

EMBRACING EQUITY ALL YEAR LONG - 2022

The Lebanese Women
Democratic Gathering (RDFL)

Annual Report 2022

Prepared by RDFL's Vice President
Sara El Outa

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT MARIE-THERESE EL MIR

Dearest fellows and friends in the feminist struggle,

Today we put in your hands the harvest of last year, this harvest is the fruit of the success of those who came before us, and as the writer (Dale Carnegie) says, "Success can only be achieved if you love what you do."

This harvest was accomplished by RDFL team with determination, strength and consistency, to achieve its goals and objectives, through its projects and programs in order to achieve social justice for women and girls, knowing that we are still at the beginning of the struggle to achieve complete gender equality that we have sought and are striving for with colleagues and comrades in the struggle.

We did not start our work by chance, nor did our ideas and issues come by mistake, but it is the faith of the cause for which RDFL was found, and we found, and it is the result of serious and diligent work of all colleagues in all branches and centers of RDFL.

2022 is a year during which the world gathered its breath after successive crises that affected it, from the Covid-19 pandemic, to the global economic and political crises, to the Lebanese crises that have not ended since 1975, which is the date of the start of the gathering, abolishing the discrimination that women of that era were suffering from, and still to this day. What Lebanon has experienced in the modern era since the October 2019 revolution, the Covid-19 crisis that ravaged the country under its political, economic, social, cultural and humanitarian crises, so that Lebanon became one of the countries that compete with a few countries with fragility, collapse and resounding bankruptcy.



It cannot be said that the deteriorating conditions affected one group without the other, but affected all segments of society, from residents to refugees, and migrants, but it affected more women and girls who are subjected to the largest number of violations during crises in the absence of protection mechanisms and gaps in many laws that directly concern them.

These conditions prevented a decent living, during which all human rights and human dignity were violated, so that depositors' money was frozen in banks, and we witnessed the migration of many citizens to expatriate countries in search of social security after the high unemployment rate, leading to the spread of crime, the high rate of violence against women and girls, and the rate of reports, which renewed our determination to work hard to combat gender-based violence, raise awareness among survivors and enhance women's political participation. This year, we have witnessed the arrival of eight female deputies to the Lebanese Parliament, a percentage that is still shy despite the high competencies and capabilities of women.

During 2022, we developed the roadmap to restart our advocacy efforts and the "Not Before 18" campaign to pressure decision-makers to pass the law setting the age of marriage and ending child marriage in Lebanon.



“Hand in hand, we raise our aspirations to turn them into a real reality dominated by equality and gender justice, and live up to the ranks of developed societies.”

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THE CURRENT LEBANESE CONTEXT IN RELEVANCE TO RDFL'S INTERVENTION

The current situation in Lebanon is characterized by a severe economic crisis that has had wide-ranging impacts on the country and its people. The Lebanese pound (LBP) has lost a significant amount of its value, with the exchange rate reaching record lows against the US Dollar. The economic downturn has led to high levels of inflation, increased poverty rates, and soaring unemployment rates.

The economic crisis has had a significant impact on the labor market in Lebanon, with many businesses closing down and workers losing their jobs. The unemployment rate in Lebanon has reached unprecedented levels, with the World Bank reporting an unemployment rate of 35% in 2021. In addition to the poverty rate which has been rising steadily, the United Nations estimates that over 78% of the population is currently living below the poverty line.

The fuel crisis has also led to a shortage of essential goods, including medicine and cooking gas. This has severely impacted households, hospitals, and businesses.

The transportation sector in Lebanon has been severely impacted by the ongoing crises, with the cost of fuel rising significantly which made it difficult for many people to commute to work or access essential services (public sector staff, schools staff...)

The education system in Lebanon has also been severely impacted by the ongoing crises, with many schools struggling to pay their teachers and provide basic supplies which led to continuous strikes among public entities. This has led to a decrease in the quality of education and a rise in drop-out rates. Additionally, the protection situation in Lebanon has deteriorated, with an increase in child labor, child marriage, and exploitation, particularly among vulnerable refugee communities.

Lebanon is also facing a communication crisis, with limited access to the internet and mobile services, particularly in rural areas. This has made it difficult for people to access information or communicate with each other.

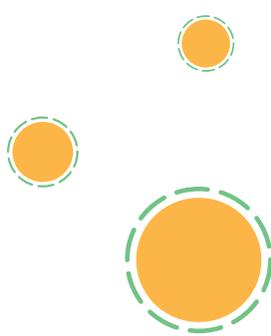
Additionally, the political situation in Lebanon remains unstable, with ongoing protests and tensions between different political factions with no agreement on the presidential elections and with the caretaking government.

The women and girls' situation in Lebanon remains challenging, with high reported violence rates and limited services to support them.

As the economic crisis continues, resources are increasingly scarce, and competition for basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare has intensified, this has also led to a rise in tensions between refugees and host communities, with refugees facing increased discrimination and marginalization.

RDFL had to face all these challenges that are related to mobility, security, changing priorities, civil unrest, pandemic, and many more. This has pushed RDFL to think of ways to deliver the activities and services in relevance to the current situation.

In the past year, RDFL have stood more determined than ever to adapt its programming to fit with the current needs of women and girls in Lebanon. The journey is long in lifting the human rights status in Lebanon, but this will not hinder RDFL's members and staff to do everything in favor of advancing the lives of women and girls around them.



RDFL works to leave no one behind, even in the worse situations.

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OUR NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS

RDFL's members have always participated in grassroots movements calling for Democracy and Transparency. And starting from the belief that elections are essential, RDFL's members had the opportunity to choose who they would like to represent them.

As such, a new board of directors was re-elected on September 2022. The new board includes women from different generations, backgrounds, experiences and knowledge. The feminist causes have joined them to continue the fight of their ancestors towards a more gender-equitable world full of opportunities to women and girls in Lebanon and worldwide. This new board is open to inter-generational and inter-cultural dialogues to ensure that challenges are addressed and opportunities are generated to all women and girls suffering from Gender Based Violence.

The new board members are:

- Marie Therese El Mir : President
- Sara El Outa: Vice-President
- Maha Al Jammal: Secretary General
- Amal Rahhal: Treasurer
- Tracy Deeb: Accountant
- Bariaa Al Zein: Member
- Camale Cherfan: Member

The new board seizes this opportunity to assure their continuous cooperation and work to achieve gender equality and ending all types of violence against Women and Girls.

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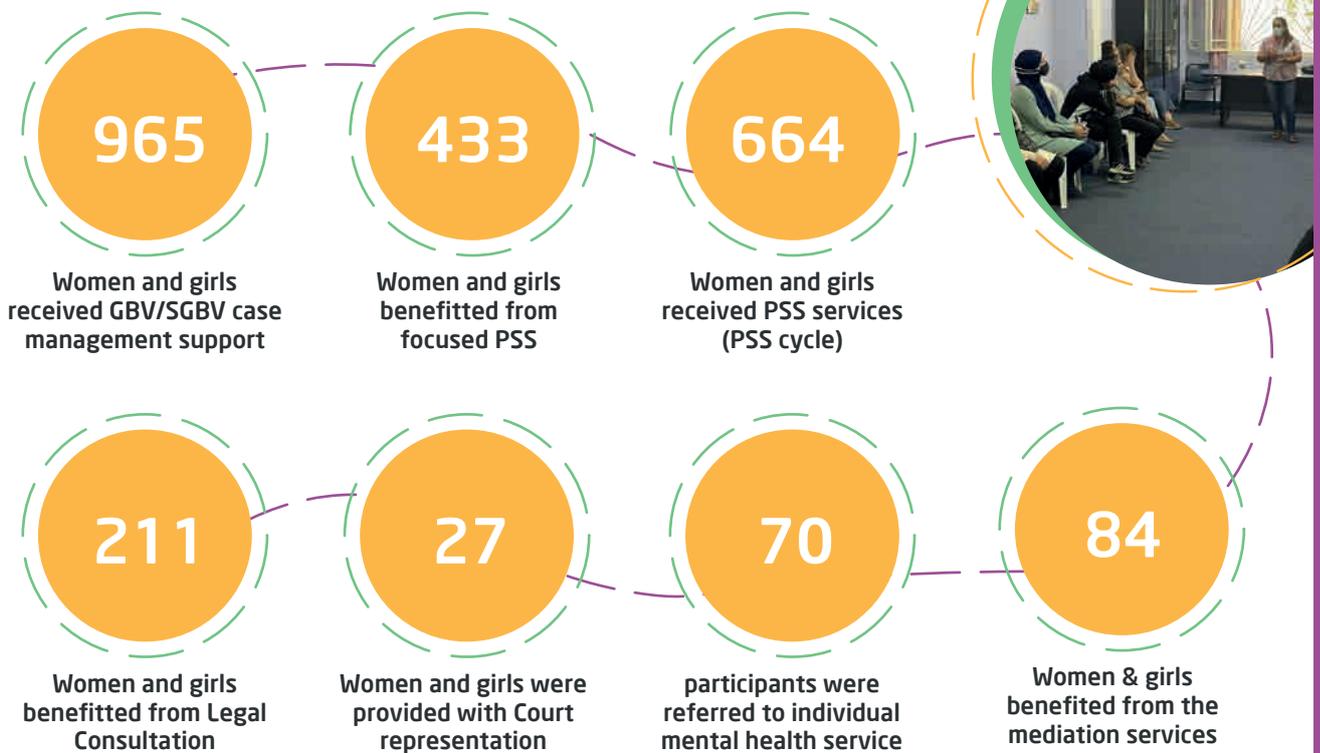
RDFL'S PROGRESS IN 2022

Power shared in Numbers

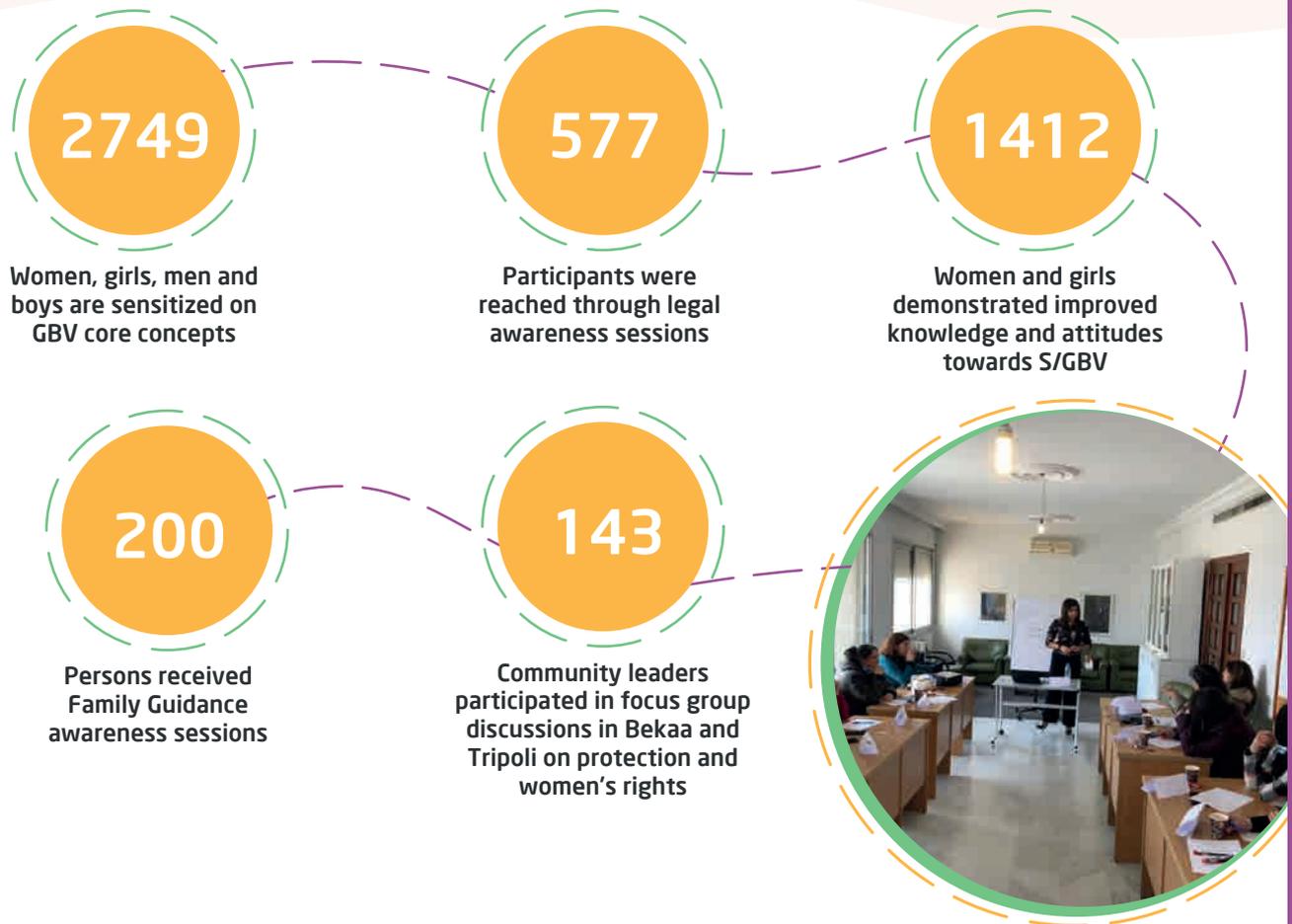
In Response to the Multi-faced crisis in Lebanon:



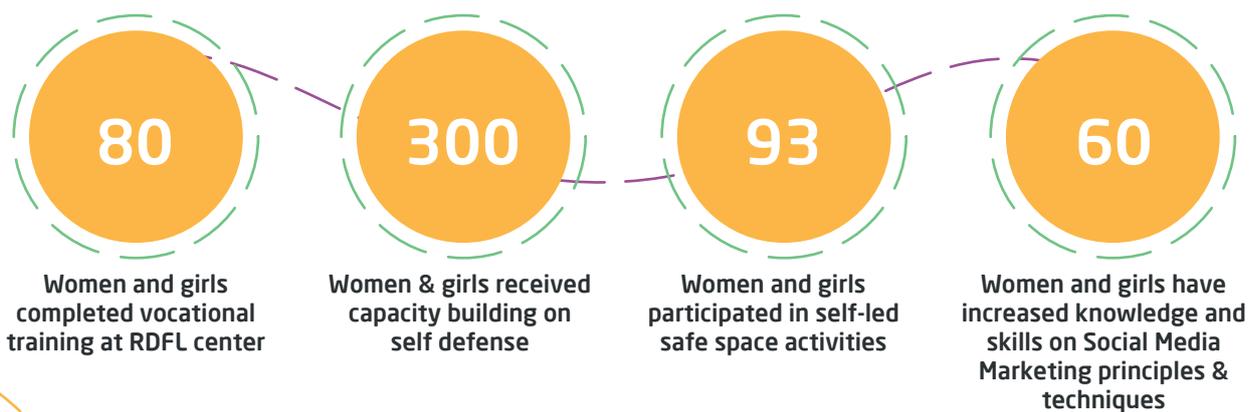
GBV/SGBV Prevention and Response:



Community Mobilization:



Women Empowerment:



● **Projects' Interventions that translates our Mission**

Through its projects, RDFL proves to the community and partners that they don't just execute projects, but also leaves a trace for people to follow when talking about gender equality.

RDFL's projects and programmes have contributed to enhance the lives of many women and girls through one or more of the following key programming:

Service Provision

- Provision of specialized services on PSS, SRR, family planning and GBV.
- Provision of legal information, consultations and advice: women have greater and safer access to comprehensive multi-sectored legal, psychosocial, SRR and GBV related services.
- GBV services and legal support to women survivors of child marriage or GBV: case management and legal consultation and lawsuits.
- Focused and Cycle PSS sessions were delivered.
- Mediation sessions were delivered to couples and family members.
- Provision of day care activities for children dependent of women and girls attending activities/service's session.



Individual/Community mobilisation, outreach, and Empowerment

- Strengthening the capacities of Community Based Organisations on Gender and GBV, Child Early and forced Marriage, GBV safe identification and Referral Training, Gender and Inclusion, Adolescents SRHR training, Child Protection Safe Identification and Referral (CPSIR), Champions of Change Module , Safeguard Training, M&E Plan (including Logframe and ITT) and Tool Revision, Financial Checklist, Anti-Fraud, Anti-Bribery and Corruption Training, Procurement SOPs Training.
- Training Youth-led groups on GBV, Gender core concepts, child marriage, social strengthening, overview of key issues facing youth civic engagement, advocacy campaigns, communication skills, public speaking, leading initiatives, and digital advocacy.



- Increase at the level of activism and volunteerism in their communities: Women Groups have attained a remarkable improvement of knowledge and awareness on topics related to rights, reporting of violence, and identifying risks and taking actions to combat violence against vulnerable people. They are now active actors in breaking taboos and stereotypes in their societies. Their speech and verbal expression tend to be more humanitarian and based on human rights conventions' articles.

- Increase the sense of responsibility towards reporting incidents of violence. Conducting Information session with community leaders and community members in sharing GBV related Media content and open discussions on the topics guided by the RDFL specialized staff at Bekaa governorate. 10 visits were conducted with the community leaders and preparing the focus groups at Bekaa governate and Tripoli and conducting 4 focus group discussion with 40 community leaders in favor of working towards ending VAWG in the regions.



- Held a roundtable to share observations about social norms and the benefits of diversity to community members, community leaders and local authorities, one in Tripoli & other in Bekaa.



- Proper coordination with relevant specialized organization took place.
- Contribution to strengthening referral mechanism system.
- Networking with other groups to lead initiatives and achieve humanitarian interventions in response to the current economic and social crisis.
- Partnering with Municipalities to outreach communities and offer them the protection and response GBV services.
- Participated and organized more than 174 Gender-related public events.
- Provision of technical and soft skills trainings contributing to economic empowerment including Embroidery workshop, electronic maintenance workshop, and art workshop.
- Provision of self-defense capacity building for women and girls.



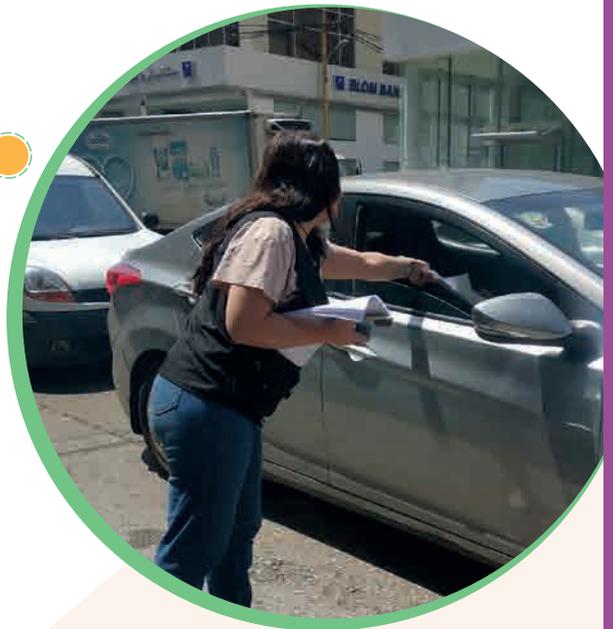
● Towards ending child marriage and all types of GBV/SGBV

Pre-elections campaign

With the Lebanese elections nearing in 2022, and the Women's International Day, the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering distributed leaflets aimed at shedding light and raising awareness about women's issues and the protective laws for them that were not approved by the Lebanese Parliament during the four years of its rule, foremost of which is the law setting the age of marriage, in order for these laws to be a priority and a standard essential for electoral selection.

In view of the imminence of the Lebanese elections, RDFL produced and launched video on social media platforms, gathered number of young girls acting as elections candidates using the hashtag (#المشروع_انت) with a speech targeting the protective and human rights laws for girls and women that were refused by the Lebanese Parliament even though many advocacy and media campaigns were lunched for the laws to be passed, in addition of setting them as a priority on the election's programs for 2022.

In addition to mobilization online post focusing on the all the protective laws for girls and women that were not submitted in Lebanon.



Documentary "Childhood Under Slavery"

On the occasion of International Day of the Girls, the Lebanese Women's Democratic Gathering launched its documentary film on child marriage under the title "A Childhood under Slavery", as a part of #NotBefore18 campaign during an event that included deputies from parliamentary blocs, union, military and security bodies, local and international organizations, journalists and media professionals, as well as the National Coalition for Protecting Children from Early Marriage.

A dialogue session, was held after the screening of the documentary with Lebanese Parliament Members on the law determining the age of marriage to pressure the political authority to approve the law submitted by RDFL since 2017.



As a result, to the panel, the following statements were provided by the guest speakers on behalf of their political parties:



I pledge that the law will be in the Women and Children Committee and I will ask to reintroduce it for discussion. I will contact you to be present at the discussion

MP Antoine Habshi
Representative of Strong
Republic Bloc

What we can say is that the head of the Democratic Meeting pledged with RDFL to sign the law as soon as it reaches its final stages. Our deputy in the Administration and Justice Committee, Dr. Bilal Abdullah, is following up on this matter

MP Faisal Al Sayeh
Representative of Democratic
Meeting Bloc





“This topic deserves to be in the Administration and Justice Committee and the Women and Children Committee, and I will talk with Dr. Inaya Ezzedine, of course.”

MP Halima Kaakour
 Representative of Change
 Representatives Bloc

“With Lebanon’s strong bloc, we of course consider that early and forced marriage is a violation of human rights, a violation of women’s rights, a violation of children’s rights. We support the law and say that we must do everything necessary for the law to be passed.”

MP Samer El Toum
 Representative of Strong
 Lebanon Bloc





Based on the bloc that I represent, we have put in our electoral program paragraph 111 that we fully support what came of the draft law presented

MP Salim Al Sayegh
Representative of Al Kataeb Bloc

I volunteer with you with all the possibilities to contribute with colleagues and everyone to pressure on this topic. I will try to influence my colleagues in my bloc, but we want more lobbying from you.

MP Sajih Attieh
Representative of Northern Parliamentary Meeting Bloc



Social media campaign using the MPS commitments for ending Child Marriage

During the 16 days of Activism RDFL published the official commitments of MPs during the launching event of Childhood Under Slavery documentary to push towards the law endorsement as social media posts naming each MP under the campaign's hashtag #NotBefore18.

The campaign included a trailer and 3 short stories excerpted from the main documentary.

Campaign Social Media Reach

Documentary "Childhood under slavery"



Views:
1.4k



Reaches:
+291,193 thousand
Engagement:
108,415



Reaches:
+76,921 thousand



Impressions:
+10,828



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFpT0oo4MjE>
- <https://fb.watch/hrY64xA8na/>
- https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cjcz7nqAtoE/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link
- https://twitter.com/RDFLwomen/status/1578704116921946113?t=fGRHCrNQDEWuFI_5fxLN8

A Regional Webinar entitled “The Marriage of Child Girls in Arab Countries under a Non-Deterrent Legal Environment” (December 9th)

During the 16 days of activism, the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering - RDFL launched a regional webinar entitled “The Marriage of Child Girls in Arab Countries under a Non-Deterrent Legal Environment”, in partnership with the Swedish Development Partner IM-Swedish , with the participation of 47 representatives from local and regional institutions from Iraq, Morocco, Palestine, Jordan and Libya, and member from the National Coalition for the Protection of Children from Child Marriage, where the interventions focused on the reality of child marriage in the aforementioned countries.



The webinar closed with recommendations and suggestions to combat child marriage at the regional level, including: exchanging experiences in this field, the importance of unifying legislation, clear legal texts, working with the Lebanese Ministry of Education to spread awareness in schools about the dangers of child marriage, and working to establish a regional coalition or network for cooperation against child marriage.

Review paper entitled "child marriage in Lebanon: impact of the crisis"



During the 16 days of activism, the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering conducted a review paper entitled "child marriage in Lebanon: impact of the crisis".

The paper focuses on the increase in child marriage in Lebanon starting the crisis in 2019 till now.

The review paper includes an overview of child marriage and related issues in Lebanon with an identification of the implications of the crisis on child marriage rates, prevention and response, in addition to documented changes or trends in child marriage since the crisis started, and the contributing factors to changes in the rates of child marriage during the crisis with good practices in child marriage programming during the crisis.



Main numbers of child marriage in Lebanon were highlighted through social media posts.

Media Prominence:

RDFL's Media prominence included:

18 Media interviews and News reports

11 I news articles

RDFL'S social media reach

The following insights are an overview from **1/1/2022 till 31/12/2022**



Total Page Reach:

5M

Total Page likes:

33.9 K



Total Followers:

8,654

Total Page Reach:

433K



Total Followers:

2,914

Impressions:

32.6k

Engagement Rate

(90DAYS)

2.6%



www.rdfwomen.org

Total Views:

28,830

Published Posts Reached:
88 posts of RDFL activities
and updates and the general
views.

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ECHOES OF RIGHTSHOLDERS' VOICES

"The menstrual kits are very useful for us, it's important to us as food!"

"The ECA was useful for me to pay rent or medicine or even get away from the abuser"

" I can't believe that we have won the judicial statement! I am happy and I will be safe now!"

"I was weak in character; I would cry when I heard such words or when I saw a young man walking behind me. But today, when a man harassed me, I slapped this man with two kicks, with the hand and the leg, and he ran away quickly. I smiled and started laughing on my own in the street. Then I knew very well that my weapon was my personality and my physical strength, all of which I gained through self-defense sessions, which increased my self-confidence."

Story Spotlight:

S.M., a woman in her thirties, and a mother of 4 children, suffers from extreme poverty. After the financial crisis, her husband lost his job and the economic situation became more severe. Her reaction was to verbally abuse the children and even her husband, to the point where she could no longer bear anyone at home. S.M. , I visited Al-Fayhaa\RDFL center, looking for a solution to her problem, which is getting worse day by day.

The case worker opened a file for S.M., after which her name was registered to participate in PSS support group. A month and a half after she attended the sessions, according to what she told us, she became a new, calmer person, and her dealings with her children became smooth and gracious, to the extent that the atmosphere in the house changed for the better, and her relationship with her family and surroundings became for the better.

This is behind group psychological support sessions. S.M. pleads that such services will not stop, because women in these areas cannot afford the costs of treatment in private clinics, and their only hope is what the organizations provide.

*"We are also human beings and we have our rights in life
and we will always seek it despite all circumstances"*

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OUR SOURCE OF FEMINIST FLAME

RDFL expresses its full gratitude to all its donors and partners enlisted below for making it possible to enhance the socio-economic status of women and girls in Lebanon through funding the aforementioned accomplishments of the organization and their likes. With and through you, we progress and accomplish!



People
Change
the World

