechen. "Fragile Sanctuary: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Face Abuse and Deportation". May 29, 2024. *TIMEP* <https://timep.org/2024/05/29/fragile-sanctuary-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-face-abuse-and-deportation/>

²¹ H. Davis "Detained, Deported, Disappeared: Assad's critics face "nightmares" in Lebanon". February 9, 2024. *Syria Direct*. [Detained, deported, disappeared: Assad's critics face 'nightmare' in Lebanon](#)

²² It is helpful to note however, that Lebanon hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees in the world; the refugee crisis in Lebanon impacted, and continues to impact the country.

²³ Davis (2024)

²⁴ مسألة "المثلية الجنسية" تعود الى الواجهة: مشروع قانون لعدم تجريمها تقدّم به عدد من النواب - مركز بيروت للاخبار. (2023, August 13). *Beirutnewscenter*. <https://www.beirutnewscenter.com/935582/>

²⁵ *Lebanon: Attack on Freedoms Targets LGBTI People* | *Human Rights Watch*. (2023, September 5). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/05/lebanon-attack-freedoms-targets-lgbti-people>

Further, the country's minister of culture decided to ban the movie "Barbie" because it "promotes homosexuality and transgenderism."²⁶

This wave of escalating queer hate continued and resulted in the inception of several organizations and groups that advocate for the criminalization of same-sex relationships and the protection of the Lebanese family against "western ideas that aim to corrupt the youth and dismantle the family"²⁷. It is worth noting that these groups also instrumentalise the atrocities unfolding in Gaza to legitimize their view on the moral corruption of international organizations and conventions²⁸.

Following this slew of troubling remarks and decisions, an extremist Christian group attacked a queer friendly bar in Beirut while a drag show was ongoing in August 2023, physically assaulting some of the attendees, while state security forces stood as bystanders²⁹. While this marked an alarming escalation in the anti-queer sentiment³⁰, another even more vicious attack followed. In September 2023, a group of men attacked a protest organized by a number of civil society organizations calling for the protection of personal and political freedoms. Noteworthy that this escalating aggression comes after an intensified vilification campaign against the community of organizers, accusing them of "promoting deviancy", led by political and religious figures. Expectedly, the assault was unfolding under the eyes of abjectly failing security forces who, once again, acted as mere bystanders and arrested no one³¹.

Zooming in on the violence against women policy area in 2024, the general ambiance of lawlessness and the slow decay of the Lebanese social fabric resulted in a spike of violent behavior against women, queer and migrant workers, and created an environment of hostility towards them that escalated in 2023 and continued well into 2024.

In April, the highest Sunni authority in Lebanon, Dar Al-Fatwa, pressed charges against Lebanese queer comedian Shaden Fakih, known for her sharp critiques of religious and political establishments, over a joke. This unleashed a vicious hatred campaign, with conservative influencers on social media inciting violence against her and her family, including death and rape

²⁶ Christou, W. (2023, August 9). Lebanese minister to ban "Barbie" for "contradicting" values. <https://www.newarab.com/>; The New Arab. <https://www.newarab.com/news/lebanese-minister-ban-barbie-contradicting-values>

²⁷ هيئة علماء المسلمين في لبنان. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/muslimolama/posts/%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89%D9%88%D9%8E%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%92%D9%85%D9%8F%D8%A4%D9%92%D9%85%D9%90%D9%86%D9%8F%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8E-%D9%88%D9%8E%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%92%D9%85%D9%8F%D8%A4%D9%92%D9%85%D9%90%D9%86%D9%8E-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8F-%D8%A8%D9%8E%D8%B9%D9%92%D8%B6%D9%8F%D9%87%D9%8F%D9%85%D9%92-%D8%A3%D9%8E%D9%88%D9%92/5544401402354755/>

²⁸ حملة حماية الأسرة والمجتمع—حسم. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2024, from https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story_fbid=326481010356492&id=100089837865849
حملة حماية الأسرة والمجتمع—حسم. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2024, from https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story_fbid=326481010356492&id=100089837865849
[inbow-raid-from-incitement-to-action/](#)

³⁰ For more details, the full account from the assault can be found here: <https://twitter.com/i/status/1694718766972891256>

³¹ Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression. (2023, October 10). The Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression in Lebanon Demands Investigation into the Assault on the Freedoms Protest. *Legal Agenda*. <https://english.legal-agenda.com/the-coalition-to-defend-freedom-of-expression-in-lebanon-demands-investigation-into-the-assault-on-the-freedoms-protest/>

threats. The campaign mobilized what she called, in an interview with the AiW, the “mafia thugs” against her “in the name of religion”³². In her interview with the AiW, Shaden described some of the intimidating tactics deployed against her to silence her, such as the mobilization of tens of thugs on their motorcycles in her street, awaiting on her or sister or mother to leave the house. Shaden was accused of “mocking religion and insulting God” for a joke that was dug out of a YouTube video recording a skit she performed years ago, leading to her conviction that the establishment weaponized the law and judicial system to silence and punish her for “challenging their fragile egos”³³. Indeed, she frames this move as backlash against her for her long-standing political activism, as an outspoken queer woman explicitly challenging the hegemony of the male-dominated religious and political oligarchy.

The persecution, intense vitriol, and threats that compromised the safety and security of her family culminated in Shaden’s decision to permanently leave Lebanon, and immigrate to France, where she now resides and remains outspoken in her political activism online.

Shaden was certainly not the only one at the receiving end of vile silencing and intimidation. The general ambiance of lawlessness and increase in violations against women (specific numbers in the violence against women mapping) and refugees (above), that marked the past couple of years.

In April, lawyer Suzie Abu Hamdan was severely beaten and dragged down the street in broad daylight by her client’s husband, as she came out of a hearing for her client at the Jaafari court, while still in her barrister robe³⁴. In the same vein, in August, a woman believed to be a migrant worker, was severely beaten in the middle of the street in Beirut, in broad daylight, by two men who were trying to kidnap her – one of whom was visibly armed. The two men were detained and questioned briefly before being acquitted, but the woman was not identified. While violence against women in Lebanon is not a novel phenomenon, the fact that these incidents are happening more openly, visibly, and in public, marks a distressing trend. Coupled with the disintegration of the social fabric, the total collapse of any sense or modality of justice and the ensuing impunity and shamelessness of offenders, embolden perpetrators of violence and perpetuate this type of behavior.

3. The Issue

Despite the relative and apparent social and cultural openness of Lebanon in the Arab milieu, women in Lebanon live under a complex patriarchal legislative, social, and political system that discriminates against them in personal status courts, access to services and protection, labor and citizenship laws, and political participation. The state has always fostered an economic, political, religious, and legal setting that treats them as mere subordinates to their male counterparts and as second-class citizens.

The Lebanese constitution enshrines “respect for social justice and equality of rights and duties among all citizens without discrimination”³⁵ and pledges to abide by the values of the Universal

³² From an interview with Shaden Fakih for this mapping, September 2024

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=806858344835505>

³⁵ Lebanese Parliament. (1926). *The Lebanese Constitution*. Retrieved September 1, 2020, from <https://www.lp.gov.lb/backoffice/uploads/files/Lebanese%20%20Constitution-%20En.pdf>

Declaration of Human Rights. However, gender remains one of the significant variables determining access to rights and protections, some of which have almost become exclusive privileges to men. Indeed, Lebanon's frail performance on gender justice placed it at 132 out of a total of 156 countries worldwide, and 6 out of 12 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index.³⁶

Women's relationship with the state in Lebanon is deeply problematic, and the pervasiveness of gender inequality in the country is due to numerous structural flaws in the make-up of society as well as in the power dynamics within families. These flaws include **a sectarian governance system, the grip of patriarchal religious institutions on personal status laws, and the patrilineal citizenship and kinship system prevalent in all spheres of life (families, the market, and governmental institutions)**. These flaws are, in turn, indications of an ambivalent and contradictory relationship that women in Lebanon have with their state. While women are full citizens by law, with political rights such as the right to vote, they don't enjoy access to the full slate of rights enshrined by the constitution. Most importantly, by relegating personal status matters to sectarian courts—notorious for invariably upholding a patriarchal bias—the Lebanese state abstains from assuming its full responsibility towards women.

Sex-based differentiation saturates civil laws. It is also salient in the penal code, where patriarchal biases remain evident despite hard-earned changes that feminist and women's groups advocated for in the last decade. For decades, the notion of "honor" imbued the Lebanese criminal law, which boasted an "honor crime clause" (Article 256)³⁷ until 2011 and grants lesser punishment for crimes committed "in a state of anger"³⁸ to this day. It is also worth noting that an earlier iteration of this law was initially annulled in 1995, when the then-minister of justice repealed it, in tribute to lawyer, legal scholar, and women's rights advocate Laure Moghaizel honoring her legacy, after she passed away.

Further, persistent decades-long feminist lobbying resulted in repealing several laws that uphold misogyny and protect perpetrators of crimes against women, notably Article 256 in 2011 and later in 2017, article 522.³⁹

Yet, discrimination against women in criminal law is not limited to protecting men who kill female relatives. Penal code articles governing rape as well as the domestic violence law, which was passed only recently in 2014, explicitly exclude marital rape from punishment, unless it entails severe physical violence and leaves visible marks that could be used as evidence. Further, the sexual harassment law, which went into effect in 2020, remains weak⁴⁰ and is yet to prove its

³⁶ World Economic Forum (2021). *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. Retrieved November 8, 2021, from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

³⁷Article 256 explicitly granted "he who injures or murders his wife, ascendant, descendant, or sister after catching her in an act of adultery or an illegitimate sexual act" a lesser sentence. In contrast, women who kill their husbands for similar reasons do not benefit from any mitigating excuse due to the nature of the crime

³⁸ Article 252 of the penal code grants mitigating excuse "to the perpetrator of an offence who acted under the influence of violent anger provoked by an unjust and sufficiently serious action by the victim". It is known as the "provocation excuse". While being extremely broad, the law was mainly used to reduce punishments of "honour crimes" perpetrators.

³⁹ An article in the penal code that spares rapists punishment if they marry their victims.

⁴⁰ This law does not fully meet the standards set by the 2019 ILO convention of 2019. It lacks clear mechanisms enabling survivors to pursue civil remedies (e.g. compensation for wrongful termination of the contract and other damages), and places the burden of proof on the plaintiff, etc.

accessibility to survivors. This weak legal framework has created a dangerous reality for women: while “honor killings” have technically declined, in their place, Lebanon has seen an increase in the prevalence of husbands killing their wives with impunity.⁴¹

In light of this reality, AiW’s policy mapping on violence against women seeks to document the ongoing struggles among the government, political parties, sectarian authorities, and women’s rights activists, organizations, and feminists over women’s right to protection from violence.

The mapping will cover the legal battle to pass the domestic violence law (293/2014) and track the fight against the normalization of sexual harassment and the battle to criminalize it. These battles exemplify the struggles of Lebanese women for protection, equal rights, and recognition.

Since 2019, Lebanon has experienced multiple crises. The COVID-19 crisis which was accentuated due to the government’s mismanagement, was coupled with a financial and economic crisis and a severe devaluation of the national currency. This situation worsened the already weak government institutions. Women’s rights have historically been deprioritized, but as a result of the multiple crises today, they are being marginalized further. Additionally, the economic collapse has contributed to a surge in violence against women, with COVID-imposed lockdowns trapping women in abusive households, and hence particularly vulnerable to violence.

➤ Domestic Violence

The fight for a domestic violence law started back in 1995 when a group of women survivors stood before a symbolic tribunal in Beirut to expose unspoken tragedies long concealed from the public. Individual women and women’s rights groups have taken it upon themselves to expose gender-based violence (GBV) in order to shift the social perception that this is a “private affair” to a matter of public welfare, one that is punishable by law. Among the most prominent groups who engage in awareness raising for a law against GBV is the organization Kafa (Enough Violence & Exploitation).⁴² Prior to the domestic violence law (2014), laws governing violence were the same for both men and women with no special provisions for domestic violence, and articles governing rape excluded marital rape from punishment and exonerated rapists who chose to marry their victims.

In 2007, Kafa gathered a team of three judges, lawyers from Kafa, and a representative from the Internal Security Forces (ISF)⁴³ to draft a law against domestic violence.⁴⁴ In March 2008, Kafa launched the “Towards the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence” campaign, bringing together several organizations under the umbrella of the “National Coalition for Legislating the Protection of Women from Family Violence.”⁴⁵ The idea behind the formation of this coalition was to strengthen the call and defence for the draft bill by active civil society. The

⁴¹ For more, see Baydoun, A. C. (1). “Killing of Women in the Name of Honor”: An Evolving Phenomenon in Lebanon. *Al-Raida Journal*, 70-77. <https://doi.org/10.32380/alrj.v0i0.22>

⁴² **Kafa** (Enough violence and exploitation) was established in 2005 by a group of multi-disciplinary professionals and human rights activists as a Lebanese non-profit, non-political and non-confessional CSO. It works on gender equality through advocacy for law reform, influencing public opinion, conducting research and training, and providing women and children who have been survivors of violence with social, legal and psychological support.

⁴³ The Lebanese police

⁴⁴ Khattab (2010) p. 162

⁴⁵ Ibid

coalition included a broad array of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working on different human rights concerns, such as religious-based associations, confessional associations, associations dealing with physical disabilities, LGBTIQA communities, as well as Lebanese and Palestinian women's rights groups.⁴⁶

After three years of sustained efforts, the Coalition succeeded in drafting a law to protect women from domestic violence, which received the approval of the Lebanese government in April 2010. The next step was to have the draft law endorsed by the Lebanese parliament. Following initial parliamentary deliberations, it was delegated to a parliamentary sub-committee to review it. However, a major obstacle facing this endorsement at the time, was the opposition of the country's Muslim clerics. In June 2011, and while the draft bill was being studied by the parliamentary sub-committee, Dar al-Fatwa, the country's highest Sunni authority, issued a press statement condemning it and demonizing the right groups supporting it for "inciting the destruction of the Muslim family." This statement triggered a slew of similar statements from women's groups affiliated with Dar al-Fatwa, asserting that shari'a law already grants women their rights, so there was no need for a civil law "inspired by the Western society model to run our societies." Clerics from both Sunni and Shia religious establishments joined forces in refusing the draft law. A meeting between both in August 2011 emphasized this rejection and raised rumors about the pro-domestic violence law coalition's and other feminist organizations' "dubious sources of funding," insinuating that these organizations were only fighting for a domestic violence law because Western governments were funding their work and demanding it.^{47,48}

The bill remained pending in parliament between 2010 and 2013. It took the sub-parliamentary committee tasked with the review of the bill 16 months⁴⁹ to finalize its work in July 2012, and another 12 months for the joint parliamentary committees to approve the draft in July 2013 after making several amendments. This was followed by yet another nine months to pass the law in April 2014.

In August 2012, the sub-committee called for a press conference to announce the fruits of its labor, a precedent in the history of parliamentary work as historically, MPs were never as keen to keep the general public updated on legislative progress. The MPs eagerness, however, did not stem from their genuine concern for women's safety. Rather, it was a result of the political pressure that they were subjected to as a result of the coalition's intense lobbying. The coalition's efforts focused intensely on informal channels, such as outreach and work with media networks, key backers within the political system, and public mobilization.⁵⁰

As the sub-committee was on the verge of removing crucial elements from the bill in December 2011 and January 2012 for instance, the coalition launched a campaign naming and shaming the members of the parliamentary sub-committee making these changes, and called on them to not

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Aziz (2013)

⁴⁸ MP Samir Jisr for instance, who was a member of the parliamentary sub-committee, raised issues of funding regarding one of KAFA's campaigns in 2012: "How much did this campaign cost? Where did they get the funds to organize a campaign this big?"

⁴⁹ Between April 2011 and July 2012

⁵⁰ Paragraph based on L. Khattab (December 2016). "Gendering state-citizen relations in Lebanon: The case of the Family Violence Bill 2014." *International Alert*. <http://international-alert.org/publications/gendering-state-citizen-relations-lebanon>

“mutilate and cripple the law.”⁵¹ The campaign, which aired across several major Lebanese television channels, stopped airing a few days later on Future TV, the Lebanese TV channel associated with the Sunni confessional leadership. In July 2012, feminist activists from the coalition marched into parliament square raising banners addressing MPs: “Your responsibility is to protect us, our responsibility is to hold you accountable.” They also distributed photos and warnings against the distortion of the law under the slogan: “Watch them and hold them accountable.”⁵²

Throughout the years, KAFA and the coalition’s approach relied on engaging a wide range of stakeholders—such as doctors, lawyers, and security forces—right from the beginning. The coalition actively reached out to media representatives and invested substantial amounts of time in training, informing, and working closely with them; and providing expert advice on framing talk shows, reportages, and issues. Further, the coalition brought several non-traditional allies to the women’s movement, such as the women’s committees of different sectarian political parties, in order to win support for the draft bill. This intensive lobbying process culminated in a march that gathered over 5,000 people protesting on International Women’s Day in 2014, one month before the parliamentary session that saw the passing of the law⁵³.

Trajectory of the family violence bill⁵⁴:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| July 2007 | KAFA releases draft law |
| March 2008 | Campaign “towards the protection of women from domestic violence” is launched |
| 2008 | “National Coalition for legislating the protection of women from family violence” is set up, encompassing around 40 different associations |
| April 6, 2010 | The council of ministers amends and ratifies the draft law |
| April 28, 2011 | Formation of a special parliamentary sub-committee to review draft law |
| July 31, 2012 | Sub-committee presents an amended draft law |
| July 22, 2013 | Parliamentary joint committees ratify the sub-committee’s amended draft |
| March 8, 2014 | After six active years of advocacy, popular campaigns, networking with local communities, one of the biggest public gatherings on women’s rights takes place in Beirut on International Women’s Day with almost 5,000 people joining a peaceful march against Violence Against Women (VAW). |
| 2021 | NCLW and KAFA proposed a draft law amending the law on the “protection of women and other family members from domestic violence”, initially passed in 2014. |
| March 2024 | Opposition MPs present comprehensive anti-violence bill to parliament, in collaboration with KAFA. |

⁵¹ Haddad (2012)

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ This is an edited timeline, mostly based on Saghie N. (December 23, 2013) “Lebanon’s Law to Protect Women: Redefining Domestic Violence”, Legal Agenda [online] Available at: <http://english.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=571&lang=en>

In July 2013, the parliamentary joint committees ratified the amended draft they received from the sub-committee. Upon realizing that the draft law had removed several key clauses of the original draft, KAFA lobbied MPs to retain much of the original draft. Although they received 71 signatures of support⁵⁵, not a single MP kept their promise. On April 1, 2014, the Lebanese Parliament passed the Law on the Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence. The passed law, which was an amended version of the draft law released seven years ago, contained several distortions and gaps. It left out multiple forms of abuse and focused on family violence over GBV more broadly by changing the name of the law from “Draft Law to Protect Women from Family Violence” to the “Law to Protect Women and Other Family members from Family Violence,” thus eroding its focus on women. Further, it limited the protection guaranteed to the children of the victim/survivor and turned marital rape into an issue of “marital rights,” criminalizing only “injuries” resulting from procuring this right. It also gave priority to existing personal status laws in the case of a conflict with the new law.⁵⁶ Thus, although its passage represented a success for the women’s movement to influence policy, the victory was a diluted one.

The law, put into effect on May 15, 2014 after it was published in the Official Gazette,⁵⁷ is comprised of two parts. The first is “punitive,” imposing harsher sanctions on some of the crimes listed under the penal code. The second is “protective,” encompassing the protection order that the victim can demand from the civil judge. This includes the option of transporting her and her children to a safer space.⁵⁸

Among the major distortions in the law was the exclusion of partners from previous marriages, cohabitation, temporary marriages, and relationships that fall outside legally recognized frameworks. As such, domestic violence practiced by a former husband for example was not incriminated by the 2014 version of the law.⁵⁹

In 2017, KAFA launched a draft bill to amend Law No. 293, endorsed by the Minister of Justice, Minister of State for Women’s Affairs, and Minister of State for Human Rights.⁶⁰ On August 3, 2017, the council of ministers approved the proposed amendments. The amendments expanded the scope of “family” to include a current or a former spouse⁶¹; it also clarified the definition of violence to include emotional, psychological, and economic violence. Finally, the amendments also comprised the repeal of the clause that binds the protection of the victim’s children to the custody age.⁶² A final round of amendments proposed by KAFA was put forward in 2020.

⁵⁵ The Lebanese parliament is formed of 128 members. As specified in Article 34 of the Lebanese constitution, “The Chamber shall not be validly constituted unless the majority of the total membership is present. Decisions shall be taken by a majority vote. Should the votes be equal, the question under consideration shall be rejected”.

⁵⁶ HRW (January 2015). “Unequal and Unprotected: Women’s Rights Under Lebanese Personal Status Law.” *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ KAFA (enough) Violence and Exploitation. (2014). *Zalfa’s questions on the Law to Protect Women and Other Family Members from Family Violence*. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <https://kafa.org.lb/sites/default/files/2019-01/PRpdf-77-635530470324885132.pdf>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ KAFA (enough) Violence and Exploitation. (2017). *Annual report 2017 highlights*. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from https://kafa.org.lb/sites/default/files/2019-03/kafa_report.pdf

⁶¹ Up to a year after divorce or separation.

⁶² KAFA (enough) Violence and Exploitation. (2017). *Annual report 2017 highlights*. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from https://kafa.org.lb/sites/default/files/2019-03/kafa_report.pdf

The domestic violence trajectory saw no activity in the policy sphere in the past two years (2022/2023). The inaction in the policy space was exacerbated by a judges' 45-day strike between August and October 2022, denouncing judges' deteriorating financial and social conditions, and rejecting political interference in their work.

Despite the strike being a valid right for judges as workers demanding the betterment of their work conditions, their strike meant delayed protection orders for countless women who needed it⁶³. According to KAFA's documentation, 14 women were killed in the first 9 months of 2023⁶⁴, and the number of completed suicides of women – as reported by the media - in abusive homes was 6, as of July 2023⁶⁵. While it is true that impunity especially when it comes to crimes committed against women is rampant in Lebanon and that it does lead to an increase in crime, it is also worth pointing to the increased awareness of the media, the general public, and particularly the women (and other entities in the popular space), of the importance of complaining about and reporting abuse.

The often-complicit role of the judiciary in domestic violence cases, and particularly in giving lenient sentences to men who murdered their wives, is often highlighted in KAFA's awareness frequent campaigns on social media about domestic violence crimes and deaths, particularly the #Our_Life_Is_Not_A_Game campaign, launched in September 2023⁶⁶.

In March 2024, opposition MPs Najat Saliba, Paula Yaacoubian, Halima Kaakour, Cynthia Zarazir, Michel Doueihy, Firas Hamdan, and Marc Daou, proposed a piece of legislation to parliament to “prevent violence against women”, drafted in collaboration with KAFA. The bill, characterized by a comprehensive outlook on violence against women, offered a refined and more wide-ranging definition of domestic violence replacing the one proposed in the 2014 bill, and specified domestic violence as “any act or practice that reflect an abuse of power within the family through physical – or other forms of – violence”. The need for the bill, according to the MPs who presented it to the parliament, is a response to the previous laws' failure to meet the need for “prevention, prosecution, protection, criminalization, and provision of necessary services and compensation for damages caused to victims”⁶⁷.

Indeed, the bill includes measures that are meant to strengthen available legislation and mechanisms protection women against domestic violence. The bill's main propositions include the extension of protection of victims to “all forms of violence, including harassment and rape”; the creation of a system that expedites domestic abuse victims' reception of restraining orders whether or not they filed a complaint, thus bypassing legal delays; the appointment of “specialized judges” and “specialized courts” for violence against women, so their protection is not trapped in judicial backlog; in addition to the creation of a victims' support fund, resourced by the fines imposed on perpetrators of violence.

⁶³ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/lebanon/2022/09/05/as-judges-join-strike-for-better-pay-and-conditions-ordinary-lebanese-suffer/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=696703575825482&set=a.474586211370554> (post in Arabic).

⁶⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=656591536503353&set=a.474586211370554> (post in Arabic).

⁶⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/KAFALebanon/videos/1016620422716814>.

⁶⁷ L'Orient Le Jour. 28 March, 2024. [Opposition MPs propose law to combat surging violence against women - L'Orient Today](#)

Though KAFWA had been working for a few years on developing this comprehensive anti-violence law for years in collaboration with other Arab women's rights organizations, it has been proven timely to propose it in 2024, as the past few years have seen levels of domestic violence that many women's rights organizations denounced as "unprecedented". As demonstrated in the mappings of the previous years, violence against women in Lebanon has been on the rise for some time now.

Expectedly, the proposed comprehensive anti-violence law faces multiple obstacles and delays, preventing its full adoption and enactment. As of December 2024, the bill remains stalled in parliament, reflecting an age-old wilful disregard of the plight of women enduring violence and the barriers they face in seeking protection.

Tangential to the domestic violence law is the emergence of DoubleX⁶⁸ as an organisation fighting sexual exploitation. In July 2024, the Double X organization convened the "first international symposium in Lebanon and the Arab world on "Prostitution as Male Violence against Women"⁶⁹.

The positioning of DoubleX and its first international symposium on prostitution within the discussion of the domestic violence law is largely due to multiple considerations: that the founder of DoubleX, is one of the co-founders of KAFWA – the organization that spearheads the legal work on domestic violence; that multiple speakers at that symposium are prominent and influential figures within KAFWA, including KAFWA's director, and that the symposium was co-organized by KAFWA; and most importantly that the symposium and DoubleX's framing of all sex work as necessarily prostitution, and its aim to abolish it, is derived from KAFWA's stance on the issue.

In a campaign titled "Love Can't Be Bought", KAFWA launched its work on prostitution/sex work – framed as sexual exploitation and trafficking – in 2016, generating a wave of severe criticism from other feminist groups and individuals in Lebanon who advocated for the rights of sex workers and called for the regulation of sex work as opposed to abolishing it. This group of feminist advocates hence found the framing of KAFWA's campaign deeply problematic. KAFWA maintained its position then, but has not made any public reference to its work on prostitution since.

➤ **Sexual Harassment**

In comparison to the campaigning and lobbying for the protection of women against family violence that started in the early 1990s, activism around sexual harassment has been present in Lebanon for decades, stretching back to demands of women's labour organizing in the 1950s.⁷⁰

The 1990s featured the creation of national and international groups focused on GBV in Lebanon such as the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women (LECORVAW). Yet, while

⁶⁸ an organization that defines itself as a "feminist organization fighting sexual exploitation in Lebanon and the Arab World, and exposing systems that commodify, exploit, trade, and harm women", and that centers its work on "abolishing the system of prostitution and pornography".

⁶⁹ <https://doublex.org/about-doublex/>

⁷⁰ Kaedbey, D. (2014). *Building Theory Across Struggles: Queer Feminist Thought from Lebanon* [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1405945625

sexual harassment was included in the GBV paradigm, it never seemed to be a primary concern; it was rather folded in with other demands of the women's movement.

While sexual harassment has been a historical concern of the women's movement in Lebanon, mobilization against it has continuously been characterized by a number of weaknesses. These include the lack of coordination between grassroots awareness efforts and legislative advocacy; a persistent foreign donors' agenda focused on domestic violence in Lebanon for most of the 1990s and 2000s⁷¹; and a lack of consensus concerning the law. While some consider that the law is necessary to pull the conversation on sexual harassment out of closed, elitist, and activist circles, others consider that serious conversations and ensuing behavioural shifts around sexual harassment are required and are much more important than having a law that could be used to further police women and other vulnerable groups.

Until 2020, Lebanon lacked legislation on sexual harassment, despite a notable proliferation of feminist initiatives and programming with the objective of raising awareness on the matter. The Lebanese penal code neither defines nor criminalizes sexual harassment. The only reference to it is in Article 503, which criminalizes the act of coercing or threatening someone into committing "immoral acts," including non-marital rape and abduction. As HarassTracker's 2017 research demonstrates, sexual harassment is significantly under-reported in Lebanon, mainly due to the stigmatization, lack of definition, intimidation, and harassment that victims of sexual violence face when attempting to report.⁷²

The two-year window between 2011 and 2013 witnessed a proliferation of feminist initiatives that aimed to raise public awareness on sexual harassment and violence, mostly led by Nasawiya, the feminist collective,⁷³ and the Najdeh Association in Palestinian camps. The most prominent of these initiatives were "The Adventures of Salwa,"⁷⁴ and a blog where survivors of sexual harassment can anonymously narrate their stories. Also, a massive protest under the call to "Fight Rape" was organized in 2012 by Nasawiya and other young feminist groups who were keen to work on issues related to sexual violence and harassment. Further, 2013 also saw the establishment of the first Title IX office⁷⁵ at the American University of Beirut. In 2012, Nasawiya, in collaboration with progressive scholars and legal think tanks, drafted a law addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. Despite being the most thorough, elaborate, and progressive among all other drafts presented to parliament to date, it was never presented at the Lebanese Parliament⁷⁶.

⁷¹ A 2016 Lebanon Support report found that 29 out of 36 surveyed women's rights organizations relied on international funding, with 10 receiving all of their funds through international donors. "Overview of Gender Actors and Interventions in Lebanon." *Lebanon Support*. <http://civilsociety-centre.org/content/gender-actors-interventions-lebanon-0>

⁷² S. Hassan, M. El Mir, N. El Rahi (April 2017). "Attitudes and Practices towards Sexual Harassment in Beirut." *HarassTracker*. <http://harasstracker.org/attitudes-and-practices-towards-sexual-harassment-in-beirut/>

⁷³ The "Feminist Collective" is group of grassroots intersectional feminists that existed between 2009 and 2013. It disintegrated by a decision of its founders and members in July 2013.

⁷⁴ <https://www.beirut.com/l/11890>

⁷⁵ Title IX is a federal civil rights law in the United States that was enacted as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. It prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or any other education program that receives funding from the federal government – in the US or abroad. AUB was the first university in Lebanon to create an office for it in 2013, followed by the Lebanese American University (LAU) in 2017.

⁷⁶ The funding that the collective received to run this project was not renewed, and hence the work on it came to a halt

Five years later, in 2017, a Ministry of State for Women's Affairs ⁷⁷ was established. On March 8, 2017, the Lebanese Cabinet approved a draft law criminalizing sexual harassment as a "gift to women," in honor of International Women's Day, according to statements made by Minister of State for Women's Affairs Jean Ogasapian. This announcement came less than two months after the Lebanese parliament voted down a bill, originally proposed in 2014 by MP Ghassan Moukheiber, to criminalize sexual and racial harassment. Numerous MPs ridiculed Moukheiber's bill when it came up for a vote in January 2017, openly laughing and questioning whether another law was needed to protect men from women.⁷⁸ Ogasapian's draft, which was heavily criticized by feminist groups working on the issue, had major shortcomings. It framed sexual harassment as acts that defy "morality and ethics," and linked it to the penal code clauses on morality, effectively binding sexual harassment to ever changing concepts and cultural constructs such as morality, honor, and ethics without mentioning the will and consent (or lack thereof) of the person subjected to it. Parliament then requested from both Minister Ogasapian and MP Moukheiber to reconcile the two bills, while the timeline for the passage of the new resulting bill remained unknown.

In 2019, two gender machineries started working separately on drafting anti-sexual harassment laws: the NCLW and the Women and Children parliamentary committee chaired by MP Inaya Ezzedine. When the government resigned following the October 17, 2019 uprising, the NCLW and the World Bank Group's Mashreq Gender Facility began working on yet another sexual harassment law. It is worth noting that the NCLW team was continuously involved in drafting the previous laws, however, none of the laws mentioned here except Nasawiya's engaged with feminist or women's groups. It was the draft that MP Ezzedine was working on that eventually saw the light on December 21, 2020, under the name "Law to Criminalize Sexual Harassment and [for] Rehabilitation of Its Victims." The law mostly addressed sexual harassment in the workplace. Predictably, the law "fell short of international standards by addressing sexual harassment solely as a crime and neglecting prevention, labor law reforms, monitoring, and civil remedies," according to a statement by Human Rights Watch on the eve of International Women's Day 2021⁷⁹. The law also falls short of the Violence and Harassment Convention,⁸⁰ which demands governments address violence and harassment at work through an "inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach," including through labor laws, occupational safety and health laws, and equality and non-discrimination laws, in addition to criminal law. International organizations were not the only disappointed parties. Several women's rights and feminist groups, many of which had worked for decades on sexual harassment and on more comprehensive versions of the bill expressed disenchantment with the limited scope of the approved law.

The first major issue with the law is that it bypasses structural reforms that the Lebanese state needs in order to prevent of sexual harassment, such as identifying marginalized populations that are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Migrant domestic workers for instance, who are excluded from the labor law and are isolated in the private homes of their employers and bound to them

⁷⁷ State ministries do not usually receive funds from the state.

⁷⁸ R. Hamzeh. "سحب قانون التحرش في المجلس النيابي" January 20, 2017. *Legal Agenda*. <http://legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=3408>

⁷⁹ <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/lebanon-sexual-harassment-law-missing-key-protections/#:~:text=Lebanon's%20new%20sexual%20harassment%20law,law%20that%20was%20ultimately%20adopted.>

⁸⁰ ILO *Convention No. 190* on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (Entry into force: 25 Jun 2021). Lebanon has not ratified this convention.

through the sponsorship system, are the most at-risk group and are not covered by the 2020 law. Another group includes Syrian and Palestinian refugees and transgender women. Another structural measure that the law bypasses is the absence of sexual harassment policies in corporations and organization in Lebanon. A 2018 study by the Arab Foundation for Equality and Freedom (AFE) found that only 15% of employers surveyed in Lebanon have policies that address sexual violence⁸¹. Beyond the workplace, a 2016 report by the International Men and Gender Equality Survey in Lebanon and UN Women found that two-thirds of women respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment in public spaces, with many experiencing it in the three months preceding the survey.⁸² Regardless of the above, over 50% of employed women in Lebanon work informally, so workplace criminalization does not help them, which makes its focus on criminalization within the workplace a major flaw.

In addition, feminist and women's rights watchdog groups have raised four major concerns that might limit the law's capacity to protect victims of sexual harassment. Among the most prominent is the law's definition of sexual harassment. The law defines sexual harassment as "any bad and repetitive behavior that is extraordinary, unwelcome by the victim, and with sexual connotation that constitutes a violation of the body, privacy, or emotions." It also notes that sexual harassment can occur through speech, actions, and electronic means, and considers single or repeated acts that use, "psychological, moral, financial, or racist pressure to obtain benefits of sexual nature" as sexual harassment. While the broad definition may be used in favor of the victim, it may also be exploited by Lebanese authorities to support perpetrators if certain behaviors are not "bad" or "out of the ordinary" enough.⁸³

Another concern highlighted by legal scholar and lawyer Karim Nammour from the human rights' watchdog and think tank Legal Agenda⁸⁴ was the burden of proof, which is on the victim. He notes that the law requires that victims of sexual harassment not only prove that they have been harassed, but also the consequences that they have suffered as a result, as opposed to demanding that the perpetrator prove their innocence. Victims are therefore requested to provide irrefutable evidence that they have suffered from sexual harassment. In contexts like the Lebanese, people exploit their connections with individuals in high-ranking positions to exonerate themselves, and it's almost invariably the men who manage to sway matters to their favour.

A third concern is the law's failure to protect the privacy of sexual harassment survivors from public scrutiny, which is very likely to lead to retaliation from the perpetrator, his friends, or his family. Per the law, survivors of sexual harassment can only use criminal courts to file complaints, in contrast to civil courts, which necessarily makes the case and their names public. In other words, the victim's privacy will not be protected under the new law which makes filing a complaint unrealistic for those who fear retaliation or do not wish to publicize their cases.

⁸¹ <https://hivos.org/assets/2021/02/Towards-a-safer-workplace-English.pdf>

⁸² https://imagesmena.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/IMAGES_Leb_summary_Final_Web_Dec13.pdf

⁸³ A recent example of this is the case of Tripoli-based school teacher Samer Mawlawi who has been accused of repeatedly sexually harassing dozens of his young female students in December 2021. Despite the fact that a case has been submitted against him in February 2022, he managed to evade the investigation forces three times before appearing before the public prosecutor in late March. The interrogation took less than a few hours, after which the attorney general released him on the same day, deeming his crime as a "misdemeanor" despite the amount of evidence and students' testimonies. Mawlawi was released with a pledge not to approach the female students who have filed complaints against him.

⁸⁴ Karim Nammour was interviewed by the AiW team for this policy mapping, July 2022.

A final concern is exposing survivors wishing to file complaints using the law to re-traumatization. Although Article 3 of the law notes that steps should be taken to protect the victim and witnesses during investigation and prosecution, the article remains vague. Gender-responsive training for security agencies, prosecutors, and judges is essential for treating victims sensitively and for providing a safe environment for reporting and pursuing complaints. Without this training for frontline justice personnel, survivors of sexual harassment and violence risk re-traumatization and stigmatization upon seeking remedies through the criminal law system as a result of discriminatory attitudes at police, and from prosecutors and judges.

Despite it being a step forward for many, the law fails to truly protect victims/survivors of sexual harassment, and to provide them with a safe environment to report and attain justice.

Similar to the domestic violence bill, the sexual harassment law trajectory within the policy space also did not see much progress in the past two years (2022-2023) – despite the law needing amendments and modifications. Yet, while the domestic violence issue saw some activity within the civic and popular spaces, awareness around sexual harassment seems to have waned compared to the year that followed the passing of the bill (2021), despite intensive training and awareness sessions that the SEEDS Legal Initiative⁸⁵ conducted around the law. Seeds reached over 500 participants from various ministries, private sector corporations, and political parties, across the country. Though impressive in terms of outreach, legal trainings remain marginal in the bigger picture. Beyond the need for substantial legal reform, efforts led by SEEDS and other actors remain fragmented and sporadic, occurring in isolation from broader advocacy initiatives on sexual harassment and not integrated into a wider, coordinated campaign. Discussions on sexual harassment must take place across diverse workplaces in both the public and private sectors to ensure that institutions establish reporting and accountability mechanisms—which most currently lack—before addressing legal reform.

4. Type of Contestation

Based on the six types of backlash outlined in Flood et al. (2018)⁸⁶, the manifestations of backlash against legislation protecting women against violence in Lebanon include the dominant political parties' **deliberate lack of implementation, particularly inaction and actively stalling discussing and passing both bills, the domestic violence and sexual harassment.**

On the level of the family violence bill, manifestations of backlash include **vilification and stigmatization of the advocates and supporters of the law**, often demonizing them and accusing them of destroying Muslim family values. Another type of backlash is **the co-option and subversion of women's right to protection against domestic violence.** This was particularly perpetrated by party representatives who falsely promised to lobby for retaining the original version of the bill, including the many MPs who signed the support petition, only to later agree on passing it with the distortions. Their agreement to sign the petition could have been an attempt to appease any possible opposition or unrest within the party, especially that KAFA had rallied the women's committees of these parties in favor of the law. Further, such two-handed

⁸⁵ <https://legal-clinic.org/>

⁸⁶ Flood, M.; Dragiewicz, M. and Pease, B. (2018) Resistance and Backlash to Gender Equality: An Evidence Review, Crime and Justice Research Centre, Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

dealings might also have been used to pacify the coalition's campaigners, who by that time had become known for their public shaming techniques against MPs.

Following Htun and Weldon's typology (2010)⁸⁷, backlash against the domestic violence law is characterized by both doctrinal and status politics. **While both doctrinal and status politics fuel backlash in the context of domestic violence, only status politics drives backlash in the context of sexual harassment.**

As domestic violence is deemed a personal status matter that falls under the purview of religious courts and rulings, religious authorities harshly criticize any attempt at shifting control away from them and into the realm of civil law. Lebanon's highest Sunni and Shiite councils aggressively lobbied MPs to hamper the policymaking process and obstruct the bill's successful passage through parliament. As detailed above, Dar al-Fatwa, along with various civil society organizations affiliated with it, opposed the draft bill on the grounds that it represents a violation of shari'a and undermines the authority of the father, aiming to ultimately put an end to the notion of family as understood in Islam.⁸⁸ Though religious authorities' hostility towards the law did not stop it from passing, it still had several important effects, mainly that the parliament passed a distorted version of the originally proposed bill, effectively eroding the essence of the law.

It is worth noting three specific modifications of the law, first, the reframing of marital rape as a punishable crime in the original bill to a "marital right" criminalizing only "injuries" resulting from procuring this right. This dangerous language **that frames sexual relations between a married couple as a right is exclusively found in religious personal status laws. Though the laws frame it as a right for both the man and woman in a couple, patriarchal norms and values transforms it into a prerogative of the man, and facilitates control over women's bodily and sexual autonomy.**

Second, the amendment limiting the protection granted to the children of the victim/survivor to only those under the mother's custody, or those within the age of custody protections according to the personal status laws, as opposed to including the victim's children who have been exposed to violence regardless of their custody age.

Third, the inclusion of the shameless amendment giving priority to existing personal status laws in the case of a conflict with the new law.⁸⁹ While the children's custody amendment was ultimately repealed during the first round of amendments proposed by KAFA in 2017, the other two remain. This underscores the power exerted by religious authorities on the MPs who have worked on the law and reveals the tug of war between seculars, feminists, and other advocates of the law on the one hand, and all of the country's religious authorities on the other.

⁸⁷ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/abs/when-do-governments-promote-womens-rights-a-framework-for-the-comparative-analysis-of-sex-equality-policy/5B6328280597AE81DAA4A76EB7B44563>

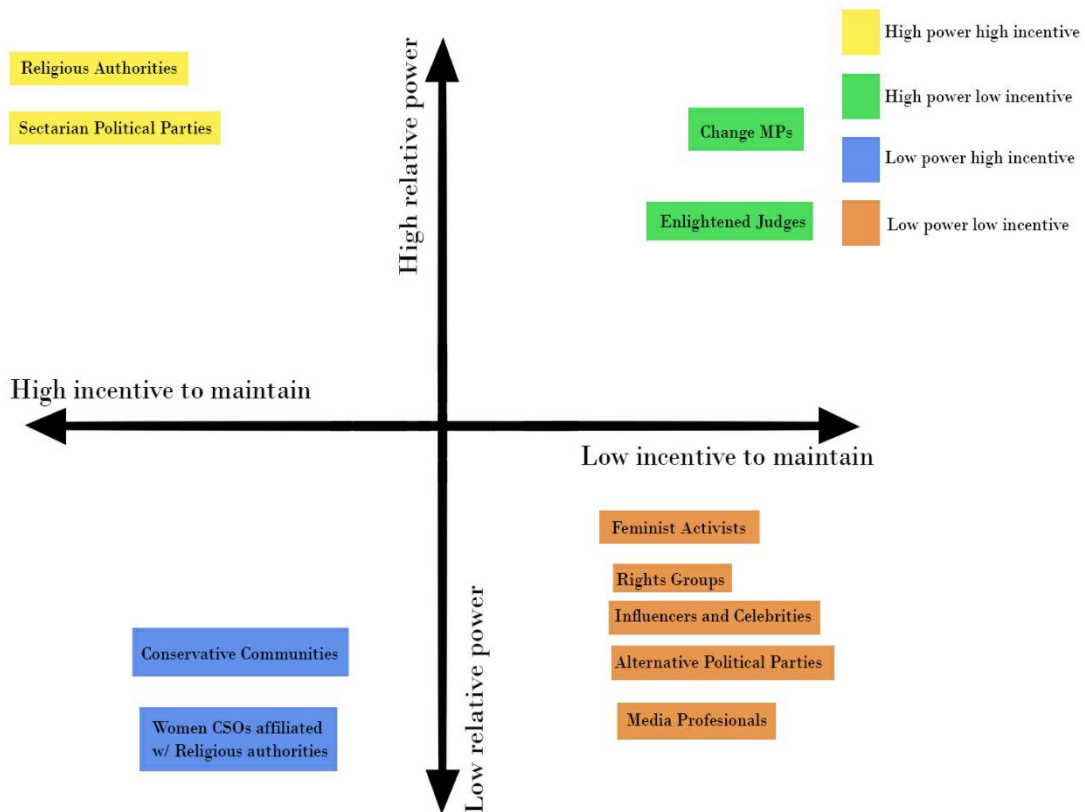
⁸⁸ CHR. Michelsen Institute (CMI). (2017). *Legal reform and women's rights in Lebanese personal status laws*. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/6341-legal-reform-and-womens-rights-in-lebanese.pdf>

⁸⁹ HRW (January 2015). "Unequal and Unprotected: Women's Rights Under Lebanese Personal Status Law." *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws>

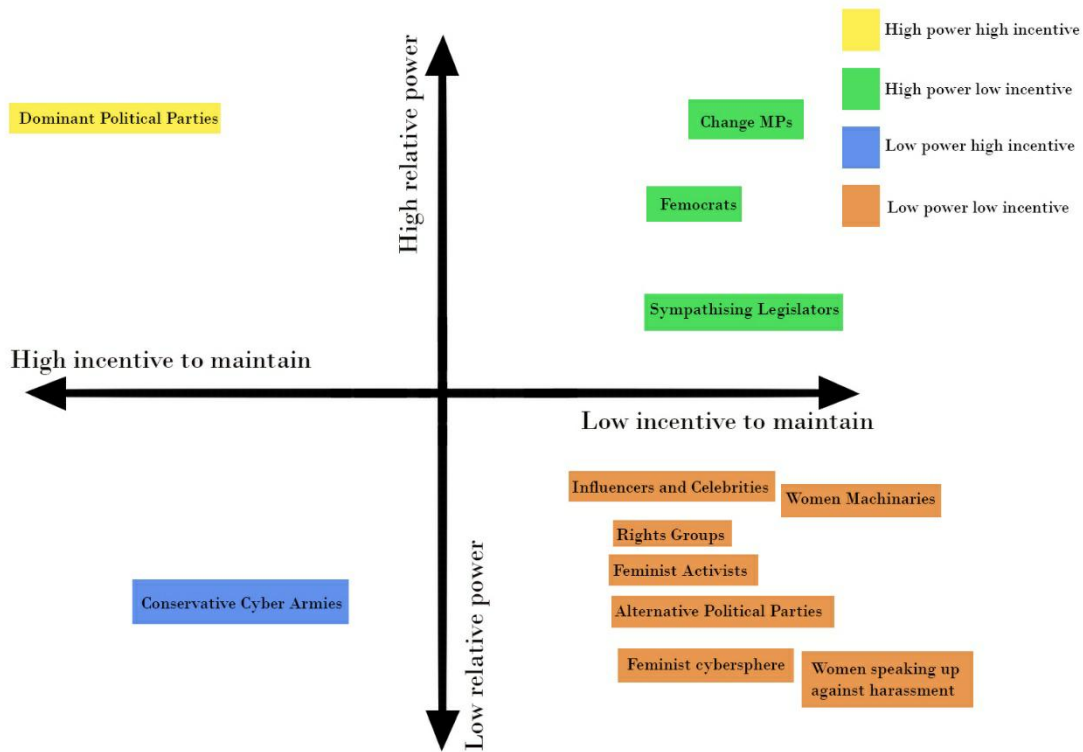
The backlash against the sexual harassment law is also driven by status politics. Backlash perpetrators belittled and demeaned all attempts at rectifying the gender status hierarchy and power imbalance, including any attempts to pass an anti-sexual harassment law. As observed when MP Moukheiber’s law proposal was due for discussion in parliament, numerous MPs ridiculed it and jokingly questioned whether a law was now needed to protect men from women. This clearly points to policymakers’ determination to keep women crippled by threats of violence and harassment in public, particularly in the workplace, preventing them from reaching status equality.

5. Actors

➤ Domestic Violence



➤ **Sexual Harassment**



6. Drivers

These two cases of sexual harassment and domestic violence are enmeshed within the larger system of discrimination and violence against women in Lebanon, defined by four primary structural issues: **a sectarian governance system, the grip of religious institutions on personal status laws, the patrilineal citizenship and kinship system prevalent in all spheres of life (families, the market, and governmental institutions), and the largely misogynist penal code.**

Personal status law elevates family law to public law and legalizes preferential treatment of men in sectarian codes. While the legal codes of the Muslim and Christian sects vary, these laws more generally enshrine patriarchy, with all religious laws discriminating between women and men in a myriad of issues, including marriage and assignment of roles within the family, and by positioning women and girls as inferior compared to men and boys in the face of the law.⁹⁰ The personal status laws might be the primary mechanism of legal recognition devised by the state for separate sectarian groups, but sect is not citizens' only register of recognition in Lebanon.

⁹⁰ See for instance: M. Mikdashi, A legal guide to being a Lebanese woman (Part 1), Jadaliyya, 3 December 2010, [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/376/a-legal-guide-to-being-a-lebanese-woman-\(part-1\)](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/376/a-legal-guide-to-being-a-lebanese-woman-(part-1))

Citizenship in Lebanon is recognized via sex and sect. **Sex-based differentiation saturates most branches of Lebanese law and along with gender, determines which facets of citizenship are available and which are foreclosed to women and girls. This underscores how deeply embedded sexual difference and gender-based discrimination are in the Lebanese political system. Mikdashi (2022) uses the term “sextarianism” to approach and unpack this system in Lebanon, and argues that “sect and sex are mutually constitutive modes of political difference in Lebanon.”** Mikdashi (2022) observes that “state effect,” or the material and ideological presence and status of the state apparatus, and therefore **Lebanese sovereignty itself**, emerges from the management of these modes of political difference. Consequently, laws that aim to shift the structural inequality of women and girls, sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups, in this case the anti-sexual harassment and domestic violence bills, face stringent backlash from political and religious authorities who benefit from the continuation of this “sextarian” system.

7. Spaces

There are a variety of critical spaces wherein backlash and counter backlash are taking place across Lebanon. **First, there is growing student activism on both issues of sexual harassment and domestic violence**⁹¹, both where there is university infrastructure (Title IX) to discuss the issue, like at the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University, and where this does not exist. Notable players include the AUB Feminist Club, LAU Intersectional Feminist Club, LAU Citizenship Club, AUB Feminist Forum, and student clubs at the Université Saint-Joseph.

Second, the growing student enthusiasm is accompanied by a **number of young feminist groups, initiatives and spaces**, like the Feminist Network, HarassTracker,⁹² and Fe-Male⁹³—that address sexual harassment both explicitly and implicitly.

Third, numerous workshops and awareness campaigns have been conducted, primarily led by KAFA and the Coalition, involving a broad range of stakeholders – including lawyers, doctors, judges, police officers, and particularly members of the media. This engagement has put the issue of domestic violence at the forefront of these groups’ priorities and mainstreamed women’s protection against violence in public and across various media platforms.

In the past years, NCLW has been carrying out awareness campaigns in schools. The campaigns engaged both students and parents to raise awareness and combat violence not only against girls, but also boys. This is part of the joint project implemented by the NCLW in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and in partnership with UNICEF.

In terms of sexual harassment, the campaigns implemented by NCLW helped raise awareness of the sexual harassment law and its implementation. For instance, the NCLW partnered with the General Directorate of State Security and the United Nations Population Fund to organize a

⁹¹ El Rahi, N. (2022). Clashing with the Patriarchy: The Promise of Potential as Politics. In Jeffrey, K. and Rima, M. (Eds.), *The Lebanon uprising of 2019: Voices from the revolution*. London: I.B. Tauris and Bloomsbury, pp. 131-150

⁹² www.harasstracker.org

⁹³ <https://www.fe-male.org/>

dialogue session with members and officers of the General Directorate of State Security regarding the harassment law. This dialogue is part of a series of awareness and dialogue sessions in multiple unions, universities, and institutions concerned with implementing the law criminalizing sexual harassment and its policies. The commission also carried out two dialogue sessions with employees from the Ministry of Labor and officers from the General Directorate of the Internal Security Force.

Though the NCLW is usually heavily criticized by various feminist groups because of its affiliation and ties to dominant political parties, and its uncritical positions on relevant issues, these activities still reach groups and communities that are otherwise side-lined or absent in conversations on gender justice. Outreach to these communities is indeed crucial. Sexual harassment has never really been taken seriously by internal or general security services so initiatives like this are positive steps towards raising awareness on it.

The participation of the NCLW in this project is mostly due to its involvement in the legislative debate on sexual harassment, and in the validation of the law proposed by MP Inaya Ezzeddine, which was ultimately adopted by parliament. Further, and in light of NCLW's role in this process, the entity received funding to implement awareness around it.

Fourth, online spaces have become incredibly important for discussions about sexual and gender-based violence both in domestic and public spaces. The **Lebanese feminist cyber sphere** has expanded significantly and gained momentum in the past few years, particularly after the #MeToo campaigns and the development of a more local and organic hashtag (نصدق_الناجيات) which translates to #WeBelieveSurvivors. In the past few years, this largely nurturing space empowered hundreds to come out with their stories with sexual violence and harassment. Importantly, since KAFA started engaging media stakeholders, **traditional media platforms have also become spaces of engagement, action, and counteraction on the issue of violence against women.** Feminist use of this space helped advocates of the protection of women against violence to expand beyond traditionally feminist or women's rights circles and audiences.

Fifth, the parliament. Since 2007, the parliament has been a challenging but crucial space for deliberation on laws to protect women against sexual violence. The broad engagement that KAFA initiated with multiple stakeholders in the context of the family violence battle created momentum and legitimacy for the issue in parliament.

Sixth, the streets. In the context of the October 17, 2019 revolution, feminist calls for gender justice were at the forefront of the uprising. In December 2019, women demonstrators organized a march where they performed the viral anti-rape anthem used in Chile "the rapist is you" in the form of a flash mob. Their performance marked an explicit call to amend personal status laws and incriminate violence against women. Further, the NGO ABAAD⁹⁴ launched an awareness campaign using the street and embodied practices as their means, in order to encourage women who are subjected to domestic violence to seek help. ABAAD called on all Lebanese to share the NGO's hotline from their balconies to inform abused women on how they can call for help. As such, some citizens went out on their balconies clanging their pots and pans and featuring the number 81 788 178 on sheets.

⁹⁴ <https://www.abaadmena.org/>

8. Events

➤ Domestic Violence

Countless women in Lebanon were killed by their husbands – both before the passing of the 293/2014 law and after it.

Two prominent and highly-mediatised cases stand out in this context, and these are the crimes that killed Roula Yaacoub (July 2013) and Manal Assi (February 2014). These two crimes do not only stand out because of their horrific and brutal character, but also because their heavy mediatisation contributed to turning people’s attention to women’s rights in the country and to the domestic violence bill that had been sitting in parliament for almost seven years by then.

Roula Yaacoub, a mother of five, was found comatose in her house in Akkar – North of Lebanon on the 27th of July, 2013. She passed away shortly after being transported to the hospital. Yaacoub’s mother and neighbours admitted that Roula’s husband, Karam Bazi, would regularly beat Roula and their five daughters – the youngest only months old then. On the day Roula died, one of her daughters managed to escape the house to seek help for her mother from their neighbours. Despite that and though neighbours and extended family members were ready to testify and provide evidence against Bazi, he was acquitted soon after he was taken in for investigation and a 13-page report was released stating absence of conclusive evidence that he killed his wife. The investigation included testimonies of Roula’s daughters⁹⁵ who denied their father’s violence on the day of their mother’s death and forged a forensic report to state that Roula’s cause of death was brain aneurysm. Bazi’s acquittal was possible not only because he was connected to an influential political figure in Akkar, but also because there was no law to protect women from domestic violence.

The second crime is the **killing of Manal Assi, bludgeoned to death by her husband Mohamed El Nhaily, with a pressure cooker and other home appliances.** The man, who was also married to another woman, justified his actions by blaming his fury at discovering that his wife was having an affair. Upon knowing this, El Nhaily – known for his thuggish behaviour - stormed into the house and beat his wife for seven consecutive hours, preventing her siblings from seeking help or any medical emergency services. As Manal was taking her last breaths at the hospital, El Nhaily threatened her family and forced them to lie to authorities about Manal’s cause of death. In 2016, and even after the domestic violence bill had passed, the court proceeded to grant El Nhaily the “provocation excuse” which significantly reduced his sentence.⁹⁶ The court proved that adultery did indeed occur and accepted the husband’s excuse, thus reducing his sentence to 3 years and 9 months only. That decision was simply a revival of the concept of honour killing.⁹⁷

These two crimes were the drop that spilled the glass. The years-long intensive advocacy and online and offline campaigning around the domestic violence issue culminated in a massive

⁹⁵ They were automatically taken in by their father’s family; and Roula’s mother was denied any contact with them for years. It is widely assumed that the daughters were manipulated and put under psychological – among other forms of pressure – to testify in favour of their father.

⁹⁶ He was given only 5 years of prison – prison years in Lebanon are 9 months. The court did accept his justification, and proved Manal’s adultery (after her death)

⁹⁷ Nizar Saghieh. (2016). *Judging Manal Assi: return of the macho*. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <https://english.legal-agenda.com/judging-manal-assi-return-of-the-macho/>

protest organized by KAFA on International Women’s Day on the 8th of March, 2014. Over 5,000 people responded to KAFA’s call, and, led by the mothers of Roula Yaacoub and Manal Assi, the crowd marched in Beirut in what was described as the largest women’s rights protest in recent history. This protest not only demonstrated that domestic violence was no longer solely a women’s issue but a matter of broader public concern, it also served as the impetus for parliament to place the law on the agenda of the upcoming session on April 1, 2014.

In 2023, women victims of domestic violence were in heightened danger, partly as a result of the judges’ strike that started in mid-August 2023 in which judges protested against the decline in salaries and the deterioration of their work conditions. Although the strike is a valid right for judges as workers demanding better conditions, it led to the paralysis of the judicial system, with some of the nation’s top courts completely halting their activities, including for urgent judiciary matters. This meant delayed protection orders for countless women who needed it, which put them in greater peril.

This was highlighted by KAFA on their social media platforms, as they shed light on the number of women killed by their husbands, and the minimal coverage from the media that these cases have received. KAFA’s rich activity in the popular space (the media) on the domestic violence issue also features a solid framing of these crimes, tying women’s vulnerability to violence and abusive homes to patriarchal sectarian personal status laws that are notorious for their patriarchal bias. Thus, they advocate for the adoption of a unified personal status.

Indeed, 2023 witnessed several cases of crimes against women and femicides all over Lebanon. In February 2023, a retired Internal Security officer shot his ex-wife, Mona El-Homsi, in the Northern city of Tripoli with a hunting rifle. The crime occurred in broad daylight in front of neighbors who stopped by and watched the crime unfold despite knowing the victim well.⁹⁸

In March, Dr. Zahraa Al Tashem was violently beaten by her brothers over an inheritance argument. In an interview with Megaphone media outlet⁹⁹, Dr. Zahraa revealed that she asked for help from the Hermel police station mid-assault. However, the officer remained indifferent despite hearing her scream through the phone. Upon filing a complaint against him and questioning his neutrality and indifference, the officer’s excuse was that he was unable to leave the police station building.¹⁰⁰

During the same month of 2023, Zeinab Zeaiter was shot ten times by her husband in front of her children. Not only did she endure violence and misogyny throughout her life, she was also defamed after her passing. Her brother posted a video on social media praising her husband and murderer. He claimed that the family image had been cleansed through this “honor” killing because Zeinab was having an affair and that if her husband hadn’t killed her, he would have had

⁹⁸ (2023). Human Rights Development in a Week [Review of Human Rights Development in a Week]. In *cldh-lebanon* (pp. 2–3). Centre Libanais des Droits Humains. http://www.cldh-lebanon.org/HumanRightsBrie/02fd23b1-36da-4b1a-96b3-e5861b172b75_Human%20Rights%20Brief%2027%20February%20-%205%20March,%202023.pptx.pdf

⁹⁹ Megaphone is an online independent media platform that produces explainer multimedia content covering current affairs and social and cultural commentaries, in formats adapted for the digital media.

¹⁰⁰ (2023). Human Rights Development in a Week [Review of *Human Rights Development in a Week*]. In *cldh-lebanon* (pp. 2–3). Centre Libanais des Droits Humains. http://www.cldh-lebanon.org/HumanRightsBrie/02fd23b1-36da-4b1a-96b3-e5861b172b75_Human%20Rights%20Brief%2027%20February%20-%205%20March,%202023.pptx.pdf

to. Classically, some people chose to defend the offender because he suffered from mental health issues, blaming Zeinab for cheating on him.¹⁰¹

In May, news came out of a man shooting his pregnant daughter three times before fleeing the crime scene. While the fetus survived, the pregnant daughter remained in intensive care at a local hospital. The incident was said to have occurred after a family fight regarding the father's disapproval of her marriage.¹⁰² Also in May, another woman, Rajia Al-Akoum was killed by her ex-husband, who ironically happens to be the former chief of an Internal Security Forces (ISF) station, in front of her three children.

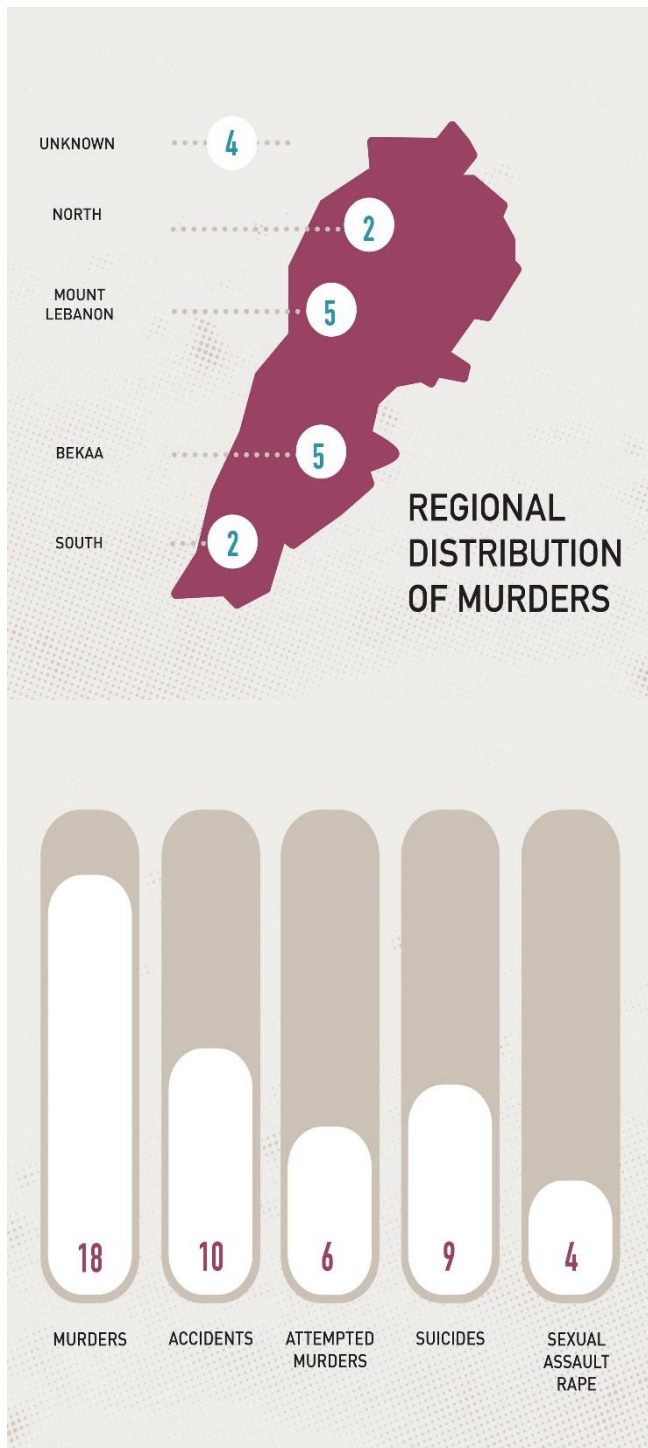
In August, a disabled girl was admitted to a hospital for “a high fever” and later died. Upon examination of her body, doctors revealed that her death was caused by the bruising of her lung membrane. During interrogations, her father admitted to beating her because she cried and said she had special needs and suffered from paralysis and malnutrition.¹⁰³

According to Kafa, in the first six months of 2023 alone, 12 women were killed, six experienced attempted murder, and seven completed suicide. The year 2023 closed with a total of 18 reported cases of femicide (visuals below). The first seven months of 2024 recorded 13 cases of femicides. Noteworthy that these tallies only include reported cases.

¹⁰¹ Doueiry, M. (2023, May 9). Father shoots pregnant daughter in Tripoli [Review of Father shoots pregnant daughter in Tripoli]. Today.lorientlejour. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1336909/father-shoots-pregnant-daughter-in-tripoli.html>

¹⁰² Doueiry, M. (2023, May 9). Father shoots pregnant daughter in Tripoli [Review of Father shoots pregnant daughter in Tripoli]. Today.lorientlejour. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1336909/father-shoots-pregnant-daughter-in-tripoli.html>

¹⁰³ (2023, August 19). Today.lorientlejour. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1346881/man-beats-daughter-to-death-in-marjayoun.html>



Source: Kafa's official Facebook page, July 24, 2024.

In 2024, a scandal involving the sexual abuse of children through TikTok rocked Lebanon. Throughout several months between April and June 2024, Lebanese authorities investigated a group of around 30 individuals implicated in this scandal, who allegedly used TikTok to lure and groom children for sexual assault. Gang members reportedly filmed the assaults, intending to sell

them on the dark web, according to local media outlets¹⁰⁴. Lebanese police reports revealed that gang members – some of them minors – lured children via TikTok messages and then sold images and footage of them on the dark web, hence blackmailing them into coming back and enduring assault repeatedly.

Over 8 people are currently detained in this case, but given the current situation in Lebanon, investigations have been stalled, with several prominent members of the gang residing abroad and hence out of the Lebanese judicial system's reach. While this is not about violence against women per se, it is still important to mention it among prominent events within the violence against women and girls policy areas, because this violence against young boys is gendered, and remains an expression of patriarchal violence, and hegemonic power structures that subjugate the younger and more vulnerable to the predatory behaviour of the more privileged.

➤ **Sexual Harassment**

On the level of the sexual harassment law, two events stand out.

At the height of the uprising, in a protest in November 2019, a woman spots a man who had previously sexually harassed her and decides to expose and shame him to alert other women to his presence and warn them. Upon taking his picture and posting it online, countless other women identified him as the man who sexually harassed, assaulted, stalked, and/or raped them and/or their friends. In the months that followed, tens of women spoke out. Countless resorted to social media to share their stories, many used the HarassTracker map to report and some reported to the police.

Marwan Habib's case became a nation-wide scandal, but unfortunately, not only had he shown no remorse over his crimes, the internal security forces have also been too lenient and forgiving with him despite multiple victims' complaints; and most of the victims who started building a court case with the HarassTracker team against him eventually ended up retreating.

Not only was justice not served for Marwan Habib's survivors, Habib was also hosted on a talk show to be "questioned" about his actions hence providing him with a platform to justify his actions. Habib was not held accountable for his crimes, and was still free to roam his online and offline crime scenes. He was later spotted lurking on Tinder under the alias Jamy. Habib was recently arrested in the US for assaulting a woman in her hotel room in Miami.

Habib's survivors were denied justice in Lebanon, but the scandal around him sparked a long-awaited debate on sexual harassment and turned the public's attention to the necessity of criminalizing it. It is also worth pointing out to the context of this conversation. The fact that women in the 2019 uprising reveals that the protests and streets then were indeed a safe and empowering space for women to voice their needs and rights. This presented an opportunity for feminists online and offline to discuss critical issues such as the intersectional nature of their demands, and consent in intimate partner relationships; and it was around this time that the hashtag mobilization #WeBelieveSurvivors spread.

104 Jadah, M (2024, May 8). What is the 'dark web,' allegedly used by a TikTok pedophile gang arrested in Lebanon? Today, Lorientlejour <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1412910/what-is-the-dark-web-allegedly-used-by-a-tiktok-pedophile-gang-arrested-in-lebanon.html>

9. Tactics

To understand hidden and visible power in the context of women's protection against domestic violence and sexual harassment, the stalling and delays in passing of both laws on the one hand, and the aggressive attack against the domestic violence bill on the other reveal a number of tactics used by backlash perpetrators/opposition actors to prevent legal changes acknowledging and adequately prosecuting GBV.

Broadly, the fact that both the domestic violence law and the anti-sexual harassment law were only passed into legislation once the contents of each bill had been watered down is telling evidence of the visible power of backlash actors. In both cases, original versions of the law were carved up and reduced in order to please political and religious elites who vehemently opposed the original versions.

Relatedly, the multiple bureaucratic and political delays involved in passing both bills is evidence of the hidden power of backlash actors. For example, it took parliament seven years to pass the bill, even as feminist and women's rights organizations were vocally highlighting the increasing number of women and girls dying at the hands of their family members. Another aspect of hidden power in relation to these two laws is the continued appointment of conservative political actors to the very sub-committees tasked with reviewing and validating GBV legislation. These tactics operate by gradually and continuously undermining the power of secular or reform-minded MPs, replacing them with conservatives who align with the demands of political and religious groups opposed to passing any GBV legislation.

Another critical vector of invisible or hidden power is the influence of conservative religious and political elites to quickly influence public discourse surrounding women's rights and feminist organizations and their goals. These actors were able to quickly mobilize a discourse that shed doubts on the funding sources and motives of these organizations as "Western" and therefore, "anti-Muslim" or "anti-family," was a decisive factor in the time it took to move these pieces of legislation through the various levels of parliament.

The "invisible power" in the context of both laws and particularly domestic violence is vested in the reinforcement of religious authorities' grip over personal status issues, and resultantly over women's bodies and agency. It also lies in the reproduction of the same patriarchal traditional norms and values in the Lebanese community that frame sexual relations and women's bodies as prerogatives for men, particularly their husbands. This form of power reinforces patriarchal social constructs, and patriarchal connectivity, and thus keeping women subjugated in the domestic sphere as a tool to keep her from playing a role, and fully contributing to public and political life.

10. Counter-tactics

Today, the main drivers of women's right to protection – on both domestic violence and sexual harassment – can be traced to the 2019 revolution, and the hopes that the revolution sparked for changes to the systemic discrimination facing various marginalized groups, in particular women.

The calls for women's protection against sexual and gender-violence draws from a historical legacy of feminist campaigning for this right. Women's rights NGOs, as well as feminist collectives operating online and offline have long received financial support from various foreign governments and international development organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, to develop social media and political campaigns promoting the legislation of women's protection, among other rights that women have been denied in Lebanon.¹⁰⁵ Women machineries as well other CSOs and collectives received this funding to counter-backlash mostly by building online and offline campaigns, and engage with broader publics and unusual suspects (such as forensic doctors and judges in the context of domestic violence). In particular, KAFA has received significant international support to lead the campaigns in favour of a law. However, KAFA is not the only entity engaging in campaigning and advocacy against violence. Across the country, multiple organizations are mobilized, namely LECORVAW (mentioned above), RDFL, Musawat, FE-male, and others. Notably, in 2012, ABAAD launched their "We Believe" campaign as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, with the ultimate goal of eradicating gender-based violence. The campaign originated from ABAAD's use of positive psychology to engage men and religious leaders, given that religion continues to govern matters of personal status in the country and that religious authorities hold significant influence in shaping attitudes toward contested issues. The campaign brought together religious leaders from various factions who allied in order to end gender-based violence.¹⁰⁶ While this counter-tactic is not aligned with KAFA and the coalition's confrontational, rights-based approach, it is still considered a tool that groups employed to navigate the challenging process of legislating protection of women against violence.

Further, with the election of the Change MPs, the coalitions they can build inside parliament, in addition to the relationships they have with grassroots movements, will both help in advancing the feminist agenda. With enough popular support, pressure on the government and on other opposing parties in parliament will help in creating new power dynamics and pressure groups which are hard to bypass. This potentially means amendments to better the existing laws on both domestic violence and sexual harassment.

Women murdered by their husbands/ male relatives

2024:

- Abir Rahal: Shot to death in a courthouse while completing divorce proceedings by her husband who later committed suicide

2023:

- Amira Moughnieh: Lebanese woman who moved to Australia killed by her ex-husband
- Zeina Kanjo: Strangled to death by her husband in her home

¹⁰⁵ Nassif, G. (2020, March 4). *Women's political participation in Lebanon and the limits of aid-drive empowerment* [Report]. Lebanon Support. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/women-s-political-participation-lebanon-and-limits-aid-driven-empowerment-enar>.

¹⁰⁶ ABAAD– Resource Center for Gender Equality. Retrieved December 2, 2020, from <https://www.abaadmena.org/programmes/advocacy-and-policy-development/project-5811e5ec765b96-58108725>

- Rajia Al-Akoum: Killed by her husband (ISF member & former chief of a police station in Saida) in front of her three children
- Rokaya Halawi: Shot to death with a hunting rifle by her husband
- Sahar Francis: Shot to death alongside her mother by her husband
- Jumana: Shot and killed by her ex-husband
- Mona al-Homsi: Shot and killed by her ex-husband
- Maria Hatti: Shot in the head by a married man whom she rejected his love proposal and later committed suicide
- Zeinab Zeaiter was shot ten times by her husband in front of her children

2022:

- Nabila Idan: Shot in her family home by her husband (July 28)
- Hanaa Khodr: Set on fire by her husband while pregnant (August)
- Basma Abbas and Rima, Tala, and Manal: Mother and her three daughters shot, murdered, and buried in a cave by one of the daughter's fiancé

2021:

- Widad Hassoun: Domestic violence victim, strangled to death and thrown in the sea

2020:

- Manal al-Timani: Stabbed 13 times to death by her husband who later murdered eight other people over allegations that she was cheating on him with his brother

2018:

- Remi Al-Hussein tortured and murdered by her husband who filmed her last moments and sent the videos to her family
- Nada Bahlawan: Shot to death by her husband
- N.Sh.: Stabbed more than 20 times to death by her husband's friend alongside her child who was found in a critical condition. The motive behind this murder was the victim's refusal to engage in a physical act with him.
- Wisal A.: Beaten on her head by her husband who left her bleeding for 4 hours before taking her to the hospital where she later passed away.

2017:

- Rayan Iaali: Succumbed to her wounds after she was hit on her head by a rock (March)
- Majida Haidar: Stabbed to death by her husband
- Samira Shour: Shot nine times by her husband who later shot their daughter five times and killed himself 24 hours later
- Bassma Mohammad Latifeh: Shot to death by her ex-husband
- Fatima Khaizaran: Shot his ex-wife to death
- Moumina Mousallem: Shot by her ex-husband in the chest from the window after she forbade him from entering her house
- Dalia Hijazi: Shot to death by her husband after he was also accused of killing his former fiancé

- Yaman Darwich: Hit on the head with a vase, broken chin, choked, and gunshot wounds led to her murder by her husband
- Soubhiye Aoude: Passed away after signs of torture and abuse from her husband.

2016:

- Chirine Asaker: Shot to death by her husband or committed suicide after years of domestic abuse
- Zahraa Ali al-Kabbout: Shot dead by her husband over an alleged family dispute.
- Rawaa Al Mohammad: Murdered by her brothers through slicing her throat and then stabbing her because she married a man they did not approve of
- Zeina El Khalil: 15-year-old girl shot dead by her neighbor for refusing to marry him
- Maymouna Ahmad Abu al-Aila: Beaten to death by her husband
- Hanadi: Shot to death by her husband.
- Hiba M.: Shot to death by her brother.
- Hanaa Yaacoub: Shot to death by her husband.
- A.M.: Stabbed to death by her son.

2015:

- Mirna Sfeir: Shot to death by her ex-boyfriend who killed himself after it <https://civilsociety-centre.org/content/sami-el-lamaa-kills-mirna-sfeir-and-commits-suicide>
- Sarah El Amin: Shot 17 times by husband in front of their children
- Abir Qantar: Beaten to death by her husband while pregnant alongside the husband's son
- Fatima Naa'im: 80-year-old woman stabbed to death by her son
- Feryal: Shot to death by her son "in the name of honor"
- Lamis Daoud: Shot to death by her husband who later murdered his uncle too. She suffered years of domestic and financial abuse from her husband.
- Ghazal Beshara: 19-year-old wife murdered by her husband.
- Amal H.: Committed suicide after years of domestic abuse
- Radwa Tawfiq Ismail: Stabbed to death by her son.
- F.A.: Shot to death by a taxi driver who was following her husband's order. The husband planned to murder his wife for financial reasons and to marry another woman, therefore staging her murder as an attempted robbery.
- Suheir

2014:

- Salam Mohammad: Murdered by her husband and buried in a garden
- Salwa El Ahmad: Shot to death by her brother because he was trying to "protect her honor" after finding a text message on her phone
- Nawwar El Khaled: Slaughtered with a knife by her uncle
- Ruqayya Monzer: Shot to death by her husband while pregnant
- Christelle Abou Shakra: Poisoned to death by her ex-husband
- Manal Al Assi: Tortured to death by her husband.
- Nisrine Rouhana: Shot to death by her husband

- Wala Sawfan: Shot to death by her father after a dispute regarding the marriage of her fiancé

2013:

- Adele Lahoud: Murdered by her son who hit her on the head with a farming pickaxe. This was not his first murder; he had already served a sentence for murdering his brother's wife.
- Baghdad El Issa: Stabbed and beaten to death by her brother. She was 7 months pregnant at the time because her brother had raped her and killed her in the name of "honor" because she refused to abort her child
- Bassima Itani: Stabbed to death in her home (by her husband or the concierge or both together still unclear)
- Bouthayna Zein: Set herself on fire after years of physical and emotional abuse from her husband who had divorced her to marry his brother's ex-wife.
- Fatima Bakkour: Murdered by her husband while pregnant
- Malukah Moursel: Murdered by her son for financial reasons.
- Roula Yaacoub: Beaten to death by her husband who was convicted 9 years later.

2012:

- Sonia Yaghi: Femicide, murdered by her brother in the name of "honor"
- Mona: Committed suicide after years of domestic abused and ill treatment from her husband.
- H.F.: Strangled to death by her husband.

2011:

- Zenad Khalil: Shot to death by her husband
- Mariam Khadra: Shot to death by her husband who later committed suicide
- Nilian: Hit on her head with a sharp object by her father leading to her death after she "disobeyed his orders".
- Nour Al-Ain Shaaban: Shot to death by her father after she married a man he disapproved

2010:

- Latifa Kassir: Strangled to death by her ex-husband after years of suffering from GBV (his sentence was later reduced and he was released)
- Fatima Al Mokdad: Strangled to death by her husband who later burned her body to hide his crime
- Sylva Saouma: Shot to death by her husband who later completed suicide

2009:

Amina Baydoun: Murdered by her husband.